

interpreted to mean that God is uninvolved in His world and lacks empathy with His own. The Preacher declares: "I know it will be well for those who fear God." The details of *how* God will vindicate His own are hidden from the eyes of the Preacher. He has observed enough, however, to know that someday, sometime, God will have the final word and justice will triumph. One must keep in mind the purpose of the book and also the restricting limitation of "under the sun."

The NASB translates the first part of verse thirteen to read, "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow." The idea here is understood to mean that a shadow lengthens and the evil man will not experience length of days. Although this appears to contradict the statement concerning the fact that the evil man "may lengthen his life" (verse 12), it need not. First of all, it has been pointed out that verse twelve could mean his activity in sin is lengthened although his actual days of life need not be. Also, some sinners do live a long time but such longevity should not be understood as a product of their wicked activities. The message to the wise man is that he should not despair if he observes a wicked man living a long time in spite of his wickedness. Leupold translates the first part of this verse differently. He writes: "But it shall not be well with the wicked, and being like a shadow, he shall not prolong his days." This conveys just the opposite meaning of lengthening and implies a fleeting, transitory existence as a shadow. In 6:12 the comparison between life and a shadow is made to illustrate how fleeting man is and this truth corresponds to Leupold's translation. The use of the shadow to represent the shortness of life is also supported by Luther, Vaihinger and Hengstenberg.

It will not be well for the wicked and the reason is clearly stated: "He does not reverently fear and worship God" (*The Amplified Bible*). Once again the practice of the fear of the Lord is the distinction made between the wise man and the wicked. One should not be surprised to see this theme occur (Cf. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12, 13) or to discover that when the conclusion of the "whole matter" is drawn, it is once again

“the fear of the Lord” which remains as the one distinction which sets a man apart as the one who shall stand in the final day (Cf. 12:13).

FACT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

431. Identify the general admonition offered in this section.
432. What three possible functions could verse nine serve?
433. Give evidence from verse nine that Solomon is still laboring from the standpoint of restricted information.
434. Who is to be understood as the injured man (verse nine)?
435. Is it the wicked, the wise, or a mixture of both under discussion in verse ten? Defend your answer.
436. More specifically, who are those who are buried?
437. What experience did the Psalmist have that gave him courage in the face of the prosperity of the wicked and oppression of the righteous (verse 11)?
438. What is the occasion that gives rise to the statement, “men . . . are given fully to do evil”?
439. What two possible effects on the hearts of men can the long-suffering of God have?
440. What is meant by “given fully to do evil”?
441. Identify the messages for both the wise man and the wicked man found in verses 12-13.
442. What is meant by saying that the sinner’s days are lengthened?
443. What characteristic must the wise man possess if it is to be well with him?
444. What two meanings are given to the term “shadow” as it is used in verse thirteen?
445. What theme, which occurs in a number of verses, is also the distinguishing mark of the one who will stand in the final judgment?

3. Work even when one cannot understand
the working of God. 8:14-17

TEXT 8:14-17

- 14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.
- 15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.
- 16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),
- 17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

344. What two events which take place upon the earth does Solomon identify as futile (verse 14)?
345. If a man is without revelation from God, what is the best thing he can do (verse 15)?
346. Who gives both the wise man and the wicked man his days to live?
347. How extensive or intense was Solomon's pursuit to see the "task which has been done on earth"?
348. Can man discover all the work done under the sun?
349. When a wise man has observed all that he can, he should be able to say what?

PARAPHRASE 8:14-17

There are some threads of life which are difficult to unravel. The world is filled with many anomalies. Note these two: a wicked man continues in his wickedness and prospers as if he were a wise, righteous man; a righteous man, who does the right thing and acts wisely suffers as if he were a sinner. I say that this is certainly empty and unfulfilling. In my search under the sun, apart from God's revelation, I have decided what is good for man. There is no better thing for him to do than to eat, to drink, and to be joyful. These are the things which will stick with a man and warm his heart in the short time God gives him to live upon the earth.

Man is busily engaged in the sorry and difficult task of business under the sun—to the degree that some men never close their eyes day or night—and I joined the endless round of activity, and gave myself to know wisdom and see all that it was possible for me to see. I saw that such activity is the work of God and man cannot discover all that is done on the earth. A man can toil to discover but he will not find it out. A wise man should, after living his life seeking after wisdom, be able to say that he has found it out, but even he will not be able.

COMMENT 8:14-17

In this third division, one is instructed to work although he has limited resources under the sun, and although he discovers that God's ways are past finding out. In addition, he is deeply troubled because on numerous occasions the events of life are opposite from what they should be: wicked men prosper as though they were the righteous, and the righteous suffer as though they had committed grievous sins.

The two most common factors which color the writing of the Preacher are evident in this section. Both the "vanity" and "under the sun" concepts limit his observations. From

the purely earthly point of view he has drawn his conclusions. His conclusion found in verse fifteen is a reasonable one to him. Especially is this true in the light of his restricted knowledge as he observes the activities of the wicked and the righteous.

v. 14 Is there an issue on the face of the earth that is more perplexing to the one who does good than that presented in this verse? It is the basis for much of what has been identified as a "grievous, sorry task" that has "afflicted" the sons of men. This issue, the inequitable correspondence between the righteous and the wicked and their deeds, serves as a potential stumbling block even to the Christian who has the *full* revelation from God. How difficult it would be for one to understand when all he has to work with are the tools of observation. This explains the Preacher's rather matter-of-fact and limited conclusion.

He equates the activities with "futility." Since the mark of vanity rests upon all creatures "under the sun" then, to a degree at least, one could almost expect some imbalance in rewards and punishments. In other words, the shock need not be so severe when one realizes that the world too travails beneath the curse of sin and decay. However, even such an admission does not dissuade the searching mind. The Preacher's conclusion is still valid—there should be a closer, observable correlation between the righteous and his rewards and the wicked and his punishment. But it is not the case, so he marks the whole experience as false and empty.

v. 15 In the face of his observation, Solomon returns to his previously stated conclusion (Cf. 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18). He commends the enjoyment of the primary resources of living: eating, drinking and merriment. He also qualifies his commendation twice in this one verse by the phrase "under the sun." He is not encouraging one to a life of greedy abandonment or wanton hedonism. He offers more the idea of quietly sharing in the blessings of life which are obviously placed here by God for one's enjoyment. Man is going to have to "toil" through life and his memory will serve him best if it contains these fundamental joys upon which he can reflect. He admits

to the truth that it is God who gives man his days to live. It is true that God gives the "wicked" his days too. Solomon is arguing that a wise man will recognize them as a gift from God and although he is often bewildered by what he sees to be unfair balances of life, he will nevertheless resign himself to living each day to its fullest.

v. 16 This verse is a summary of the two previous proposals: (1) From 1:16-17, he declared that he would "know" wisdom. He recognized that such wisdom would enable him to succeed in his second proposal. (2) He also proposed to see the business activity that is done upon the earth. (Cf. 1:13)

The closing thought in the verse has been interpreted two different ways. It may suggest that Solomon is the one whose eyes cannot close in sleep. This would be due to the intense study of that which he desired to know. Or it could have reference to the ones he observes who are so engaged in the activities of life, especially in business enterprises, that *they* do not even take time to sleep. "To see sleep" is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament and means to *enjoy* sleep. Once again it could apply either to the one who tries to discover the solutions to the problems of life, or to the ones who are engaged in endless labor to increase their wealth. Neither will discover satisfaction and thus will never "enjoy sleep." Almost all authorities admit to the hyperbolical use of the expression "one should never sleep night or day."

v. 17 If Solomon could have reached beyond his time and selected any verse from the New Testament to state succinctly his closing thought, it undoubtedly would have been: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Romans 11:33)! Solomon wanted to discover the work of God—that which is done upon earth through the providential ordering of things—but it was far from him. Even though man "should seek laboriously" he will not discover it. A wise man should say "I know," but he cannot. This double emphasis on man's desire to know and his willingness to expand his energies without restraint, speaks

to the gravity of the subject and the intensity of Solomon's quest.

FACT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

446. Identify the inequity revealed in this section.
447. Name the two oft-appearing concepts which qualify the Preacher's remarks.
448. What has been the primary cause of the imbalance in rewards and punishments (verse 14)?
449. What conclusion does Solomon state that he has previously observed (verse 15)?
450. Explain what Solomon means and also what he doesn't mean by "eat," "drink," and "be merry."
451. Verse sixteen is a summary of what two proposals Solomon has made from the beginning of the book.
452. "To see sleep" refers to whom? Discuss.
453. What was Solomon's objective which he found impossible to fulfill "under the sun"?

4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly. 9:1-10

TEXT 9:1-10

- 1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred, anything awaits him.
- 2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

- 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.
- 4 For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.
- 5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.
- 6 Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.
- 7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.
- 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.
- 9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.
- 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

350. What is it that Solomon takes to his heart, and then explains (verse one)?
351. Who holds the destiny of "righteous men" (verse one)?
352. Identify the "one fate" which comes to the good man as well as to the wicked man (verses two-three).
353. List the characteristics of the sinner set forth in verses two and three.
354. What advantage does the living have over the dead (verse four)?
355. According to verse five, what knowledge possessed by

- the living could cause them to turn from evil to good?
356. List the seven characteristics of the dead (verses five-six).
357. Why should the living be happy and cheerful (verse seven)?
358. "White clothes" and "oil" could be symbolic of what (verse eight)?
359. Man's reward is identified as what (verse nine)?
360. With what spirit should man work (verse ten)?

PARAPHRASE 9:1-10

So I thoughtfully considered and reflected upon everything I had observed—I took it to heart, examining and exploring it all. I discovered that righteous men, the ones who are wise and whose activities are in harmony with God's will, are the ones whose deeds and works are in the hands of God. However, that which is ahead for the wise man, whether love or hatred, he will have to wait to find out as no man can forsee the future. The same thing happens to the innocent as well as to the guilty. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. Anything may happen to anyone whether they are submissive to authority or defiant of the law; whether they swear by an oath or are afraid of an oath. Yes, one event comes to all regardless of their moral behavior. I concluded that this is a terrible thing that happens under the sun. It causes some men to be filled with evil and behave wickedly. Their lives are actually governed by insane impulses while they live. Afterwards they die too. As long as there is life, there is hope! Surely to be a live dog is better than being a dead lion. Why? Because the living at least know they will die while the dead know nothing. There is nothing left for the dead in this life; even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hatred and their warm emotion have vanished into the dark past; they can no longer participate in the work or joy of the activities of those who still labor upon the earth.

Since you are one who is righteous, wise, and in the hand of God, go on your way. Eat your bread with joy and drink

your wine with an untroubled mind, for you are one of whom it can be said, "God has already accepted and approved of your works." Because this is true, you should demonstrate God's acceptance and approval of your works by wearing white garments which indicate your pure life. You should also anoint your head regularly with oil which is a sign of your genuine joy and gladness. In addition, you should make the most of your marriage. You do not have many years upon the earth, so live joyfully with the wife of your youth. Remember, God has given you the few years you will have on the earth. This joy and happiness you experience will be your reward in life. Such joy will also be the reward of all your toil and hard work which your hands find to do under the sun. Everything your hands find to do, do it with all your might. Such industry will bring you satisfaction during your few years here upon this earth. Remember, there is no industry, work, knowledge, or wisdom in the place of the dead where you are going.

COMMENT 9:1-10

The first ten verses capture the despair, resolve and encouragement of the Preacher. They begin with the age-old problem of the similar fate of both the godly and the ungodly. This, however, is not to become a basis for pessimism or inactivity on the part of the godly. As long as one is still alive, he has hope. The Preacher's conclusion is simple: Do not waste your opportunity. His advice is to gain as much as possible from each day. His formula for daily activity states that one should give himself whole-heartedly to his work. In addition, his life should be filled with happiness and cheer as he lives it with the wife whom he has chosen and whom he loves.

The explanation found in these verses sustains his previous contention (8:14-17) that men cannot find out the work of God. The future is veiled from men, but known to God. His conclusion is the same here as in the previous discussion. He

suggests industry and joy in one's daily task.

v. 1 The "all this" refers to the preceding discussion concerning the inability of men to know what the future holds for them. He admits to God's control of the future activities of men and the fact that *everything* is in His hand. The fact that man does not know what the future holds is of grave importance to Solomon, and he gives himself completely to explain it.

The "love" and "hatred" which will come to even wise men represents the broad scope of experiences of life. While the context suggests these are deeds "in the hand of God," one need not conclude that God is the author of evil. He permits or allows evil to come upon the godly but only so far as He chooses not to intervene in the activities of ungodly men. Neither should one think that determinism, as a doctrine, is supported by this verse. God does affect the activities of men when His plans or purposes are involved. The important lesson in this verse is that outward signs of prosperity and success are not necessarily indications of God's approval; neither should suffering or poverty be interpreted as a sign of His disapproval. The "love or hatred" which befalls the wise man come to him because he is an intricate part of the total experiences of life, they are not contingent upon his moral character or lack of it.

The argument which states that "love and hatred" comes from others, rather than God, is supported by verse six. Here Solomon specifically refers to "*Their* love, *their* hate, and *their* zeal." The distinction between what God wills, or desires, and what He permits must constantly be made. It is precisely this point that Solomon makes. God is in control of His world, but He, at times, permits or allows the flow of history to ebb and tide unobstructed, and thus the events which fall to the godly should come to the wicked and those which fall to the wicked should come to the godly. One thing is certain even as Solomon says, "anything awaits him," or "is before him."

v. 2 What is the *one* fate? The verse begins with, "It is the

same for all." This undoubtedly refers to the observations in verse one which speak to the many facets of life. This fact has been clearly demonstrated. *Death* is often understood to be the fate or event which comes to all men. (Cf. 2:14; 3:19) While this is true, the term in Hebrew translated "fate" suggests more of a "meeting with" or "happening," and most likely includes all of the events of life spoken of in the preceding verse. This would not *exclude* the death event. The message clearly states that whether one is godly or a sinner, he will be caught up in the activities of hatred and love. None escapes. The following list of contrasts illustrates that all men experience the same fate. It is true even as Solomon says. Whether one is righteous or wicked, clean or unclean, a sacrificer or non-sacrificer, good or sinner, honors an oath or is a profane swearer. All receive the same fate.

It is not important to decide if these are individuals or classes of people the Preacher has observed. The fact that he has extended the list to include variations of good and bad people enforces his argument that *no man* knows what the future holds and all men are caught up in the innerplay of life's struggle.

The characteristics of those who have been approved of God indicate a general attitude of submission to God's will. The "righteous" are those who behave correctly toward their fellow man, while the "wicked" would violate proper relationships. The "clean" would refer to those who are ceremonially clean as Solomon speaks next in sacrificial language of the one who follows the levitical rules, or fails to do so. However, the use of "good" which qualifies "clean" suggests acceptable *moral* activity as well as clean in the levitical or externally legal sense. There were those who were careful to sacrifice according to the laws. Such are called "good" in contrast with the "sinner." The final comparison is made between those who see the value of the use of an oath before God, and those who fail to reverence an oath. Zechariah 5:3-4 refers to the evil of swearing (oath taking) with an irreverent attitude. Isaiah 65:16 speaks of the solemn act as acceptable to God.

The point of the many contrasts is stated at the beginning of the verse where it reads: "It is the same for all."

v. 3 The first half of this verse is a summary statement. The one fate for all men is looked upon as an "evil under the sun." The fact that Solomon states that all "go to the dead" does not have to be understood that *death* is the one event or "fate" he has in mind. Death simply terminates the fate of men. It is the final exercise of all the futile and transitory activities of men upon this earth.

He observes that because the godly suffer as if they were the wicked, and wicked people prosper as if they were the godly, that two things result. First, the righteous should recognize that their deeds are in the hands of God and unfortunate calamities should not move them from their pursuit of good and righteousness. Second, the wicked sinners because they prosper and their wicked deeds often go unpunished, are self-deceived and believe there will never be a day of judgment before God. As a result of this deceitfulness, the hearts of wicked men are set to do evil continually. Solomon says, "Insanity is in their hearts." This strong affirmation of the intensity of their sin is in contrast to wisdom and reason which are characteristic of the godly. If men respected the moral laws of God as they do the physical laws, there would be less sinning in the world. Wise men refuse to violate laws when they recognize the reciprocating, sudden recompense for their folly. Because God is long-suffering and desires that no man perish, He postpones or defers punishment of sins. This act of grace is often misinterpreted by wicked men to mean that no judgment will be forthcoming.

Thus the inability of righteousness to protect or deliver one from evil is occasion for doubt and despair. At the same time the apparent lack of judgment against an evil deed encourages participation in wickedness. Of such activities, Delitzsch has written: "It is an evil in itself, as being a contradiction to the moral order of the world; and it is such also on account of its demoralizing influences. The author here repeats what he had already, viii. 11, said in a more special reference, that

because evil is not in this world visibly punished, men become confident and bold in sinning.”¹

“The dead” is mentioned here as the end of those who hold disregard for God’s government and laws. It is the end or final resting place where all activities are thought to cease. The godly also partake in this event. (Cf. 4:1-2)

vs. 4-6 For the true sense of the passage, these three verses must be considered together. Each verse is an extension, an observation, based upon the declaration of verse three. Solomon observes that so long as there is life there is hope; death closes the door permanently to all activity; even the memory of the dead is soon obliterated. Finally, the contribution of love, hatred and energy can no longer be made as the dead no longer share in the transitory futility of life on the earth.

The comparison of a dog with a lion was much greater in Solomon’s day than it is with one who lives in American culture. The lion was the most noble of beasts. (Cf. Proverbs 30:30; Isaiah 31:4) Dogs were not treated kindly and held as pets, but were considered scavengers of the streets. (Cf. I Samuel 17:43; 24:14; II Samuel 3:8; 16:4; Matthew 15:26; Luke 16:22) The meaning is obvious; the most despicable or undesirable *person* who still possesses life is better off than the finest individual who has already gone to the grave. The reason? Because as long as there is life there is hope. “The living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything.” Since one knows he will die, he should so order his life as to come into a proper relationship with God. This is the hope of the living. One is reminded of the Preacher’s admonitions in 7:1-4 where the living are directed to seriously consider the fact that death is the end for every man. Obviously the result will be a re-ordered and improved life.

The “reward” lost by the dead refers to their consciousness. They no longer share in the knowledge, love, hatred, or events upon the earth. Their memory is even forgotten.

¹ F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 357.

This is not a denial of God's retributive action after death. It is just that such activities are not under consideration here. His conclusions are based upon his observations made "under the sun." The Preacher does not approve of the activities of despicable men, and neither does he suggest that sinners who are alive are of greater value than godly people who have already died. His emphasis is simply on the fact that life affords opportunities which the dead cannot experience. Death terminates all activity under the sun. Therefore, one's reward is gained on the earth: to be cut off from the earth is to be cut off from one's reward. Solomon had written: "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my *reward* for all my labor" (2:10). He adds that man should find happiness in his activities (3:22); that he should enjoy his life as well as his riches (5:18-19); and to live joyfully with the wife of one's youth is reward indeed (9:9)! It is to be noted that these rewards are experiences which take place among the living. None of these will take place in the grave. Therefore, his emphasis upon the living is clear. One must not conclude that Solomon did not have some insight as to activity beyond the grave. (Cf. 12:7) He is writing with a self-limiting focus which qualifies his observations by the closing thought of verse six which states, "they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun."

v. 7 The Preacher has already established both principles that are expressed in this verse: (1) Enjoy life (Cf. COMMENT on 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15); (2) God's approval of your labors (Cf. COMMENT on 3:13; 5:19). The admonition to enjoy life is not in contradiction to 4:2 where Solomon said, "So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living." On the one hand life could be filled with joy and merriment while on the other there was sorrow, oppression and bitter experiences. When God approves one's works, life is enjoyable even "under the sun."

"Works" are to be understood in the context of this chapter, and would refer to all the godly, righteous acts of the good

man. God has no delight in the sinful acts enumerated in the preceding verses but approves or accepts the works of righteous men. The fact that God approves of their works implies that their labors are in God's hands (verse one) and negates the idea that the "love" and "hatred" come from God. It is obvious that such activities come from the hands of men with whom one lives and works upon the earth.

v. 8 "White" in the Bible signifies glory, purity and joy. The Preacher is arguing for a full, happy life to be lived by the ones who labor through life with God's blessing. The white attire of angels (Mark 16:5) and of men (Acts 1:10) represents messengers of God who have His approval. In addition the glorified saints are dressed in white apparel manifesting both joy and righteousness. Jesus said to the church in Sardis: "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels" (Revelation 3:4-5). The people in Solomon's day were admonished to wear white as a sign of God's approval. They were also to keep oil on their heads as a sign of joy. (Cf. Psalms 45:7; Isaiah 61:3) The oil was to be perpetually worn upon the head representing the constant joy of the one whose works are approved of God.

v. 9 Solomon compounds his admonition to be happy with still another injunction: "Enjoy life!" The literal meaning is "*look upon life.*" This suggests turning away from the scenes of sadness and experiences which would rob one of joy. Fix your eyes on the hope of joy—on those things which will result in God's approval and subsequently your own happiness. You should share your joy with your life. Although the monogamous ideal is out of harmony with Solomon's polygamous practice, he is keenly aware that genuine joy in marriage is experienced between husband and wife—not multiple wives or concubines. Jesus gave the order which receives God's approval when He said, "He who created them from the beginning made them

male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.' Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). (Cf. Proverbs 5:15, 18, 19; 18:22; 19:14)

Your wife is intended to make this toilsome life more bearable. Do not long for the past or wait expecting to find joy tomorrow. Live for today. Realize that God has approved your works and it is He who has also given you the few years you have to work upon the earth.

v. 10 This section is summarized by two observations: (1) Work with great industry; (2) Remember that today, in this life, one is afforded his only opportunity to work. You cannot redeem lost opportunities in the grave. Solomon has clearly demonstrated that it is the righteous, godly person who is under consideration. He is to find renewed determination in the truth that God approves of his work and gives him time to labor. Similar instruction is found in John 9:4; II Corinthians 6:2; Galatians 6:10 and II Thessalonians 3:10.

"Sheol," or grave is used only this one time in Ecclesiastes. It means a shadowy region or place of the dead. Such a dark, shadowy region where there are no activities is contrasted to life "under the sun." It is today upon the earth that one is instructed to seek joy and work diligently.

FACT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

454. Identify what causes some godly people to grow pessimistic and inactive.
455. What advice does Solomon offer in view of the fact the future is known only to God?
456. The "all this" refers to what? (Cf. verse one)
457. "Love" and "hatred" will come to whom? They will come from whom? (Cf. verse six)
458. Are outward signs of success indicators of God's approval?

Discuss.

459. What is the *one fate*? Explain. (Cf. verse two)
460. The godly are identified by what five terms?
461. What general truth is demonstrated by such a long list of characteristics of both the godly and the ungodly?
462. Explain the "evil" under the sun. (Cf. verse three)
463. Write in your own words the inequity that exists between the godly and the ungodly.
464. What is meant by "insanity is in their hearts"?
465. Explain why God withholds *immediate* punishment against some sinners.
466. Why should verses four through six be considered together?
467. Explain why the contrast between a dog and lion would be greater in Solomon's day than today.
468. Identify the lesson taught in verse four.
469. What is meant by "hope" in this verse?
470. Explain what the "reward" is which the dead loses. (Cf. 2:10)
471. State the two lessons found in verse seven.
472. God approves what kind of works?
473. The people of Solomon's day were to wear "white" as a symbol of what? (Cf. verse eight)
474. Where does Solomon admit that genuine joy is experienced? (Cf. verse eight)
475. What is a wife intended to do about her husband's toilsome life?
476. The godly person finds renewal of his work in what two truths?

5. Work with the awareness that God will control
the final outcome. 9:11-12

TEXT 9:11-12

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift,
and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread

to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

- 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

361. What reason is given in verse eleven for the many inequitous situations found in life?
362. Where do these unfair situations take place?
363. What is it that man does not know? What is meant by this statement?
364. Identify the lesson taught by the fish and the birds.

PARAPHRASE 9:11-12

Once again I took a hard look at things done under the sun and I found that many things are not as they appear. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the battle is not always won by the best trained warriors; the wise are not always the ones who have bread; the intelligent ones do not always hold the wealth; the skillful are not always the ones to win favor. Time and chance will catch up to them all. Neither does a man know when his time of misfortune will come. His moment of disaster will fall upon him like fish caught in an inescapable net, or birds trapped in a snare. Even so men are ensnared in such an evil time.

COMMENT 9:11-12

The truth of the advice offered in these two verses could be easily observed and is not dependent on divine revelation.

We are confronted with five illustrations which demonstrate the lack of consistency in life. The effort exerted by the swift, the warriors, the wise, the discerning, and the men of ability should produce expected and predictable results. However, in each situation the opposite of that which one anticipates actually happens. This is the way life is "under the sun." In addition, two illustrations of netted fish and trapped birds demonstrate that not only is the outcome of man's efforts unpredictable, his time of death falls upon him suddenly and without warning. The transitory nature of life is once more impressed on the minds of the readers. The Preacher has previously explored the injustices of life which on occasion discourages the godly and leads them to despair. He now assures his audience that it is *wisdom* that protects against despair and fortifies the godly against the contradictions of life.

v. 11 "The race is not to the swift." The idea here is not that the swift loses the race to the slower runner because he is diverted from his goal by some lesser attraction or activity. Neither does it mean that the fast runner is over confident in his ability. The incident that causes him to lose the race is not of his doing. The closing thought in the verse qualifies all five of the illustrations—"time and chance overtake them all." The term "chance" does not mean something gambled or that one has "fallen down on his luck." It is best understood as an "incident," and means a calamity or an unfortunate experience that one encounters in the pursuit of goals or objectives. Unavoidably tragedies occur among men as well as in nature which necessitates the changing or readjusting one's plans. The reason for this is that both man and his world labor under the mark of vanity. Paul argues for this same premise when he states, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Romans 9:16).

A similar explanation is given to the remaining four illustrations. One would expect a different result than the one stated in each example, but the events of life often curtail the detailed and carefully laid plans. In the Christian age the lesson is

the same, but there is the added act of trust which leads to the spirit of submission, goes beyond "time" and "chance" and leads one to pray, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that" (James 4:15).

v. 12 We have just learned that great talent and planned activities do not guarantee success. "His time" may well mean one's hour of death, but it should also allow for calamitous events which hinder planned activities. Thus man's life and daily activities are out of his own hand. The events are not controlled by some sinister force, competitive with God, known as "time" and "chance." Rather, in the exchange of love and hate as one lives his life out on the earth among the sinners and the righteous, he will come to realize that no guarantee of the fruition of any earthly activity is given. The two following similarities are offered to illustrate this truth. Just as "fish" and "birds" follow the course of daily routine and innocently go about searching out that which is essential to their livelihood, so man is engaged in similar activities. Without warning the fish and birds are trapped and their future is sharply altered. Just like the "fish" and "birds" the Preacher declares, "so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them." "Evil" means a time of misfortune and could refer to numerous events which befall men. Jesus used a similar figure of speech when he warned his generation of great calamity with the words, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth" (Luke 21:34-35). Even when God is directly involved in the *sudden* judgments upon evil men, the image of a *net* is often used. (Cf. Hosea 7:12; Ezekiel 12:13; 32:3)

FACT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

477. What do the illustrations in this section demonstrate?
478. What protects and fortifies the godly?

479. Why does the swift lose the race? (Cf. verse 11)
480. In what way does Romans 9:16 explain verse eleven?
481. Identify the two meanings which could be attributed to "his time" in verse twelve.
482. What is the specific lesson taught by the "fish" and "birds"?

6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in
our work. 9:13-18

TEXT 9:13-18

- 13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.
14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it, and constructed large siege works against it.
15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.
16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.
17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

365. Solomon said he was impressed with what (verse 13)?
366. What kind of wisdom was it?
367. Give three reasons why the small city should not have been delivered.
368. What was the poor, wise man's reward for delivering the city?

369. Does Solomon prove by this parable that "wisdom is better than strength"? Discuss.
370. How should wisdom be communicated?
371. What should be heeded in time of trouble?
372. Identify the two lessons taught in verse eighteen.

PARAPHRASE 9:13-18

The following parable on wisdom, which I have observed under the sun, made a genuine impression on my mind. There was a small city with only a few men in it and a powerful king surrounded it with his army. The king also built overpowering bulwarks which towered above the city. The king cut off the small city from all exchange of goods and communication. However, there was a potential deliverer within the city. He was poor and insignificant but he was very wise. He was wise enough to deliver the city by his wisdom even in the face of such overwhelming obstacles. Yet no one thought of that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is far better than the strength of an army." The wisdom of the poor insignificant man is despised and his words, which delivered the city, were soon forgotten. The quiet words of wise men, even when the wise men are poor, should be heeded rather than listening to the shouting of a great king who labors in the midst of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons but one sinner who acts foolishly can destroy much good.

COMMENT 9:13-18

The central subject of this section is *wisdom*. A parable is clearly evident in verses 13-15 while the interpretation of it is found in verse sixteen. Two final observations on the value of wisdom are given in verses 17-18.

How can one safeguard himself from the treachery of snares and traps? Is there any way one can find encouragement in

the midst of calamity? The answer is found in securing wisdom and practicing it. One should not despise such a valuable possession as wisdom though it be in possession of a servant—this would not diminish its worth. One should not only enjoy life, and work with great industry, he should also employ wisdom.

v. 13 One should not attempt to equate this wisdom with the wisdom revealed in the New Testament which is *complete* in Christ and wonderfully *redemptive* in nature. The wisdom the Preacher discusses is qualified at the outset as earthy “under the sun” wisdom. Such an example of wisdom as set forth here “impressed” Solomon and was “great” to him. This is true because of what it did.

Varied interpretations of the parable are offered. Among the notable views are: (1) Israel is represented as the possessor of true wisdom, and although she was small and despised, she was accepted by God and delivered by his hand. (2) The true church is besieged from generation to generation. However, she has Jesus Christ, once Himself poor, to deliver her. (3) The event in Bible history which most nearly parallels the story is recorded in II Samuel 20:15-22 and Judges 9:53. (4) Imaginative interpretations include cities such as Dora, besieged by Antiochas the Great and Athens which was delivered by Themistocles from the hand of Xerxes. (5) Luther and Mercerus both held that no actual historical occurrence is intended.

The most natural interpretation would be that which elevates wisdom. The emphasis on the “great” king and the “poor” wise man heightens the contrast and increases the odds. Thus, the fact that the city is delivered from such overwhelming strength elevates wisdom and makes it the true hero.

v. 14 “A small city” indicates a lack of military resources. “A few men” in the city implies a minimum number of men to defend the city rather than the number of non-fighting personnel. The plight of the city is magnified by the fact that a “great” king surrounded it with his soldiers. In addition, he built “large siegeworks against it.” One need not search for such an actual event in history as the emphasis here is to

demonstrate that *wisdom* can deliver from insurmountable odds.

The "siegeworks" are also called "palisades" (Septuagint), embankments or mounds. Sometimes wooden towers were used whereby the enemy could catapult heavy rocks against the wall or into the city. From such strongholds towering over the city, the enemy could spy out the weak areas of the beleaguered city so as to assail it. (Cf. Deuteronomy 20:20; II Samuel 20:15; II Kings 19:32; Jeremiah 3:4; Micah 4:14)

The comparison is reminiscent of the powers of darkness which are set against the church. However, just as wisdom had the capabilities of delivering the city, even against such overpowering odds, so Christ has given the victory to the church. (Cf. I Corinthians 15:55-57; I John 5:4)

vs. 15-16 "Wisdom is better." Wisdom is better than strength (verse 16). Wisdom is better than weapons of war (verse 18).

On the one hand wisdom stands in bold relief against the great king and military might of the enemy. Within the city it emerges as the hero against the fact that it was insignificantly contained in a small city and a poor man. Wisdom had everything going against it and nothing in its favor. Wisdom was sufficient to deliver the city, however, when everything was going against it. The tragedy came after the victory. The one who through his wisdom delivered the city was forgotten. It is sometimes argued that since the verb is pluperfect it should be rendered "no man *had remembered* that poor man" and thus would change the emphasis of the text. The meaning then would be that none remembered him until the *need* for deliverance was keenly felt and then they turned to him. This interpretation would clarify the verse but would complicate the meaning of verse sixteen where the Preacher declares, "But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded."

The *Anchor Bible*² takes an altogether different approach:

² R. B. Y. Scott. *The Anchor Bible: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 247.

"Now there was in it a man who was poor but wise, and he might have saved the city by his wisdom. But no man thought of that poor man. So I said, 'Wisdom is better than might!,' yet the wisdom of the poor man was despised, and his words went unheeded." On the idea of "might have saved," the editors comment: "Literally 'he saved.' The former sense is implied by the comment in verse sixteen. The point is that no one remembered the wise man because he was little regarded, rather than that men were not grateful for his advice which saved the city."³

Still a different view is explained by Hitzig: "In this particular case they had, it is true, not despised his wisdom, and they had listened to his words. But it was an exceptional case, necessity drove them thereto, and afterwards they forgot him."⁴

The latter view most clearly states the intent of the passage. The rulers of the small city were forced to listen to the wisdom of the poor man and they heeded it. Because he was poor and the crises facing their city was over, they soon forgot the poor man. In a similar way, Joseph was treated by the Chief Butler (Genesis 40:23); and Jesus was temporarily forgotten after His death upon the cross where the wisdom of God was revealed (I Corinthians 1:24).

The lesson is obvious. Solomon observed the incident—whether real or imaginary—and then reflected on the observation with the statement that "wisdom is better than strength." If the man had not *actually* delivered the city, Solomon would not have been impressed with the parable.

v. 17 The contrast between wisdom and strength continues. Jesus demonstrates perfectly the principle set forth in this verse. It was said of Him that He did "not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:2). On the other hand, the pompously dressed Herod assumed the role of the shouting ruler among fools at Caesarea when Luke wrote of him: "And on an appointed day Herod, having

³ R. B. Y. Scott. *ibid.*

⁴ Hengstenberg. *op. cit.*, p. 220.

put on the royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering the address to them. And the people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten with worms and died" (Acts 12:21-23).

The quiet tranquility could belong to the wise man himself. If so, such an attitude toward life would be an indication of his wisdom. Or it could refer to those who are so disposed as to quietly listen as they recognize the strength and power of his words.

v. 18 The first half of this verse has been sufficiently explained. The above example has shown that wisdom accomplishes more than weapons of war (7:19). The new thought introduced here is in antithesis to the former truth. Just as wisdom is better than weapons of war so one foolish act can undo the fruit of wisdom. The "much good" could refer to the present or potential good a nation accomplishes. The fact remains that it may all be lost if the ruler is a fool and engages in foolish or evil deeds. The "good" would not refer specifically to moral good but possessions, properties, prosperity, etc. This theme is taken up more fully in 10:1.

As an aside, it is interesting to observe how the preceding story has a counterpart in the Christian age. It is to be noted, however, that such a comparison is *not* to be interpreted as the original meaning of the author of Ecclesiastes. It does demonstrate, however, both the universal and spiritual application of the principles involved. The analogies are: (1) *Wisdom* would be the New Testament entrusted today to the church; (2) the *small city* would be the church (Luke 12:32; Hebrews 12:22-23); (3) the *great king* refers to Satan who sets himself against the chosen of God (John 12:31); (4) the *poor wise man* would represent Jesus Christ whose wisdom was, by some, forgotten (Isaiah 53:2-3; Mark 6:3; II Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 2:3).

FACT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

483. How can one fortify himself against snares and calamities?
484. Why is the wisdom of verse thirteen different from redemptive wisdom?
485. Give the best interpretation of the parable. Explain your answer.
486. Why is it not important that an actual event be identified in the siege of the small city? (Cf. verse 14)
487. The "siegeworks" are symbolic of what threat to the church today?
488. Make a list of the things wisdom had to oppose. (Cf. verses 15-16)
489. What became of the little man who saved the city?
490. Explain the statement: "Wisdom is better than strength."
491. In what way does Herod illustrate "a ruler among fools"?
492. What does "much good" refer to in verse eighteen?
493. List the possible analogies the parable could have in the church age.

D. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THOSE WHO LACK WISDOM 10:1-11

1. The foolish worker is in trouble. 10:1-4

TEXT 10:1-4

- 1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.
- 2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.
- 3 Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.
- 4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

373. What lesson in 9:18 is illustrated again in 10:1?
374. Where does a foolish man's heart lead him?
375. What is meant by "toward the left" (verse two)?
376. A fool demonstrates to all that he is a fool because he is lacking in what?
377. A wise man should maintain his composure although the ruler does what?

PARAPHRASE 10:1-4

A large amount of perfumer's oil is ruined by a few dead flies. They send forth a vile odor, putrify and negate the value of the oil. So even a little foolishness may outweigh wisdom and honor. A wise man's mind will lead him to the right while a fool's mind will lead him to the left—as one thinks so he will act. Even the walk of a foolish man manifests his foolishness. His heart and understanding fail him and he demonstrates to all who look upon him that he is a fool. Suppose the ruler himself loses control of his temper, acts the part of a fool, and turns against you, do not flee from your position (the right side)—stand firm. Many great offenses have been diverted through patient resistance and a gentle spirit.

COMMENT 10:1-4

The unfortunate division of the chapter at this point suggests that the author is turning to a new subject. However, the following eleven verses are a series of sayings and illustrations which further demonstrate the principles set forth in the close of chapter nine.

v. 1 "Dead flies" are literally "flies of death." The statement at the close of the preceding chapter, "one sinner destroys much good," is metaphorically illustrated by the flies which

fall into the perfumer's oil. It is close to the statement of Paul that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (I Corinthians 5:6). A precious, expensive jar of mixed perfume can be ruined by the foreign influence of dead flies. So the most noble monarch or righteous person could be destroyed by one sinful act. The concept of "flies of death" is purposely intended to be much stronger than the fact that a fly falls into the oil. The flies are poisonous, destructive creatures which can potentially corrupt and destroy. One who is great in "wisdom" and "honor" may fall prey to evil and thus meet with destruction.

Even in life, how often does the one secret, unconfessed sin poison the mind until it renders the whole of man useless? Surely, "a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor."

The costly perfume is putrified and made to "stink." Thus the value of the perfume as well as its practical use is nullified. The lesson of the "flies of death" serve to remind one that there is no such thing as insignificant sins.

v. 2 The association of good with the right hand and evil with the left hand is nothing new. Pagans have long believed that the right is synonymous with *good luck*, while the left is identified with *bad luck*. Although the Christian disdains attributing the events of life to luck, he recognizes that a distinction is made in the Bible concerning right and wrong in association with the right and left hands. (Cf. Matthew 25:31-33, 41; Luke 1:11; Acts 7:56)

It is commonly said today that "his heart is in the right place." By this one means that his heart directs him toward the right. For years many considered left-handed persons sinister, shifty and generally distrustful. This was true because the majority of people were right-handed. Thus the association of foolishness with the left, and wisdom with the right, was a natural distribution. The right hand has always been a place of honor while the left is one of less importance. It is this and nothing more that should be made from the comparison.

“Heart” is equal to the judgment of the mind as used in verse three and also in Proverbs 2:2; 14:33 and 15:28.

v. 3 Verses two and three should be considered together. The grammatical construction of the sentences is such that it is more the idea of following a direction of duty of obligation than placing the emphasis upon the hands. The fool of this verse shows no sense of direction. It is said of him that even when he walks along the road, “he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.” “Along the road” suggests that in his simplist acts he gives evidence of being a fool. If the mind is filled with folly, it isn’t long until such evil finds expression. If he had learned wisdom at home (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) he undoubtedly would have manifested it in the way.

v. 4 The figure of a “ruler” rising against the wise is revived. When this happens, one should not move from his place or “position,” for truth does not change. (Cf. COMMENT 8:3) If one moves from his position of wisdom, his only alternative is to follow the behavior of the fool. Thus, the verse admonishes one to remain consistent in following the greatest of all qualities—wisdom! Such “composure” practiced by the wise will “smother in the birth” great offenses. Study Proverbs 10:12; 15:1; 25:15; James 5:6-10. Examples from Old Testament history are found in Jacob overcoming Esau (Genesis 32-33) and David who triumphed over Saul (I Samuel 26).

FACT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

494. The first eleven verses of chapter ten illustrate what principle?
495. Explain the lesson taught by the “flies of death.”
496. Explain why people have ascribed evil to the left hand and good to the right hand.
497. What is implied by “along the road”?
498. What single alternative does one face when he chooses to forsake his wise position?
499. What happens when power is intrusted to unwise men?

(Cf. verse five)

500. State the truth amplified by verses six and seven.

2. Foolishness leads to humiliation. 10:5-7

TEXT 10:5-7

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler—

6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.

7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

378. What is the reason given why “folly is set in many exalted places”?

379. Where did the “error” originate?

380. Identify the two illustrations of folly.

PARAPHRASE 10:5-7

When the ruler in the land makes a grave mistake, it results in evil doing under the sun. Folly itself is exalted in seats of dignity while the rich men sit in humble seats. Also, as a result of the error I have seen slaves riding on horses, and princes walking on the ground as if they were the slaves.

COMMENT 10:5-7

v. 5 The reader is now given a concrete example of the foolishness of the ruler. When power or authority falls into the

hands of unwise men, errors are committed and injustice reigns. In verse four the ruler is a man whose spirit or temper is raised against his subjects. Jerome has erroneously suggested that the Ruler is God. He did not hold that God is capable of error or sin, but that men *think* his judgments at times are unequal. The context, however, rules out this possibility. Those who argue that God is meant as the Ruler base their reasoning, partly at least, on the fact that the term for ruler in verse four is *moshel* but in this verse it is *shallet*. However, one literary technique of Solomon in Ecclesiastes is the interaction of synonyms: e.g., the use of *adam lo* (man) (Cf. 7:20; 9:14), and *ish lo* (man) (Cf. 6:2; 7:5; 9:15). Delitzsch says that the author wished simply to avoid repetition.

vs. 6-7 Words which capture the sense of both verses are found in Proverbs 19:10: "Luxury is not fitting for a fool; much less for a slave to rule over princes." Verses six and seven are intended as an amplification of the truth stated in verse five.

It has been suggested that "folly" is to be understood as an abstract term for the more concrete "fools." Thus the *fools* are in juxtaposition to the *rich*. The social order is out of joint. The incongruity is a result of an incompetent ruler (verses 4-5). It is not that the Preacher's own standard is violated or that His criticism betrays his prejudice. It is undoubtedly a violation of general principle. Folly should not be exalted, and the rich, most likely representing the godly of Israel (Cf. Deuteronomy 15:4) should not be humiliated. In addition, slaves should not rule over princes. The lesson before the reader teaches that when men fail to follow the direction of wisdom, folly reigns and injustice permeates the entire society.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

501. What two things happen when authority falls into the hands of unwise men?
502. Explain why "ruler" is not a reference to God.

503. What has happened to the social order? Is this good?

Explain:

504. Identify the lesson taught in this section.

3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom. 10:8-11

TEXT 10:8-11

- 8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.
- 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.
- 10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.
- 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

381. The activities described in verse eight and nine are normal. The danger lies in the fact that what quality is missing in the activity?
382. A dull axe is symbolic of one who attempts to work without what?
383. When is it too late for a charmer: What lesson is taught by this illustration?

PARAPHRASE 10:8-11

The one who attempts to dig a pit for others will fall into it himself, and he who breaks down a stone wall will be bitten by a snake. The one who removes stones or hews out new stones will be hurt by them, and he who splits logs or fells trees will

suffer hurt. When one fails to sharpen the cutting edge of the axe, he will have to work doubly hard to accomplish his work. However, if he demonstrates wisdom in his action he will have great success. Why call in a snake charmer and pay him to charm the snake after it has already bitten. What wisdom is there in this?

COMMENT 10:8-11

The following four illustrations demonstrate further the foolishness of working without the aid of wisdom. In the midst of the illustrations the Preacher pauses for a moment to make clear the emphasis he wishes to make: He says, "Wisdom has the advantage of giving success."

v. 8 In a similar passage in Proverbs 26:26-27, the context suggests evil activity. If such is the case in this verse, the digging of a pit would be an effort to try and snare another person or do him harm. In like manner, breaking through a wall would imply that one would be making an effort to steal from his neighbor. In both instances wisdom would be lacking as it directs one in the path of righteousness. Consistent with this interpretation is Psalms 7:15-16; 57:6 and Amos 5:18-20. The principle of retribution, taught clearly in the verse, also fortifies the argument that the activity is of an evil nature. The one who digs a pit will fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. *The Amplified Bible* translates the verse: "He who digs a pit (for others) will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a fence or a stonewall, a serpent will bite him." Although most snakes in Palestine are harmless, there are some which are deadly.

v. 9 This verse does not suggest retribution as did the former verse. Rather, it speaks to the accidents which may result from common everyday work when wisdom is not employed. One does not have to work long in a stone quarry or logging camp until the potential dangers are evident. To quarry stones and split logs suggests building something new. Wisdom is an

essential element in such an enterprise.

v. 10 The "axe" may be symbolic of all implements used by men in the activities of their work. When wisdom is not employed the maximum benefit of all implements is lessened. One must exert much more energy when the edge of the ax has not been properly honed. The latter part of the verse may be translated, "Wisdom is profitable to *direct*." Perhaps more time would be consumed in planning the work and sharpening the tools, but such purposeful *direction* pays dividends in both the energy exerted and the amount of work accomplished. Once again the value of wisdom is demonstrated.

v. 11 This final illustration demonstrates the foolishness of neglecting opportunities. In this instance wisdom would have directed the one responsible for charming the snake to employ a charmer (one who tames or controls the snake) before he had displayed the snake. Eastern cultures have practiced snake charming for centuries. References to the practice are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. (Cf. Exodus 7:11; Psalms 58:5-6; Jeremiah 8:17) If one has the secret to charm the snake, but does not use it and is bitten by it, what benefit does he gain from such wisdom? To be bitten by a poisonous viper which spreads its destructive venom throughout the body, is likened unto a slanderer who by his words destroys the character of another. Note *the Amplified Bible* where the verse is rendered: "If the serpent bites before it is charmed, then it is no use to call a charmer, (and the slanderer is no better than the uncharmed snake)." Wisdom teaches that both the serpent and the slanderer be controlled before they have an opportunity to destroy. A similar analogy is made by Jesus in Matthew 23:33. It is one thing to possess wisdom, it is something else to use it to advantage.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

505. What emphasis do the four closing illustrations have in common?

506. The fact that one will be bitten by a serpent or fall into a pit suggests the activity described in verse eight is good or evil? Explain.
507. Why do the accidents recorded in verse nine happen?
508. If the axe represents all implements, what lesson is taught by the fact that it is not properly sharpened?
509. If one were wise, he would have done what with the serpent?

E. THOSE WHO WORK CONTRARY TO WISDOM
ARE REPREHENSIBLE. 10:12-20

1. Talkers and workers 10:12-15

TEXT 10:12-15

- 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;
- 13 the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness.
- 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?
- 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to the city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:12-15

384. How dangerous are the lips of a fool?
385. The fool's words start out as folly and end up as what?
386. What effect does this have on the fool?
387. What effect does a fool's work have on his direction?

PARAPHRASE 10:12-15

The words of a wise man bring him honor and respect while a fool is actually consumed by his own words. The fool begins

his conversation with light-hearted and foolish nonsense, but before he is finished he is caught up in wicked and perverse madness. The fool may brag about his future plans but no man knows for sure what the future holds or what will happen after he is gone. The activities of a fool are so exhausting to him that he loses his orientation and can't even find his way to town.

COMMENT 10:12-15

v. 12 The same word used for *charming* the snake is used for *prayer* (lachash) in Isaiah 26:16. So in contrast to wrong speech, the verse begins with the idea that words from a wise man are gracious. Such gracious words of praise or encouragement of one's fellowman are considered "sacrifices" (Hebrews 13:15-16) as they proceed from the mouths of those who possess the true wisdom. On the other hand, the poison in the mouth of fools is reprehensible. This is true not only because it destroys others, but because it consumes the fool himself. A close parallel is found in "the tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly" (Proverbs 15:2). On the matter of gracious words, read Proverbs 22:11; Psalms 45:2; Luke 2:52; 4:22. On the matter of the self-destruction of the fool, read Psalms 5:10 and Proverbs 18:7.

v. 13 "As the proverb of the ancients says: 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness' " (I Samuel 24:13). The very beginning of the fool's conversation is foolishness. (Cf. James 3:8-13) While it is true that the beginning of the conversation of fools is found in jest and folly, before it is ended the element of evil characterizes their words. Here it is called "wicked madness." (Cf. COMMENT 7:25)

v. 14 The multiplying of the fool's words implies his boasting about tomorrow, his promised accomplishments, his own greatness, and his importance to his society. Yet, when he boasts of tomorrow, he is speaking of that which he knows the least. (Cf. James 4:13; Luke 12:18-20) The word used for

“fool” in this verse (sakal) means one who is a “dense, confused thinker.” In verse twelve the word for “fool” (kesil) means one who is possessed of an unwarranted self-confidence. There is undoubtedly a mixture of both as there would be in most fools. The words “what will happen,” and “what will be after him,” speak to the immediate future as well as the distant future—even after death. No man can predict the events of *tomorrow* with any certainty, how foolish to go about boasting of what one will do in the distant future.

v. 15 Two additional indicators of the fool are noted: (1) The toil or labor in which he engages is apart from God’s approval. It is of such a nature that he toils for nothing and is wearied by it. Habakkuk described nations who toil and grow weary for nothing—showing no profit (Habakkuk 2:13). (2) The second mark of the fool is the total absence of common sense. He is so void of understanding that he doesn’t know his way home. Current American proverbs which parallel this are: “He doesn’t know enough to come in when it rains”; “He is so ignorant that he can’t tie his own shoe strings.” He is indeed a fool because he brags endlessly of his future success, and yet his labor isn’t productive. If he cannot find his way over clearly marked roads, one could not expect him to succeed in his plans. The way to the city is the way most traveled and thus the easiest road to follow. Such facts heighten the ignorance of the fool.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:12-15

510. *Poison* in the mouth of fools will destroy whom? (Cf. verse 12)
511. The conversation of fools starts with jest but ends with what?
512. What characteristics mark the fools of verse fourteen?
513. Identify both ways one is proven to be a fool according to verse fifteen.
514. What is the significance of the statement: “He does not even know how to go to the city”?

2. Rulers 10:16-17

TEXT 10:16-17

- 16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.
17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:16-17

388. Why is it a dangerous thing to have rulers who feast in the morning?
389. Why were they eating at this time (verse 17)?
390. A land is blessed when a king eats for what purpose?

PARAPHRASE 10:16-17

A country is in great trouble when the king behaves as a youth, and the princes frolic and feast in the morning hours! A country is rich whose king is concerned more with justice than he is with jesting, and eats to gain strength in order to carry out his labors rather than participating in drunkenness.

COMMENT 10:16-17

v. 16 The land is impoverished when the ruler behaves as a child. It does not mean that a young king would be a curse to a land. Josiah proved a blessing to Israel and became king when he was but eight years of age. Rehoboam is an illustration of the intent of the verse, when at forty-one years, he behaved with childish thoughts and in childish ways (II Chronicles 13:7). Compare with this Isaiah 3:12 where corrupted rulers are

described as women and children. (Cf. I Corinthians 14:20) The irresponsible behavior of childish kings carries over to the princes who start the day frolicking in intoxication and sensual enjoyment. They should have attended to honest work and important matters of state (Jeremiah 21:12). Isaiah also spoke of similar circumstances in 5:11-12: "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord. Nor do they consider the work of His hands." The lesson is clear: When wisdom is disregarded by the rulers of the land, the people will have to endure injustices and uncommon trials. The "woe" that comes upon them is the inescapable sorrow which results from the land being controlled by fools.

v. 17 In this verse the opposite picture is presented. The king is not only mature in his behavior, he is also of *noble* birth. Noble not only in blood, but also in virtuous behavior. No longer is the true prince walking upon the ground while the fool triumphs on horseback. Wisdom reigns. The Jews assign to the word "noble" the idea of "freeborn." This suggests a greater opportunity for one to enjoy learning and the employment of wisdom. Such men would be a blessing rather than a curse to the land. Such wise men will eat for strength and not for sensual enjoyment. They will judge wisely in the morning hours rather than selfishly pursue the pleasures of the flesh. Instead of harsh judgments and sorrow falling upon the land, the land is blessed and happy. (Cf. Isaiah 32:8; 31:4)

FACT QUESTIONS 10:16-17

515. How do irresponsible, childish kings start their days?
516. What is the "woe" experienced by such a country?
517. Describe the conditions in the land where wisdom reigns.

3. Warnings 10:18-20

TEXT 10:18-20

- 18 Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.
- 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.
- 20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping room do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:18-20

391. What two things are said to happen to a house when a lazy man lives within?
392. Instead of repairing the house, the lazy man plans for what?
393. The indolent man looks upon what as an answer to everything?
394. Explain how the truth which states, "Be sure your sins will find you out!" is illustrated in verse twenty.

PARAPHRASE 10:18-20

Because a man is lazy and concerned only with merriment, the rafters of his house sag and soon he will have a leaky house. His whole attitude toward life is colored by his slackness. He makes a feast for enjoyment, pours wine for enjoyment, and believes every problem he has can be resolved with money. Do not revile a king, not even in the privacy of your own mind. Do not revile a rich man, not even in the privacy of your own bedroom. You can be sure they will learn of your thoughts and your words—a winged creature, like a bird, will carry your voice and disclose to others what you say.

COMMENT 10:18-20

A demonstration of the supreme value of wisdom over folly continues in the closing three verses of this chapter. It is illustrated, however, through three negative warnings. The subject of the discussion turns from the examples of noble and honorable men to the foolish rulers and the blight cast upon the land as a result of the attitudes and actions. Since the rulers or king serves as the subject, the use of "rafters" and "house" should be taken figuratively for the nation's state of affairs. Solomon was boardering upon the brink of rebellion. Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam were setting their sights on the throne. Although the picture is applicable to the later Persian period and well represents the conditions of that day, it also vividly describes the conditions in the day of Solomon. As a matter of fact, the principles which are interwoven throughout the narrative are applicable in any generation where the leaders are given to wine, merriment and money, and where a segment of godly souls long for the restoration of justice, righteousness and honor.

v. 18 "Indolence" is an intensive word and in the original language, it carries the idea of *much* slothfulness. Not just one idle hand, but both are meant. A vivid picture of such laziness is presented in Proverbs 26:14-16: "As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer." Since those who are in control have little welfare for their subjects, the judicial matters go unattended. The picture of a house is introduced to convey a common illustration which would be understood by all, and actually experienced by some. First the rafters sag and through inattentiveness the house leaks. When those in authority are more concerned with their own personal pleasure (Cf. 1:2-10) than the welfare of the state, even the innocent suffer. (Cf. Amos 6:6) How different the admonition toward industry found in chapter nine verse ten! *Diligent work is the way*

of wisdom.

v. 19 It is because of the three erroneous attitudes expressed in this verse that the condition discussed in verse eighteen existed. Instead of repairing the breaches, the officials seek a feast, wine and money. They spend their time and energy in revelry rather than looking after the affairs of the state. A Jewish tradition puts the following words in the mouth of Solomon's mother as she scolds him for just such irresponsible behavior for a king: "Do not give your strength to women, or your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink. Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his trouble no more. Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."

"Money answers all." How did Solomon acquire the money to carry out his outlandish experiments, and pursue his luxurious personal pleasures? *The Amplified Bible* says that he "depends on (tax) money to answer for all of it" (10:19c). Solomon taxed the people heavily and survived the criticism of the people. However, upon his death excessive taxation proved to be the undoing of Rehoboam and occasioned the loss of the ten tribes. In troubled times, when justice is perverted, money is secured from many illegitimate sources. Extortion, exorbitant taxation, bribes, and numerous opportunities for graft are only a few examples. Thus, money grants all that *such* people want. It is of course a perversion that money answers all. Truly it is more than just perversion, it is *idolatry*. Meander says: "Silver and gold,—these are according to my opinion, the most useful gods; if these have a place in the house, wish what you wilt, all will be thine." Such is the obsession which conquers the fool. The Preacher is already on record concerning the superiority of wisdom over money. Not only is wisdom greater than money, it has the

inherent quality of preserving "the lives of its possessors" (7:11-12). Of course the philosophy that money will resolve every problem and supply the answer to every desire is the expression of the sinner, not the godly of Israel.

v. 20 In the concluding verse, wise counsel is offered to those who must suffer through the abuse of leaders whose character has been identified in the preceding verses. It is dangerous to react in an unwise way to the behavior of leaders who work contrary to the will of God. Thus the warning, "Curse not the king." The motive of prudence is sufficient for one to refrain from lifting a voice against the king—one should have regard for his own personal safety. The idea of cursing either God or the ruler is prohibited (Exodus 22:28). Here the word "curse" means "speaking lightly of." The "bird of the heavens," and "the winged creatures" simply means, in almost every culture, that secrets have wings. Words spoken in confidence often find wings and fly to the ears of those spoken about. Today one would say, "a little bird told me." Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). One must guard against entertaining evil thoughts in the heart, for in some unguarded moment the words will find their way through the lips to the ears of others.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:18-20

518. What is meant by "rafters" and "houses" if they are taken figuratively?
519. In what way is such a picture applicable to Solomon's latter reign?
520. How intense is the laziness mentioned in verse eighteen?
521. What will take care of *all* the problems according to unwise rulers?
522. How did Solomon acquire his riches?
523. In what sense does the statement "money answers all" suggest idolatry?
524. Why is wisdom greater than money? (Cf. verse 19; 7:11-12)

525. Explain what is meant by the statement: "*Prudence* is sufficient for one to refrain from lifting a voice against the king."
526. Why refer to a "bird" and "winged creatures" when speaking of words spoken in private?

F. EXHORTATIONS TO WORK IN HARMONY
WITH WISDOM 11:1—12:8

1. Trust God and be cheerful in all of your activities. 11:1-8

TEXT 11:1-8

- 1 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.
- 2 Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.
- 3 If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.
- 4 He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.
- 5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.
- 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.
- 7 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.
- 8 Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 11:1-8

395. After reading this section (verses one-eight), list at least five principles on stewardship which are taught here.
396. What is meant by the figure of speech which states "Cast your bread upon the surface of the waters"?
397. Is benevolence taught in verse two? Explain.
398. Identify the arguments used to establish the fact that one should plant his crops regardless of the weather signs.
399. Give evidence that weather is under the control of God.
400. What two things should a man do if he lives a long time (verse eight)?

PARAPHRASE 11:1-8

Do not be afraid to send forth your merchandise upon the waters in commercial trade—you will surely have a good return although you may have to wait a long time. Divide into portions what you have—seven or even eight parts—as you know not what evil will come on the earth. If clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves upon the earth. If the wind blows from either the north or south and blows the tree over, in the place where the tree falls, there it remains. Since these illustrations speak to truth, one cannot afford to be too cautious or wait too long to sow. If you wait until all weather conditions are just exactly right before you sow, you will never reap a crop. You do not know the path the wind follows or the way bones are formed in the womb of a pregnant woman. Neither do you know how God works in all the things He does. Therefore, sow your seed from daylight until dark for you have no way of discovering at this time whether the morning or the evening sowing will produce the best harvest. Perhaps both the morning and evening sowing will be good. Indeed the light of day is sweet! It is very pleasant for one to work in the sunshine. If you are fortunate to live many years in the sunlight, rejoice in them all. One thing you can be certain of—the days of darkness will be many: all that lies ahead is emptiness and futility.

COMMENT 11:1-8

To teach through precepts and proverbs was characteristic of the wise men of Solomon's day. He includes himself in this category (12:9). In what is considered among the most beautiful language in the Bible, the Preacher now turns to his final advice. He urges his readers to trust God and work hard! He demonstrates a concern for the happiness of others (note the difference in attitude from that found in 2:1-11), and urges wise industry, combined with pleasure, before old age makes such activity impossible.

This division, which includes verses one through seven of chapter twelve with chapter eleven, is accepted by most modern commentators. The emphasis is thrilling and exciting: Give of your substance and yourself; above all, make the most of your youth. Enjoy. How badly youth need this lesson today. There is no curtailment from God on approved pleasure. No somber, spiritual straight jacket for the believer. "Rejoice," "let your heart be pleasant," "remove vexation," "put away pain," "follow the impulses of your heart and desires of your eyes" are all admonitions to enjoy life. Just remember, the Preacher warns, "God will bring you to judgment." The spirit of this final section under discussion is that one should find the work and happiness which God approves and pursue it with all his strength.

vs. 1-2 These two verses should be considered together. It is possible that the second verse is an explanation of the metaphor in verse one. However, the exact meaning of both verses is much contested. It is highly improbable that the actual meaning and application can be made with any certainty. No less than six distinct explanations have been offered by commentators. Some are so fanciful that they do not merit consideration.¹ The two views which are most generally held are:

¹ For a review of the various interpretations of these two verses, one should study the two following sections:

George A. Barton. *The International Critical Commentary: The Book of Ecclesiastes*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), pp. 181-183.

George A. Buttrick (ed.). *The Interpreter's Bible*, V. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 81-82.

(1) The traditional Jewish view holds that the lesson is one of charity, and that one's benevolence should be practiced freely without a view to personal return. There is the awareness, however, that should one give freely of his substance, in due season a substantial gain will be forthcoming. (2) The other interpretation encourages the daily pursuit of labor, resigning oneself to the providence of God's certain control and promise of future reward.

The image of a trading ship is understood as the meaning of "cast your bread on the surface of the waters." "Cast" means "send forth" and coincides with a merchant sending forth his ships laden with trade goods. One does not know when the ship will return. Often large periods of time lapsed before the ship arrived at home port with goods in trade. Solomon practiced such ventures as it is recorded of him that "the king had at sea the ships of Tarshish with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver ivory and apes and peacocks" (1 Kings 10:22). (Cf. Proverbs 31:14) The idea is that just as the ship returns to reward the one who sent it forth, so God will restore generously the one who demonstrates compassion upon others. A beautiful description of this principle was written by Solomon. He said, "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed" (Proverbs 19:17).

The division into seven parts suggests in the metaphor that one is wise if he does not trust his entire fortune to one ship. The idea is to help many different people. The additional thought of the "eight" divisions may imply an unlimited number and could be expressed by "seven and *more*." This would be making friends "for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9). As one would say today, it is unwise "putting all one's eggs in the same basket." The "misfortune" is thus understood to be an evil that results in loss of possessions or friends, and since one has helped numerous individuals, when his time of need is apparent, help will be forthcoming.

If the saying "Cast your bread on the surface of the waters"

is taken at face value, it would mean that one freely and generously distributes his riches to those in need. It carries the idea of doing good without hope of gratitude or return. (Cf. Luke 6:32-35) Although the motive is pure there is the promise that "you will find it after many days." As Ranston said, "Be generous, do not be narrow in your liberality; even on the thankless waters scatter broadcast the seeds of kindness; be sure that sooner or later you will be rewarded."²

What if the Preacher's intention is not to teach benevolence? What other lesson is justified by these two verses? Assuming continuity in the writing of Ecclesiastes, which has been consistently demonstrated, a close study of the context suggests that the subject at hand is the same subject discussed in chapter ten and obviously pursued in verses three through six of chapter eleven. What is this subject? It is the idea that the way of wisdom is superior to the way of the fool. Although one cannot control the acts of nature (God) or the evil misfortunes produced by fools (sometimes rulers) there is the admonition in the midst of it all to simply trust God—there are certain things one neither knows nor controls which may have tremendous effects upon his life, yet he must work with all his might and commit himself to God's providential care. The figure of speech—"Cast your bread on the surface of the waters"—need not be restricted to a single aspect of one's work or labor. Let it speak to the total picture of industry. Let it encompass charity, but allow more than this. If one's life is lived in its totality according to the righteous rules and principles preached by Koheleth in his book, then the reward will assuredly come to him "after many days."

Verse two is simply an admonition to be wise in various activities of life. Allow wisdom to prepare one for the unexpected misfortunes of life which are beyond control. Note how the following verses fortify this argument.

v. 3 One law of God which alters man's activities upon the

² Harry Ranston. *Ecclesiastes and Early Greek Wisdom Literature*. (London: Epworth Press, 1925), p. 40.

earth, and over which man has absolutely no control, is the fact that when "the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth." A similar example of the same principle is seen in the fact that a tree remains where it falls. E. M. Zerr comments: "This verse is to be considered especially in connection with the last clause of the preceding verse. The laws of nature are fixed so that man should make use of present opportunities for doing good, before some action of nature (which is unseen and unavoidable) cuts off the opportunity."³

Man may fret or even suffer over too much rain or too little, but he cannot control it. The tree falls very likely from the blowing of the wind. Note the use of "south" and "north" in this verse as well as in chapter one verse six. The tree could have been a fruit tree in full bloom or a much desired shade tree, but man does not prevent its destruction. The following verse describes how wise men act under such circumstances. One must admit to conditions of life which are beyond his control.

v. 4 The admonition which states, "whatever your hands find to do, verily, do it with all your might" (9:10), is not heeded by the one who excessively worries over matters he cannot control. Under all circumstances one should do the very best work he can and let God care for him. The wind may threaten to blow away the seeds at sowing time, and the clouds threaten to drop heavy rains to damage or destroy the harvest. (Cf. I Samuel 12:7; Proverbs 26:1) However, one must employ wise judgment, not fear or inactivity under such circumstances. There is no assurance for the farmer who does the best he can, but he does something.

Some see in the verse a broader application than literal sowing and reaping which would have special meaning for farmers. Luther said it pertains "in general to all human activity, but especially to charity." Delitzsch said, "The cultivation of the land is the prototype of all labor."⁴ (Cf. Genesis 2:15b) The

³ E. M. Zerr. *Bible Commentary*, III (Marion, Indiana: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1954), p. 224.

⁴ Delitzsch. *op. cit.*, p. 395.

principle established in verse one and amplified in these verses is applicable to many situations, but it serves the purpose of the Preacher's reasoning to view it in the context of the farmer who is always watching the skies and fails to sow his crop.

v. 5 The Preacher is still discussing "the activity of God." One should not stumble over the difficulty of understanding the first part of this verse and miss the obvious. There are two examples presented in the verse which illustrate the mysterious activities of God in nature. The point is made that one can not know what God does. This truth has been previously demonstrated. (Cf. 1:13; 3:10, 11; 8:17)

One difficulty is presented by the fact that the word translated "wind" (*ruach*) may also be translated "spirit." However, the wind has just been under consideration (verse four), and this could very well be a reflection of this same truth. We know, too, that Jesus discussed the subject in John 3:18 where He observed that the wind blows where it wishes but man doesn't know where it is going or where it came from. If the "wind" is misunderstood to be the true meaning, then there are two distinct illustrations.

On the other hand, if *ruach* is to be translated "spirit," then there is but one illustration as the "spirit" and "bones formed in the womb" would speak to the mysterious "making" of a baby—a mystery which even today baffles modern science. (Cf. Psalms 139:13-16)

Regardless of which interpretation is preferred, neither the essence nor the application of the lesson is changed. The point is that *man does not know* the activity of God.

"Who makes all things" does not speak to the total universe but rather specifically to things mentioned here such as wind and bones in the womb. Zerr observes, "The lesson still is that man should make use of present and known advantages, not waiting to figure out the ways of God as to the future."⁵

v. 6 The Preacher continues to admonish toward hard work.

⁵ Zerr. *op. cit.*, p. 224.

The positive emphasis "sow your seed," and the negative warning, "do not be idle," clearly demonstrates his intention. Repetition is a technique used in effective preaching. Restating this theme (Cf. verses three-four) is like hitting the same nail repeatedly until it is well-fastened (12:11). The specific explanation is found once again in the figure of the farmer who must work from morning until night, and in addition must trust God as he does not know which effort will succeed. The broader application would encourage one to work diligently at every task he undertakes as this is obviously the overriding message which Solomon relentlessly preaches.

v. 7 "To see the sun" may communicate no other meaning than to be alive. (Cf. 6:5; 7:11) The basic *joy of living* is the tenor of Solomon's emphasis now, but it is conveyed through this verse by the words "pleasant" and "good," and not necessarily by "to see." Solomon's quest is clearly set forth in 2:3, 24; 3:12; 22; 5:18 and 8:15. "Light" is a metaphor and represents life. No matter how difficult tasks may become, or how sad the circumstances surrounding life, it is still a good thing to be alive. Especially is this true when one is yet in his youth with health and vigor on his side. Oppression or misfortune could temporarily cause one to despair, but the energy of youth will assist one in rising above such adversity. The day will come when one edges toward the "darkness." (Cf. 12:2, 6-7) At that time, all opportunities for joyful activities will be lost.

v. 8 Here Solomon is careful to note that throughout life, from youth to old age, it is possible to find "good" and "pleasant" activities. How can one "rejoice" in "all" his days? The answer has been labored by the Preacher. It is best summarized by his own words, "Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (9:8-9).

The "days of darkness" do not refer to the "misfortunes"

which may occur on the earth. Neither do they refer to the end years of one's life. The reference is to the abiding place of the soul when it is no longer in the light or "under the sun." In other words it is the period of time one must spend in the grave or Sheol. (Cf. 9:10; Genesis 37:35; Job 21:13; 17:13; Isaiah 38:10) Solomon also uses the term "eternal home" (12:5) in describing Sheol. Such pensive meditation on the certainty of this truth has a sobering effect on the wise (7:2-4). He does not despair but becomes more determined that he will make the most of his opportunities. In the grave, when the soul abides in Sheol, "everything" will be futility. There is *nothing* that promises any kind of positive experience in the grave. How appropriate to this comment are the words of Jesus in John 9:4 when He said, "We must work the works of Him who sent me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work."

FACT QUESTIONS 11:1-8

527. What primary admonition to youth comes through in this section?
528. Youth should temper their activities remembering what future event?
529. What is the traditional Jewish view of verses one and two.
530. Explain the major alternative interpretation of verses one and two.
531. What is suggested by the division of one's goods into seven parts?
532. If "cast your bread on the surface of the water" speaks to the total of one's life, what is the lesson to be learned?
533. How do the "clouds" and the "tree" demonstrate that man has no control over certain activities of God?
534. What will keep one from meaningful industry?
535. What do the two examples in verse five illustrate?
536. What technique of preaching, mentioned in verse eleven of chapter twelve is used in verse six?

537. What two words in verse seven are to have special emphasis?
538. When will joyful activities be lost?
539. To what does "days of darkness" refer? (Cf. verse eight)

2. Enjoy the days of your youth. 11:9-10

TEXT 11:9-10

- 9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.
- 10 So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 11:9-10

401. Although young men are encouraged to enjoy their "childhood" and "young manhood," what warning should they remember (verse nine)?
402. Should youth follow *all* the "impulses" and "desires" of their heart? Discuss.
403. Why should young people withdraw from vexation and evil ("pain")?

PARAPHRASE 11:9-10

Make the most, young man, of your youth as well as your more mature young manhood. Rejoice and be happy in both of them! Follow the delight of your eyes and the way the desire of your heart leads you. Explore the many facets of life

utilizing all the vigor of your youth. However, keep ever before your eyes the fact that God will call you to account. Remove care and evil from your mind and body—these things will prove to rob you of your joy. Youth is fleeting and the vigor experienced in your manhood is soon lost.

COMMENT 11:9-10

v. 9 Note the Preacher's admonition is directed to young men. The youth have the pathway of life before them. Their hopes, dreams and ambitions will be shaped by attitudes formed while still young. Parker remarks: "Cohemoth thus does not fear to enforce religious considerations upon the young mind. How noble a spectacle is a young life of joy consecrated to the service of truth, eager in upholding the claims of all pureness and wisdom! There is no nobler sight in all the earth than consecrated youth, sanctified enthusiasm, exuberant joy, used as a stimulus in sacred service."¹

There is a unit relationship that exists in the admonitions in 11:9, 10 and 12:1. The unity of the section is somewhat minimized by the chapter break. However, Leupold² wisely points out that in verse nine, youth are to rejoice in all good things that give the heart true cheer; in verse ten he is told to put aside all that might interfere with such legitimate joy; and in chapter twelve verse one, provision is made for the youth to see that his roots are to run deep in *remembering God* which alone assures joy.

Solomon is encouraging the pursuit of pleasure tempered with the awareness that God will bring all activities into judgment. Some view the pleasures as sinful and thus the verse is taken as a prohibition or warning. The argument states that Solomon is using "stern irony" with a charge that one is free

¹ Joseph Parker. *The People's Bible*, XIV (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, n.d.), p. 114.

² Leupold. *op. cit.*, pp. 268-269.

to enjoy all the sinful pleasures that youth finds exciting, but one must not forget that God will inevitably bring all deeds to judgment. Such an interpretation, however, is totally foreign to the spirit of the passage. What is evident is the fact that in the prime of life all that is wholesome activity, and thus approved of God, should be pursued.

"Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes." Job speaks of the heart following after the eyes (Job 31:7). This type of wholesome pleasure has previously been approved. (Cf. 2:10, 24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 8:15) Much of what the Preacher identifies as both wise and foolish, he has observed with his eyes. The eyes stimulate impulses and desires. The caution expressed here is toward the innocent use of sight and that which is pleasing to God. The caution comes in the stern form of a reminder "that God will bring you into judgment." One does not know many of the activities of God (verses five-six), but what he *must know* is that God will one day judge him. What is the nature of this judgment? Various views are offered: (1) The judgment is the pain and debility that comes to one in old age, but is increased because of the sowing of wild oats in one's youth. The more one corrupts his youth, the more he suffers in old age. (2) the calamities that befall one are the direct result of sins and should be interpreted as an outpouring of God's wrath. This kind of temporal judgment is in harmony with the principle of retribution previously discussed. (3) The interpretation which appears the most defensible in the light of 3:17; 12:1, 7 and 14 is that there will be a final time of judgment. The Preacher's view of the final judgment is not clear or detailed, but he appeals to proper behavior on the premise that such a judgment is coming. Existence beyond the grave was hinted at in 9:5, 6, 10 and confirmed in 12:7.

v. 10 Solomon now urges the removal of vexation and pain. The final argument offered which should motivate this action is that the years of youth are temporary. One should avoid that which injures the inner and the outer man—the spiritual and the physical. That which robs youth of good times, pleasant

days, desires of the eyes, and general happiness are to be shunned. The emphasis through this section is on a positive note. Young people are exhorted to find genuine joy in their youth. Sin brings decay and sickness (I Corinthians 6:18). For the person today who wishes to capture the same spirit of this passage, the words of Paul should be followed: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).

FACT QUESTIONS 11:9-10

540. What shapes the dreams of young men?
541. Explain the unity that exists in the three verses found in 11:9-10 and 12:1.
542. Why should the pleasures discussed in verses nine and ten be considered as wholesome and not evil?
543. What influence do the eyes have on the heart?
544. Identify the three possible types of judgment that lie before youth.
545. What is the final argument offered in verse ten?

3. Remember God in your youth. 12:1

TEXT 12:1

- 1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:1

404. At what time in life should one remember God?
405. What are the "evil" days? (Cf. 11:8)

406. Young people are to enjoy and find delight in life. Is this same delight available all through life? Discuss.

PARAPHRASE 12:1

The evil days are coming! When they do come you will be unable to enjoy or find delight in them. My advice is to remember God the Creator while you are a young man and not wait until the joy of living is past.

COMMENT 12:1

v. 1 Young people are to have fun, but they are also to keep in mind who made them and why they were made. Since it is God who is the Creator, He has the right to speak through His servant and admonish toward wise behavior. Thus, not only should one remember God, he should allow God to influence all of life. Since God made man, He knows what will bring man happiness. The term "Creator" is definitely a reference to God as it is the participle form of the same word translated in Genesis 1:1 which speaks of God's creative work. It is also a plural form which suggests to many a reference to the work of the Godhead.

Since youth and strength are both marked by vanity—that is they are very fleeting—it is foolish to waste them. There is not a better time to follow God than in one's youth! The open grave invites all men too soon, even as the Psalmist said, "My days are like a lengthened shadow; and I wither away like grass" (Psalms 102:11). Now, however, life is vigorous, the accent is on youth, the joys are sweet, the time to be alive is now. Soon the joys which are now within the reach of youth will slip away. Man always moves into the period of decline. One has wisely expressed the experience of growing old as "his last days sloped gently toward the grave."

"The evil days" are obviously a reference to the following

graphic pictures presented by the Preacher of the final, crippling stages of old age. Previously "The days of darkness" (11:8), referred to the grave, but this is not the meaning here. "I have no delight" means that such closing years of life have lost the pleasure of youth and the prime of life. One does not find pleasure in the loss of strength, eyesight, and hearing; or does he look forward to the time when he no longer can walk or properly chew his food.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:1

546. What is the significance of speaking of God as Creator?
547. Explain what is meant by "the evil days."

G. DEATH COMES TO EVERY MAN. 12:2-8

TEXT 12:2-8

- 2 before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;
3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;
4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.
5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.
6 Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;
7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the

spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:2-8

407. Identify all that will be withheld from the eyes when one finally loses his sight in old age (verse two)?
408. If the darkness in verse two is the same as that of 11:8, to what does it refer?
409. After reading through verses three through five, find the corresponding word or phrase which best matches the following parts of the body: (1) white hair; (2) the eyes; (3) the molar teeth; (4) the feet and knees; (5) the hands and arms; (6) the voice and ears; (7) the lips. For additional explanation of these analogies, study the COMMENTS on 12:3-5.
410. What is man's "eternal home" (verse five)?
411. When man has gone to his "eternal home," who goes about in the streets?
412. The *two* figurative descriptions presented in verses two-five and verses six-seven picture what stage or event in life?
413. It is good for a man when he comes to the end of life if he remembered whom in the days of his youth?
414. What happens to the physical body at death?
415. What happens to the spirit of man when the body dies?

PARAPHRASE 12:2-8

The time will come when your sight will be diminished and you will no longer see the light from the sun, moon, or stars. At this time the clouds of sorrow return. When that day comes, the protectors of the house will tremble and the powerful, upright, strong men will be bent low, the grinders will have to stop because they are few, and they will see only darkness who look out through the windows. As the sound of the grinding

mill fades away, the doors to the street will be closed. One will be surprised at the sound of a bird as all who sing songs will be hushed. Also, when the hair becomes as the blooms of the almond tree the old will fear high places and dangers along the way. The ability to move about as a grasshopper will fail. The appetite and drives of life will vanish. The reason for this inactivity is that man is nearing his final resting place—his everlasting home. Listen! The mourners go about the streets and into the market places. It is important, therefore, to remember God before the silver cord pulls apart or the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is broken at the spring or the water wheel breaks down at the cistern. At that time the body will return to the earth from which it originally came, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Life is indeed transitory. Like a vapor of vapors, life quickly fades from view. All is futility and unfulfilling.

COMMENT 12:2-8

This section pictures the final “evil days” which await men. Death terminates the decaying process and the Preacher appropriately turns to the oft-repeated “vanity of vanities.” Nowhere in the book could the idea of transitoriness be more to the point than in verse eight.

v. 2 This verse most logically represents the end of life under the sun. “Light” is used throughout the Bible for *life* and *joy*. In this context it undoubtedly refers to life. Just as man’s life slowly slips toward the grave, so the light diminishes: first the sun and then the lesser light, the moon; finally the faintest light represented by the stars. The diminishing order of light is intentionally arranged to represent life from “childhood” to the “prime of life” until the “evil days.” Each light is finally extinguished and the darkness (death) comes. “Clouds” are symbolic of trouble and could refer to the judgment. Usually the clouds and rain pass and the sun shines to renew happiness and joy. This time, however, the storm continues with the

threatening clouds returning *after* the rain. Although this interpretation is imaginative and without definite support, it fits the context of the book and the immediate context of this section.

v. 3 This highly figurative language (verses three-five) has challenged the imagination and inventiveness of many. There is general unanimity, however, that regardless of the individual meaning given to each symbol, the passage is describing the frailties of old age, and ultimately of death itself.

The "house" represents the whole person while the "watchmen" would be the arms or hands. They are the protectors or guards of the house. They were mentioned first because they would be noticed first. They are also afflicted with palsy and thus tremble. Scriptural references of the body likened unto a house are found in II Corinthians 5:1-4; II Peter 1:13-14.

"The mighty men" are the legs which now are bent and stooped. Man can no longer walk erectly. Formerly the legs carried the youth pillars of strength, but now they are feeble.

"The grinding ones" are the teeth. They cease to function and "stand idle," because they are few and undoubtedly arranged in such a way that they are inefficient in the chewing process. The "millers" (grinders) is the feminine form. This is probably because women did the grinding. (Cf. Exodus 11:5; Job 31:10; Isaiah 47:2; Matthew 24:41)

"Those who look through windows" refer to the eyes. No longer will they see the light under the sun. The sun, moon and stars will only be a memory as they begin to experience total darkness.

v. 4 "The doors" refer to the mouth. Such reference is given in Psalms 141:3: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." It is possible that since the teeth are nearly gone, the lips now shut more closely. The chewing is then described by "a door opening onto a street so the sound inside could not be heard by those on the street."¹

¹ E. M. Zerr. *op. cit.*, p. 225.

Also, in Hebrew, the form is dual and may refer to the double door (*lips*): "On the streets" suggests communication with the world, but now such activity has ceased. In youth the appetite is keen and the mouth is employed in work and pleasure, but now the lips are drawn over the toothless gums and "the sound of the grinding mill is low."

"The sound of the bird" has numerous interpretations, but the one that appears most likely suggests that older people arise at the *same time* as the first sounds of birds in the morning. It does not follow that they are awakened by the chirping sparrow or crowing rooster, but they are anxious to start the day after restless and sometimes painful nights. The hearing is impaired and thus they would not be wakened by the faint chirp of the small bird.

"The daughters of song" represent the voice and ears of the aged when they no longer can produce melodious songs or discern those sung by others. When David offered to take Barzillai to Jerusalem and care for him in return for favors previously received, Barzillai answered him with the words: "How long have I yet to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am now eighty years old. Can I distinguish between good and bad? Or can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Or can I hear any more the voice of singing men and women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?" (II Samuel 19:34-35). To the elderly, the notes of song run together and the tones are indistinct. On the basis of this, some interpret the former "sound of the bird" to be a description of the high, shrill voice of the older person when he arises at the early hour. The fact that the "daughters of song will sing softly" implies deafness and supports the interpretation that this section refers to the voice and ears.

v. 5 "Men are afraid of a high place" is to be taken literally. The preacher departs from the highly figurative language and states a universal truth in simple language. When one grows old and his speech and hearing are dulled, he often finds difficulty in ascending steps or hills, and is often short of breath.

The energy which such activity demands is now missing. The strong muscles are atrophied, and the bones, which carried him securely and confidently in his youth, are bowed and fragile.

"Terrors on the road" could refer to the obstacles over which they would stumble or wicked individuals against whom they would have little or no defense. The obvious interpretation, however, would be to simple travel on the way. Their bones are brittle, their muscles are weak, and they have difficulty ascending even the slightest incline. Narrow and crowded streets would enhance the difficulty.

"The almond tree blossoms" refers to the white hair which indicates he is come to the final stages of life and is "ripening for the tomb." The almond tree first puts forth light, pink blossoms which turn snowy white before falling from the limbs to the ground.

"The grasshopper drags himself along" is clearly a vivid analogy of the inept physical condition of the dying man. Biblical analogy would point also to the symbol of smallness. (Cf. Numbers 13:33; Isaiah 40:22) In the light of this it would be understood that the message is, that to the elderly, even the most insignificant task becomes a burden. However, the comparison of the condition of the elderly with that of the appearance of the grasshopper best fits the context. Note the following description: "The dry, shriveled, old man, his backbone sticking out, his knees projecting forwards, his arms backwards, his head down, and the apophyses enlarged, is like that insect."²

"The caperberry" is also translated "desire" and "appetite." The difficulty in translation stems from the fact that the word appears only here in the entire Old Testament. "Caperberry" would necessitate a figurative meaning while "desire" or "appetite" would be literal. This does not aid the translation,

² Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown. *A Commentary: Critical Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, II (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 542.

however, as both figurative and literal terms are used in the Preacher's picture of old age and death. The caperberry is considered a stimulant and the obvious meaning is that neither the appetite or sexual desire can be aroused. Since the caperberry was not believed to be an aphrodisiac until the Middle Ages, the safe explanation would be that the stimulant is to preserve life (through eating, which desire is often lost in old age) not propagate it. However, as Luther says, "all desire fails," and again, "an old man has pleasure in nothing."

"The eternal home" or "house of eternity" speaks more to *duration* than it does to the place. It is a future state of being as compared with the existence "under the sun." Life here is transitory compared with "eternal" life there. The term "eternal home" is found only in Ecclesiastes. Characteristic of inspired literature, the meaning of certain terms often penetrate beyond the limits of man's present knowledge. Future revelation, on the same subject, often amplifies the meaning, and it becomes clear that God *intended* for the reader to look back and see that the term held the full-grown truth in seed form. The terms used by Solomon, who claims inspiration for his writing (12:11) are exact. However, the understanding of the terms, even by the author, is often very limited. Solomon says nothing to negate the richness of the full orb of the doctrine of eternal life taught by Jesus and the Apostles.

On the subject of the "eternal home," read and study Job 10:21; 30:23; Psalms 49:11 and John 14:1-6.

"The mourners" are, as tradition teaches, the paid "wailers" who prepare even before the death event to make loud lamentation in the streets and places of commerce. (Cf. II Samuel 3:31; Jeremiah 9:17; 34:5; Amos 5:16-17; Matthew 9:23; 11:17) The implication of such terms as "silver" and "gold" in the following verse would suggest affluency on the part of the one about to be mourned.

v. 6 The translators add "remember" because the "before" of this verse refers one to 12:1 where the Preacher is admonishing young men to live their lives in harmony with the designs of their Creator.

Two distinct figures are mentioned in this verse which speak to the final termination of life under the sun. The preceding detailed insights to the frailties of old age were intended to motivate young men to live thier lives to the fullest joys (Cf. 11:9-10) *before* the body breaks and the soul slips away.

"The silver cord" and "golden bowl" are to be considered together. They represent the lamp which hangs from the ceilings of oriental or near-eastern homes. The cord is interspersed with silver and the lamp itself is made of gold. Nothing is intended beyond the fact that life, like silver and gold, is valuable and much to be desired. The intention is to show that "light," which is here symbolic of one's life, is going to be extinguished regardless of how fine it is. Death does not come because one terminates his own life, but the cord *breaks* allowing the bowl to fall to the floor and break and the oil to be released upon the floor. The separation of the oil from the container negates the utilitarian purpose of the lamp. The original design of the lamp has been thwarted; the value of the practical aspect of the lamp is now nullified. So when death comes, the body returns to its source and the spirit slips away.

"The pitcher" and "the wheel" illustrate the same truth as the cord and lamp. The symbol is different, however, as the lamp represents life as light and the pitcher represents life as water. Jesus took advantage of both physical symbols to demonstrate spiritual truths. (Cf. John 8:12; 9:5 and John 4:10-11; 7:38) The NASB mentions both "well" and "cistern." The broken pitcher would render the well useless, while the wheel which falls into the cistern when it breaks, prevents the water from being drawn. The intent of both pictures painted by Solomon in this verse is intentionally clear in the following observation.

v. 7 Throughout the book the Preacher's emphasis has been on the transitory nature of man, and the fact that he, together with the world in which he lives, has been marked by vanity. (Cf. COMMENT 6:10) The body of man returns to its primary source—the dust of the earth. The admonition to the young man to enjoy life in his youth is based on the fact

that man will soon begin to die and move slowly toward the dust.

"The dust will return to the earth as it was." This doctrine complements similar passages on the same subject. The Preacher has previously stated that "all (men and beasts) came from the dust and all return to the dust" (3:20). (Cf. Genesis 2:7; 3:19; Job 34:14-15; Psalms 104:29) In this section (verses two-six) there has been strong emphasis upon the *dust nature* of men. When the spirit is released from the body through the death event, it does not join the process of decay and regression, but it returns to God.

"The spirit will return to God who gave it." Solomon's reference to God as Creator has established a principle of ownership. He now argues for right behavior on the basis of the certainty of final retribution. The judgment is a doctrine which has already been introduced but now takes on major intensity as the Preacher moves through the final stages of his arguments. There is no full doctrine of immortality taught here, but the fact of eternal life is not denied and the spirit is distinguished from the body with the emphasis upon the fact that it is the spirit that God receives. For the sinner, the ungodly person who has been described so often throughout the book, there is nothing for him to anticipate but the depressing picture of death and then the sudden and sure appearing before God's judgment. Leupold wisely states that Solomon is teaching such a judgment as a motivating factor to lead all men to live righteously. He adds, "You personally will at your death appear before the judgment seat of God, therefore get ready."³

v. 8 There is nothing new in this verse that has not already been thoroughly discussed, but the insertion of the subtheme of the book (Cf. 1:2) at this particular place serves to prove that the Preacher believes that such "vanity" has been sufficiently demonstrated. It serves to terminate his discussion in the first part of this chapter, and also introduces the final

³ Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

section of the book. Hengstenberg offers a word of warning when he writes, "The knowledge of the vanity of earthly things conducts to the fear of God afterwards recommended. Since all things are vain, man, who is subject to vanity, should do all in his power to enter into a living relation to Him who is the true absolute being, and through fellowship with him to participate, himself, in a true eternal being."⁴

The fact that Solomon once again refers to himself as "the Preacher" reflects upon the hortatory nature of the closing two chapters of the book. Especially is he eloquent in this final section. In the epilogue (verse nine through fourteen) he speaks of himself as the Preacher two more times. Never can a preacher reach a higher pinnacle of confidence than when he claims divine authority for his message. The following "conclusion of the whole matter" is driven to the heart with strong conviction.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:2-8

548. Why is it appropriate that the oft-occurring "vanity of vanities" *immediately* follows this section?
549. What is the significance of the "light" order of first the sun, then the moon and finally the stars?
550. What is significant about the fact that the clouds return again *after* the rain? Explain.
551. Although the language beginning in verse three is highly figurative, it is generally accepted that it has what meaning?
552. Identify the "house."
553. What is the significance of the "watchmen" *trembling*?
554. Why are the "grinding ones" in the feminine form in the original language?
555. "The doors" refer to what part of the body? The Hebrew

⁴ Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

form is *dual* and implies what?

556. If the elderly are not *awakened* by the "sound of birds," what is the significance of mentioning the birds?
557. Is verse five to be taken figuratively or literally? Explain.
558. Why are elderly people afraid to travel on the road?
559. Explain why the grasshopper is an appropriate symbol of the elderly.
560. How does Luther translate the *idea* that "the caperberry is ineffective"?
561. "The eternal home" suggests what primary lesson?
562. Why are the "mourners" going about the streets prior to the death of the elderly person?
563. The two figures in verse six suggest what event?
564. Explain the lesson of the "bowl."
565. How does verse seven relate to the two symbols of verse six?
566. Why say the body will return to dust?
567. To what extent does Solomon explain the doctrine of immortality in verse seven? Discuss.
568. Identify the "sub-theme" of the book.

CONCLUSION 12:9-14

A. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO WORK IN HARMONY WITH GOD THROUGH THE WORDS OF ONE SHEPHERD. 12:9-12

TEXT 12:9-12

- 9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.
- 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.
- 11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one

Shepherd.

- 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:9-12

416. What reason is given why the Preacher taught the people?
417. How many proverbs did Solomon seek out? (Cf. I Kings 4:32)
418. Give evidence that Solomon was concerned about writing a truthful account.
419. Explain why words from wise teachers would be like "goads" and "well-driven nails."
420. What evidence in verse eleven speaks to Divine inspiration of Ecclesiastes?
421. When does devotion to books become wearying to the body?

PARAPHRASE 12:9-12

In addition, because the Preacher was wise, he desired that others become wise also. Therefore he instructed them in the knowledge which he had learned. He was careful to examine, ponder and sort out many wise proverbial sayings. He not only desired to impart instruction to others, he wanted to say it in a way which would be a delightful experience for those who heard. Above all, he wanted to write down correctly the words of truth—to be certain that that which he taught was exactly right. The words which he spoke served as goads to prod his readers onward. His words also served as nails to securely fix his truth in their minds. This collection of sayings actually proceeds from one Shepherd. My son, be warned about going beyond those words which do not proceed from one Shepherd. You should realize that the writing of this kind of information

is endless, and studying such books exhausts the body and the mind.

COMMENT 12:9-12

Solomon has sufficiently defended and supported the thesis that all is vanity. Now he turns to a clear summation of his methodology and a statement of his objective in composing the book. He classifies himself among the "wise," and offers, as it were, his credentials in the form of a claim to inspiration. In addition to being wise, he professes to be a disseminator of knowledge, an imaginative arranger of proverbs, a speaker of truth, and most importantly divinely inspired. He drives home (nails well-fastened) important lessons which come to him from God. (Cf. verse 11; I Kings 3:12) He warns against one searching for truth in books which are not inspired, and that devotion to such an endless number of books is "wearying to the body."

v. 9 As a wise man, whose authority was respected and accepted, Solomon arranged many proverbs through which he taught the people. Some believe the reference is to the book of Proverbs which many attribute to Solomon. The word translated "proverbs" can mean maxims, parables, or allegories. (Cf. I Kings 4:32)

v. 10 Solomon's words are "delightful" words in that he never turned to obscene language, but spoke discretely and guardedly. He had written: "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances" (Proverbs 25:11). Also, "Listen, for I shall speak noble things; and the opening of my lips will produce right things. For my mouth will utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them. They are all straight-forward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge" (Proverbs 8:6-9). The Preacher's words are framed for the spiritual minded and in them they will find their "delight."

In addition to skilfully arranging his words, he gave diligence "to write words of truth correctly." Most commentators see in this verse a twofold intention: (1) he wants to write sincerely—that is he spoke from the heart as honestly as he could; (2) he also spoke objectively—that is he presented factual knowledge apart from a bias. He intended for his words to be well received, but he was not willing to sacrifice truth in order to retain his readers.

v. 11 Wisdom is directive. The "words of wise men" are designed to guide both the teacher and his audience on the road of right behavior. (Cf. Matthew 7:24) These words of truth are "like goads." A goad is a stick or pole with a sharp point which is used to prod oxen or sheep in the direction one wishes them to move. (Cf. Judges 3:3; I Samuel 13:31; Acts 9:5) The "collections" could refer to the material found in Ecclesiastes. It would mean that he has arranged his material in such a way that one is drawn to a path of proper conduct because he is motivated by the thought and content of the ordered material. On the other hand, it could refer to the "joint-authors of the collected canonical Scriptures." (Cf. II Peter 1:21) The truth taught by inspired teachers is now likened unto "well-driven nails." The figure of the nails is used because it is the nature of the nail to penetrate easily. It could mean to plant or drive in, to fasten and secure. So the words of the wise "nail down" the truths which change men's lives and their eternal destinies.

Solomon's reference here to the fact that such truths have their origin with the "one Shepherd" is a clear claim to inspiration. The collected sayings have but one source and thus one authority. The "one Shepherd" is God who is elsewhere called the "Shepherd of Israel." (Cf. Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalms 23:1; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:11-12; John 10:14-16; Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 2:25; 5:4) On the subject of inspiration as claimed by Solomon, Leupold states: "Observe what a correct and clear conception of the inspiration of the sacred writings prevailed in Israel at this time, especially of the fact that it was a unified work done

by the Lord for the good of His people. Observe also that the Preacher is aware of the fact that God was pleased to use him to share in this work.”⁵

v. 12 There is more in this verse than the simple jest over the prolific number of volumns written on the subject of the meaning of life, and the subsequent weariness that comes to one who attempts to read all of what has been written. Solomon's tender address of "my son" suggests the teacher-student relationship and not the physical father-son relationship. It implies that *all* may come and hear these wise words which have been given through the Preacher, but which come from God. "The writing of many books" is in contrast to the Sacred Scriptures. They represent the thinking of men outside the circle of divine inspiration. The charge is not against "studying" as such, as it is wise to study human nature, and it is especially wise to study the inspired books. The warning is against those books or writings which contradict the truth and which lead one away from the path of righteousness. It is the nature of the wisdom of this world to never give a final answer to the most basic and penetrating questions of life. Paul spoke of this matter to Timothy when he said that men were "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7). Although Ecclesiastes does not delineate the specifics of correct behavior, it does press hard toward the correct road: the fear of God. It motivates toward this conclusion by demonstrating the foolishness of searching in areas where God has not hidden the answers. It has been said that Ecclesiastes raises the question that the rest of the Bible answers. While this is partly true, it is not the complete picture. Ecclesiastes proves the emptiness of life apart from God, but it also demands that one fill the void of his life with the activity of doing the will of God.

⁵ Leupold. *op. cit.*, p. 296.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:9-12

569. Explain the methodology used by Solomon.
570. Give proof that Solomon arranged many proverbs.
571. "Delightful" words are prepared for what group of people?
572. What does it mean to write objectively? (Cf. verse ten)
573. What is the purpose of a goad? What is the relation of goad to the fact that Solomon was wise?
574. To what could the "collection" of verse eleven refer?
575. Identify and explain the claim Solomon makes for inspiration.
576. "My son" implies what relationship? (Cf. verse 12)
577. "The writing of many books" is in contrast to what?

B. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO FEAR GOD
AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. 12:13

TEXT 12:13

- 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:13

422. Explain *what* "has been heard." (Cf. 12:9-12)
423. Is Solomon's conclusion in harmony with the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles? Give evidence.
424. Identify what it is that applies to every man.

PARAPHRASE 12:13

All that I proposed to say, I have said. The conclusion then from what I have said is this: Revere and worship God; keep

His commandments. This is the complete, fulfilling work of man, and no man shall escape its implications.

COMMENT 12:13

v. 13 Whatever difficulty one may encounter in the explanation of certain sections of Ecclesiastes, there can be little doubt about the intention of Solomon as he moves to his conclusion. His final observations are stated with great clarity. The "conclusion" is literally "the *sum* of all." It should be noted that his personal claim to inspiration is made prior to his final warning which he says applies to all men.

The "fear of God" is now underscored as the major theme of the book. "Vanity" and the testimony values of this world are contrasted with true wisdom. This true wisdom leads one to shun evil and do good (Psalms 34:11-12) and is thus defined as the "fear of the Lord." The fear of God and keeping His commands are inseparable. To obey God, in this context, is not an indication that one fears Him it *is* the fear of God. It is worthy of note that Solomon now applies his message "to every man." Verse fourteen confirms the universality of the message. The Septuagint captures the meaning better than does the Authorized Version when it renders the statement as "For this is the whole duty of man." Similar translations read, "This is the duty of all men," "This concerns all mankind," "The whole of mankind," "For this, all men," and "The whole duty for every man." Paul draws this same conclusion as he said, "Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also" (Romans 3:29).

The Vanities of Ecclesiastes Contrasted With the Fear of the Lord which follows this immediate section, illustrates the negative pursuits of men which the Preacher declares to be but transitory and unfulfilling. The positive practice of the *fear of the Lord* fills the emptiness in man's life and directs him to satisfaction and joy.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:13

578. The “conclusion” literally means what?
 579. Identify the major theme of the book.
 580. Which is the better translation: “For this is the whole duty of man,” or “This is the duty of all men”? Explain.

THE VANITIES OF ECCLESIASTES
 CONTRASTED WITH THE FEAR OF THE LORD

(1) Man's advantages	1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:16
(2) The desire to learn all things	1:13; 2:23; 26; 3:10
(3) Excessive wisdom	1:18; 2:15; 7:16
(4) Pursuit of pleasure	2:1; 7:4; 8:15; 10:16
(5) Mad mirth	2:2; 7:2-5
(6) Increase of earthly possessions	2:4-9; 6:2; 5:11
(7) Personal accomplishments	2:11, 17, 18, 20
(8) Living only for tomorrow	3:22; 2:18; 6:12; 8:7; 10:14
(9) Envy, rivalry	4:4
(10) Laziness	4:5, 6; 10:18
(11) Greed	4:8; 1:8; 5:10, 13; 8:13, 17
(12) Hypocritical worship	5:1-6
(13) Discontentment	6:2-3; 7:10, 11:9
(14) Self righteousnes	7:16-18
(15) Sexual immorality	7:26, 29
(16) Lawlessness	8:3-4
(17) Self-deceit	8:11; 9:3
(18) Wicked oppression	8:12-13
(19) Identity with evil	9:18; 10:1
(20) Intellectual pride	10:10, 12-14
(21) Self-reliance	11:1-6
(22) Youth spent without God	12:1

C. MAN IS ADMONISHED TO WORK IN HARMONY
WITH GOD BECAUSE GOD WILL BRING EVERY WORK
INTO JUDGMENT. 12:14

TEXT 12:14

14 Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:14

425. Is the judgment *eternal judgment* or *judgment which takes place in this world*? Explain and discuss.
426. What truth taught by Jesus in Matthew 10:26 is taught in this final verse?
427. Who will judge the "secrets" of the heart? (Cf. Romans 2:16)
428. How thorough will be the final judgment? (Cf. I Corinthians 4:5)

PARAPHRASE 12:14

I say that no man shall escape because God shall bring every deed into judgment whether the motive is good or evil.

COMMENT 12:14

v. 14 Appropriately the reader is drawn to God in this final sentence of the book. God is the Creator (Cf. 12:1; 7:13-14; 7:29; 8:15; 11:5; 12:7), the One worshipped (Cf. 5:1, 2, 4, 6, 7; 8:2), the One who permits man's enjoyment, (Cf. 9:7) the One who knows the end from the beginning (Cf. 3:11, 15), the One who has placed the desire to know in the heart of man (Cf. 3:10), the One who supplies food, and water, and gives

His approval of labors (Cf. 2:24; 3:13; 5:18-20), the One who works that men will fear Him (Cf. 3:14), the One who is the final judge of all men (Cf. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14), the One who proves that man is different from beasts (Cf. 3:18), the One who blesses the godly (Cf. 7:18), the One who delivers the godly from sin (Cf. 7:26), the One who is the author of the words of life (Cf. 12:11).

The fact that God will bring "every act" into judgment has been established. He had previously stated: "I said to myself, 'God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there' " (3:17). In 11:9 the emphasis of the judgment is on "all these things." Nothing escapes the knowledge of God. The "eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth" (II Chronicles 16:9). (Cf. Zechariah 4:10; Matthew 12:36; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 4:5; II Corinthians 5:10) This *final judgment* will test the works of men to determine what is vanity and what endures (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

There is a sense in which present judgment takes place "under the sun." (Cf. John 3:18-20; Galatians 6:7-8; Ephesians 5:13) However, the judgment Solomon refers to must be the eternal judgment as no earthly judgment could include every man and every act.

FACT QUESTIONS 12:14

581. Would a partial judgment of sins on this earth satisfy the demands of this verse? Explain.

EPILOGUE

This final word.

Much closer to our generation than Solomon, there stands a man who represents the *same* world. He caused laughter to flash across the faces of literally thousands. Yet, in a more

serious moment he contemplated life apart from *the fear of the Lord* and his words are strikingly similar to those of the Preacher. On that occasion Mark Twain wrote:

"A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; those they love are taken from them. At length ambition is dead; pride is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence. Then another myriad takes their place, and copies all they did, and goes along the same profitless road, and vanishes as they vanished—to make room for another and another and a million more myriads to follow the same arid path through the same desert and accomplish what the first myriad and all the myriads that came after it accomplished—nothing."

One bows in deep gratitude before the throne of Grace. Indeed the vacuum within man is Christ-shaped. When through faith and submission to His Lordship He floods into our lives, there is fulfillment and purpose. The Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings. Let Jesus have the final word:

"I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I CAME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:7-11).

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THE SONG OF SOLOMON

PREFACE

This book is unique in the Old Testament canon. There is no book in the whole Bible on which more commentaries have been written or more opinions advanced. This is a strange record of the past as compared to its general neglect in the present day. We are glad to observe a few writers discovering its value (See our bibliography for recent works). There is much to learn from these eight short chapters.

We have thought much about our approach to the text. How shall we interpret? There are four approaches made by men in their attempt to understand this book. (1) *Allegorical*—The literal meaning is almost ignored. In the Jewish use of this method of interpretation it becomes the song of God's love for His people. Christians, beginning with Origen in the Third Century saw in this book the love of Christ for the Christian and the love of the believer for His Lord. (2) *Literal*—If we accept the words at their face value they express a song of human love of a man and woman. (3) *Lyrical*—Some have tried unsuccessfully, we believe, to see in the record love lyrics sung at Syrian weddings. (4) *Cultic*—Was this once a pagan ritual accommodated to the worship of Jehovah? This interpretation hardly merits mention.

We ask the serious student to read at least an introduction to this book in addition to the one we give in our text.

We have chosen to use a literal interpretation of this book. However, we are also persuaded it has the potential of wonderful analogous comparisons. We do not want to ignore the emphasis of love and communion with our Lord. We shall follow the format of the BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOKS as found in Ecclesiastes.

Readers unfamiliar with the BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOKS will wonder what to do with the "Thought Questions" or the "Paraphrase" or even the "Fact Questions." There is a very definite reason, and we believe a very practical value for this five-fold format:

(1) TEXT: This is the AMERICAN STANDARD TRANSLATION of 1901. We have found this to be a very accurate rendering of the Greek and Hebrew text. Among the many translations,

we prefer this one for its faithful adherence to the original. We ask all readers to contemplate these words as the words of God. Nothing could be more important than a thorough assimilation of every word given us by God through the Holy Spirit! Read it and re-read it—then read it again. It is God speaking to you!

(2) **THOUGHT QUESTIONS:** We have prepared these from our reading and understanding of the text. Answer every question with your present understanding of the text. *It is not important that you give the same answer to these questions that we do. It is very, very important that you attempt some answer.* We are attempting to motivate you into a personal involvement in the meaning of God's Word. We would suggest your answers be kept in a notebook. If you do not know—or you must guess—*record your response.* If after you have read the **PARAPHRASE** or the **COMMENT** you wish to change your answer you may do so, but it is vitally important that you express your response to what God has said to you and that you do it in written form.

(3) **PARAPHRASE:** This is the work of Arthur G. Clarke from his book *The Song of Songs* published by Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas. The reader will note that our interpretation is clearly spelled out in identifying the speakers of this book of dialogue. Please, please, read the paraphrase at least twice. Now refer back to the **THOUGHT QUESTIONS**—do you wish to change an answer, add an answer, or add to an answer—Do it!

(4) **COMMENT:** We want to offer our present understanding of each word in the divine **TEXT**. We wish to be very careful and thorough. For this reason we have read and reread all we could find on the book of Song of Solomon (see our Bibliography). Our **COMMENTS** shall be: (a) *Critical* in the sense that we wish to understand the meaning of each Hebrew word, both in the **TEXT** and in the **CONTEXT**. (b) *Devotional* in the sense that we want to point up the obvious, and oft times the often overlooked application of the **TEXT** to our lives. We make no apology for attempting to reach the conscience

P R E F A C E

in our COMMENTS. (c) *Expository*: We mean that the TEXT shall be analytically considered in such a way that the present day Biblical expositor could use it in his teaching. (d) *Homiletical*: We believe many sermons could be preached from Song of Solomon in which the fulness of the union and communion of our Lord could be held up as in no other way. We attempt to offer help in this grand pursuit!

(5) **FACT QUESTIONS**: The basic purpose of these questions is reading comprehension. They are based upon all you have read from the TEXT through the COMMENT. At times we have posed in this section a question or two for discussion where the point of view is open to opinion. In this section is the largest possibility for personal fulfillment. A full honest attempt on the part of the reader to answer these questions could actually form a commentary of his own on the sacred TEXT. No higher accomplishment of personal Bible study could be contemplated than a verse-by-verse personal explanation of God's Word on the part of the reader. If the reader will do this he will have a track record of his spiritual growth to which he can refer in times of discouragement or even in times of joy. Your answers to the **THOUGHT QUESTIONS** can be a preparation and research for your much more complete answers to the **FACT QUESTIONS**.

INTRODUCTION

* *By W. G. Moorehead*

Angus assigns this book of Scripture to B.C. 1001. The universal voice of antiquity ascribes it to Solomon, and internal evidence confirms this testimony. His songs were a thousand and five, I Kings iv, 32; and this is called the "song of songs," because it is the best of them all.

Key-word, "Beloved"; key verse, vi, 3.

Origen and Jerome tell us that the Jews forbade it to be read by any until he was thirty years old. It certainly needs a degree of spiritual maturity to enter aright into the holy mystery of love which it celebrates. It is possible to read the song amiss; but to such as have attained spiritual maturity, of what age soever, it is one of the most edifying of the sacred writings.

Love to Jesus Christ becomes, through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, the strongest passion which can sway the human heart. Avarice, ambition, love of power may have more of the unnatural vigor attending fever; this carries with it the quiet, enduring energy of health that brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Those alone who have experienced the power of this love in its intensity are competent judges whether any language used in expressing it may be exaggerated. If the love of God to us is as incomprehensible as is His eternity and omnipresence, it is not surprising that the love of a grateful heart should struggle and strive to declare itself by appealing to the tenderest ties, by using the boldest imagery; for the love of a believer is but a dim reflection of the measureless love of God.

1. The form of the song is somewhat difficult to determine. A drama it certainly is not, although it has been thus described. It presents little or nothing of the features belonging to the drama. While dialogue is found in it, still it is not of a very sustained kind, nor is it very marked. The feature chiefly lacking is a climax, the culminating *finis* with which the drama

* W. G. Moorehead, *Outline Studies in the Books of the Old Testament*, Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, 1893. Pg. 197.

is expected to close. Its form seems to be that of a pastoral poem, with characters presenting quasi-dramatic action. The personages introduced into it are the bridegroom and king; the bride, or spouse; the daughters of Jerusalem, or the court ladies of Solomon's palace. There is scarcely traceable any plot, nor dramatic unity, although the poem is one. Most of the addresses, instead of being dialogues, are soliloquies, apostrophes, or monologues. It has changing scenes. Sometimes the scene is laid in a garden; at others in the palace; then in the country amid pastoral quiet and beauty; and in Jerusalem amidst the noise of a great city.

This much may be confidently asserted, that it is a song of love in Oriental language and imagery, with rests and pauses and varying scenery and conversation.

2. The design of the song. There are three interpretations of the poem advanced by as many schools of expositors. Each of these may be briefly mentioned.

The first is that of the merely literal and erotic. That is, it is held that the poem celebrates the love of Solomon for a young shepherdess who was a member of an agricultural family consisting of a widowed mother and several sons, who lived at Shulem. (The name of the place is derived from the spouse, viz., Shulemite.) The young woman, in the course of her pastoral duties, met with a shepherd to whom, in due time, she became espoused. Her brothers violently opposed the union. She was invited by her lover to accompany him to the fields; but her brothers, to prevent the meeting, sent her to take care of the vineyards. Here, she one day encountered King Solomon, who assisted by his court ladies, endeavored to win her love. But she remained steadfast to her affianced. The king carried her to the city, made her large promises and sought to overcome her scruples by princely presents; but without avail; and her fidelity was finally rewarded by her marriage with the shepherd and gifts from her reconciled brothers.

According to this theory, the scope of the book is to give us an "example of virtue in a young woman who encountered

and conquered great temptations, and was eventually rewarded." If this is all, belief in its inspiration must be dismissed; and it has no better right to a place in the Bible than a tale from the Arabian Nights, or the sonnets from Shakespeare. Against this theory there are strong objections: (1) It has been doubted whether there was such a place as Shulem whence the spouse derived her name of the Shulemite. (2) It seems obvious that if we accept this view of the book as true, then we must renounce the belief in Solomon's being the author, for it is altogether unlikely that he could have written so manifest an account of his own defeat. (3) The vast majority of Bible students see no ground or foundation for the story detailed above. They find no shepherd in it; no bethrothal of the Shulemite with a shepherd; no effort on the part of the king to supplant another in her affections and steal her from him. In short, the story on which the view rests is pure fiction. (4) If it be no more than a love-poem celebrating one of Solomon's amours it is incredible that it should have been incorporated with the other books of the Bible, and for so many centuries held its place with the other inspired books as one of them. It was in the Old Testament canon when the Septuagint version was made, two hundred and fifty years before the advent of the Saviour; it has kept its place there ever since. If it is only a "dissolute love song" God would have found a way to cast it out of His Book ages ago, like the Apocraphal books. (5) The strange and strong hold it has had upon some of the most spiritually minded men the world has ever seen—men like Rutherford, McChene, Gill, Stuart, John Trapp, and Thomas Goodwin—is inexplicable if the song be nothing more than this hypothesis offers. We must reject this theory.

The second view we mention which has been put forward as an explanation of the design of the book is called the moral. The song is regarded as a description of wedded love in the exercise of its highest and purest affections. In this interpretation no spiritual sense is attached to the poem. The great moral sentiments relating to the holy estate of marriage alone

are intended to be inculcated. The foundation for this opinion rests on the union of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh. It is held that the poem sings the praises of that princess, and celebrates the happiness the king enjoyed in union with her.

There are very grave objections which may be urged against this theory. We may safely assert that the Egyptian princess is not meant at all nor can be meant by the Shulemite. Some of the difficulties that lie against it may be stated. The delicate daughter of the haughty Pharaoh could not in any supposable manner have ever been the sunburnt keeper of the vineyards, as the spouse is described to have been, ch. i, 6. She could not have been unveiled and beaten by the watchman of Jerusalem, v, 7. She could not have come from the snowy heights of Lebanon when she had no occasion to be within one hundred and twenty miles of its base, iv, 8. And it is very unlikely that she conducted Solomon into her mother's house, which was in Egypt, iii, 4.

Moreover, on this theory it is impossible to account for the remarkable situation of the spouse. She is found wandering through the streets of the great city by night; is smitten by watchmen; her veil is torn rudely from her face, the gravest insult that could be offered an Eastern woman. In fact, her whole conduct is utterly irreconcilable with the Oriental ideas of womanly seclusion and modesty. If this spouse is a veritable woman, having the experience here ascribed to her, then her character is altogether incompatible with Eastern habits of decorum, and is questionable.

The third view is, that the song is an allegory, that under the guise of human love, the love which passes between two loyal and faithful hearts, is set forth the intimate, tender relationship existing between Christ and His people. The frame, we may reverently say, is human conjugal affection. But through this thin, skillfully carved lattice-work there glance out upon us the joy and bliss, the rapture and ecstasy, the strange, tender wondrous play of the deep abiding love of Jesus for His own, and reciprocally, theirs for Him. The Chaldee Targum, the oldest Jewish commentary on the book, entitles

it, "The Songs and Hymns which Solomon the Prophet, King of Israel, Delivered by the Spirit of Prophecy, before Jehovah, the Lord of the Whole Earth." The great body of Christians have always regarded it as a symbolical exhibition of the relations subsisting between the Lord and His people. From first to last, orthodox believers hold it bears the stamp of the allegory. In support of this view the following arguments may be urged: (1) It best accounts for the position of the book in the canon of Scripture. (2) It accords with the instincts of the spiritually-minded. (3) The names of its principal characters indicate that it is an allegory—*Shalomoh*, Solomon, the peaceful one, the prince of peace, and *Shulamith*, also the peaceful one, but feminine—the daughter of peace. These names are believed to be as suggestive, as significant, as Bunyan's "Christian" and "Christiana," or "Faithful" and "Hopeful." Read in this light, we perceive how appropriately the book represents Jesus as the peaceful one, the peace-bringer, and His people as the sharers of His peace, those to whom He gives peace. (4) The fancifulness of some of the scenes and situations render a literal interpretation absurd and impossible. See, for example, ii, 14-17; iii, 1-4; vi, 4-7; iv, 8. The Shulemite is in the clefts of the rock, in the concealments of the precipices; the bridegroom is in the garden, beyond the mountains, in the distant fields. The bride sleeps, the lover knocks at her door in the stillness of the night—withdraws when he receives no answer to his call. She in her remorse arises and wanders about the streets of the city. The rapid transitions, the remarkable situations indicate that the poem is an allegory. (5) This interpretation harmonizes best with the Old Testament representations of the relation between God and His people. This relation is often set forth as one of wedlock. The prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, in particular, make the marriage covenant existing between the Lord and Israel the ground of their passionate appeals. Nor is the New Testament silent as to the relation. The union and reciprocal love of Christ and the church are described in language closely akin to that of the song, "He is the Bridegroom who hath the

Bride." They rejoice in each other. Their delights are mutual, identical; Matt. ix, 15; John iii, 29; 2 Cor. xi, 2; Eph. v, 25-32; Rev. xix, 7-9; xxi, 7-27.

The sudden pronominal changes indicate that the song is an allegory. "Draw *me*, we will run after thee." "The King hath brought *me* into His chambers; *we* will be glad and rejoice in thee," i, 4. The bride's name is not that of a single individual, but is collective. She is the "daughter of Zion."

3. The teaching of the Song we hold is the following:

(1) The bridegroom is the Messiah, the Redeemer.

(2) The bride, His people.

(3) The daughters of Jerusalem, are the friends of both, Jno. iii, 29.

(4) The Song describes the love which exists between them. The fountain of all love for Christ is His love to us. To know His love is to love Him in return, I Jno. iv, 19.

(5) The time when the Song has its fulfillment is always. But it is believed that it will have a peculiar accomplishment in that day when the Jews are again restored to God's favor and fellowship—and for the second time the marriage bond is ratified and sealed, never again to be violated, Hos. i, ii; Rom. xi, 26-29.

(6) Traits of Christ's love. It is *unconditional*, chap. i, 2-6; comp. Rom. v, 8. *Irresistible*, ii, 8; comp. 1 John iv, 10. *Intense*, ii, 9, 10; comp. John xiv, 1-3. *Sheltering and protective*, ii, 14, 15; comp. Ps. xci, 1-6. *Exact*, v, 2; comp. Eph. 4, i, 2. *Jealous*, v, 6; comp. Rev. iii, 20.

(7) Traits of a believer's love. It is *self-depreciating*, i, 5. *Eager for communion*, ii, 1-7. *Sometimes interrupted*, iii, 1. *Sorrowful*, v, 6, 7. *Intermittent*, v, 1, 2. *Self-sacrificing*, iii, 2, 3.

4. Structure and summary of contents: (Moody Stewart)
Canto One.—Subject, the bride seeking and finding the king.

1. The king sought, chap. i, 2-8.

2. The king found, i, 9; ii, 7.

Canto Two.—Subject, the sleeping bride awakened.

1. Call to meet the bridegroom, ii, 8-15.

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2. Response of the bride, 16; iii, ii, 5.

Canto Three.—Subject, the bridegroom with the bride.

1. The king in his bridal chariot, iii, 6-11.

2. The beauty of the bride, iv, 1-7.

3. The garden of spices, iv, 8; v, 2.

Canto Four.—Subject, bridegroom's withdrawal and re-appearance.

1. Sleep and sorrow, v, 3; vi, 3.

2. Bridegroom's return, vi, 4-10.

3. Glory of the bride, vi, 11; vii, 10.

4. Garden in the fields, vii, 11; viii, 4.

Canto Five.—Subject, the little sister, viii, 5-14.

THE STORY IN OUTLINE

We quote again from Arthur G. Clarke. Details of the beautiful story here unfolded can be gathered only from the Song itself. It is mainly from the standpoint of the Shulammitte maiden herself and runs something like this. There lived at Shunem (also known as Shulem) a humble family consisting of a widowed mother with two or more sons and a younger virtuous daughter, the maiden of the Song. The family seems to have had a double occupation. Besides shepherding flocks they had the care of certain vineyards, which they may have owned or held simply as tenants.

During the course of her duties in caring for the young of the flock the maiden became acquainted with a shepherd youth. They met one day about noon while resting their flocks at a woodland spot near the girl's home. It was here under the shade of a certain tree, which became a trysting place, that the shepherd first declared his love and found to his joy a response in the maiden's heart. Mutual vows of fidelity appear to have been exchanged.

According to Eastern custom, upon the death of their father the maiden's brothers, who were older, had assumed responsibility with the mother for arranging in due course their sister's

marriage. The brothers did not look with favor upon the growing intimacy of the young couple and made efforts to hinder their communion. The purpose, no doubt, was to protect their sister's reputation and that of the family. The mother seems to have taken a more lenient view, not only encouraging the young people but later on at the same hallowed spot confirming the lovers' vows by a more formal pledge of betrothal.

One lovely spring day the maiden sets out to visit a nut garden in a favorite valley. She desires to enjoy the sight of the fresh verdure of her beautiful countryside. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly she comes upon King Solomon with his retinue returning from an excursion to his northern territories where he possessed gardens and vineyards. The king's observant eye lights upon the damsel and, struck by her unusual beauty, his too-susceptible heart immediately determines to make her a member of his already large harem. It is probable that she turned to flee, but by royal command is seized and committed to the care of the court ladies, then conveyed to a royal residence or, as some think, to the king's pavilion at a nearby encampment.

(At some point in the story the scene changes from the country to Jerusalem but just where cannot be positively stated. Much depends upon the true interpretation of 4:8. A solution could be more readily found if it were known for certain whether or not the maiden was in the procession described at 3:6-11.)

It is not at all unlikely that it is then that Solomon has her taken to Jerusalem where she is handed over to the care of the women. Amid the splendors of the royal palace the king renews his attentions. The Shulammite is first promised gifts of jewelry, and when this offer fails in its purpose she is later offered advancement in station among the ladies of the court circle. Her resolve, however, is unshaken. She preserves her maidenly dignity and remains loyal to her betrothed shepherd-lover from whom she has been unwillingly separated. All the king's blandishments, offered inducements, and all the luxuries of court life mean nothing to the pure soul of this country maid.

INTRODUCTION

Her thoughts constantly dwell upon her absent beloved. Her heart is full of him and him only.

Solomon comes at last to realize the utter failure of his importunate advances. It is something new in his experiences with the fair sex. Impressed by such virtue and constancy he grants permission to the Shulammite to return home. Joyfully she sends word to her beloved to come and escort her there. To this invitation the shepherd eagerly responds.

The story ends with a touching description of the homeward journey. Readers are permitted to overhear, so to speak, snatches of the lovers' conversation as they near home. They pass familiar spots and recall past experiences. Throughout the Song the formal marriage is seen only in prospect unless the passage 4:8 to 5:1 does indeed belong chronologically to the end of the book. Regarding this point see comments *in loco*.

THE SONG OF SONGS TITLE 1:1

TEXT 1:1

- 1 The Song of songs, which is Solomon's.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. Do you imagine Solomon wrote this song right after he wrote Ecclesiastes? Discuss.
2. Is this song from Solomon or about him?
3. Why call this the best of all his many songs?

PARAPHRASE 1:1

- 1 The Song of Songs—Solomon's.

COMMENT 1:1

This is a form of expressing the superlative. Like holy of holies or Lord of Lords or King of Kings. Of the many songs that Solomon wrote (one thousand and five, I Kings 4:32) this is the best. We are eager to learn of its superlative value.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. In what area would you call this the best of all songs? i.e., as compared with what?
2. Was this song to be sung to music?
3. In what sense is it a poem?

TEXT 1:2-4

FIRST SCENE—The King's Palace

SHULAMMITE: SOLILOQUY

- 2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine.
- 3 Thine oils leave a goodly fragrance; thy name is as oil poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee.
- 4 Draw me; we will run after thee: the King hath brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in thee; we will make mention of thy love more than wine.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:2-4

4. For whom does the Shulammitte maid long in these verses? Is it Solomon or the shepherd?
5. In what way is love better than wine?
6. Why not just ask for kisses? Why mention "the kisses of his mouth"?
7. The fragrance of the oils of the man involved compares to what in the personal grooming of men today?
8. What name would be appropriate as suggested in verse three?
9. Who are "the virgins" of verse three? Where are they?
10. What is meant by "draw me"? (verse four)
11. Why use the pronoun "we" in verse four?
12. Why mention the fact that she is in the King's chambers?
13. Is there a contrast between the King's chambers and the rejoicing and love mentioned in verse four?
14. Twice love is compared with wine—show at least two parallels.

PARAPHRASE 1:2-4

SHULAMMITE'S SILILOQUY

- 2 Oh, that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For thy endearments are better than wine.
- 3 Thy perfumes have a delightful fragrance;
Thy name is as perfume poured out;
No wonder the damsels adore thee.
- 4 Draw me after thee; let us hasten away!
(For the king has brought me into his inner apartments).
We will be glad and rejoice only in thee;
We will praise thy endearments more than wine.
Deservedly do the damsels adore thee.

COMMENT 1:2-4

Our comments throughout this book will be threefold: (1) To give as careful an exegesis of the text as possible. We are concerned about every word in the Song of Solomon and its meaning! (2) The application of the text to the husband-wife relationship. We believe this book can become a veritable marriage manual in the area of love that should and can exist between those who are married. (3) As much as we need help in our day for our shakey marriages, we need more help in establishing a deep union and communion with our Lord. We shall relate the text to the mutual love between the believer and his Lord.

Exegesis

By reading 6:12, 13 we conclude the Shulammite maid was kidnapped—perhaps willingly, by the servants of Solomon. She was taken to the palace of King Solomon. Perhaps this palace was one of his northern summer houses—or was it at

Jerusalem? At least there is a garden present with a lattice-work trellis. It is springtime. She is confined to the King's inner chambers. The women of the court or "daughters of Jerusalem" surround her. When the impact of what has happened hits her she cries out in deep longing for her betrothed—"Let him kiss me with his mouth; for his love is better than wine." Even the wines of Solomon cannot make her forget her beloved. In memory and imagination she can remember the fragrance of his presence. We would compare such fragrance to cologne used by both men and women of our day. The thought of his familiar fragrance prompts her to epitomize the total personality of her betrothed with the symbolism of the fragrance of his oil poured forth—"Thy name is as oil poured forth." In her soliloquy she is saying—"You are as attractive to me in your personality as the cologne is to my sense of smell."

What is meant by the phrase, "therefore do the virgins love thee"? We see the Shulammitte dreaming of her wedding day. All her girlfriends who share with her in the wedding party also share her estimate of the groom. These virgins love the shepherd, not, of course, in the same relationship as the bride—but they understand the beauty of his character and appearance and therefore admire him greatly.

The girl from Shunem asks the groom to indicate by some word or gesture that he wants her with him (i.e., "draw me out")—only a slight indication and "we shall come running." We can see the girls and the bride of the wedding party frolicking on the green meadows of northern Galilee. All of this is fancied in the mind of the maiden as she waits in the King's chambers. She is waiting for a wedding—but not with Solomon. The king wants her to rejoice and be glad in him and all the things he can give her. The Shulammitte assures her far off lover that her heart is with him—her joy is in him—she will tell the daughters of Jerusalem of her true lover—she will speak of him to them of his endearing charms.

Marriage

All husbands would be delighted to have a wife who loved them as this maiden loved her betrothed. And perhaps at one time such love existed as a mutual deep affection. What happened? Well, no perfume lasts forever—or very long at all. If we refer to only a surface put-on physical attraction we are sure this is true. But if it is true hidden fragrance of the man of the heart we are just as sure that such fragrance will not leave or change. Your wife has always wanted you with your kisses. Yes, she wants your kisses but not without you. The sense of smell has more power in it for recall than any of the other senses. We all associate some pleasant experience or the opposite with some fragrance. Today, we with tears remember, as we catch again the fragrance of yesterday—how poignant and sad. What has changed? Not the perfume—but what it represented. There is only One who can give any of us a lasting fragrant personality. Please notice that the words concerning other women and their admiration of the husband are in the mouth of his wife—not in his. She knows her husband is attractive to other women and she is ready to admit it—not out of fear, but admiration. She is confident and secure in his love for her. She does suggest to her husband-to-be that she has an interest in expressing her love—but it is the shepherd who draws her out. The expression of not only physical love but all love in the husband-wife relationship is reciprocal. Many husbands would be pleasantly surprised to know how very often their name is mentioned in conversation shared by their wife among other women. Your wife wants to rejoice and be glad not only in your presence but in her constant pleasant memory of your presence. There is a lovely intoxicating quality in a true love affair—and it does not last for only a brief day, it is the continuing of the love of marriage where giving and not getting is the center.

Communion

Is it difficult for you to relate these words to yourself as the bride of Christ and to Him also as the groom? Or more to the point—can you relate them to yourself as the betrothed and our Lord as the One to whom you are promised? We are not suggesting that everyone will emotionally respond to what they can remember of their Beloved. Many believers have not spent time enough in the gospel accounts to get personally acquainted with the beautiful One there revealed. Is it at all possible to fall passionately in love with Jesus of Nazareth who is the God of love in human form? Perhaps we should ask—if we do not love Him deeply from the heart what has prevented it? Do we expect from Him a relationship in which our senses will respond to His near, dear presence? The words from His lips are found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These words are expressions of love to us—when we read them as such we cannot prevent emotional response—when we “abide” in His words we are moved emotionally. We are NOT saying this is our *only* response to His words—but we *are* saying this is *one* of our responses!

“The Lord Jesus excels in all the fragrant graces of a perfect character.” (Clarke) To become so intimately involved with Him in an appreciation of His character and His sacrifice on our behalf is better than wine. Can we say the joys we experience in our knowledge of Him creates a sensation (based on our knowledge) better than the physical inebriating capacity of wine? These are mere poetic words without meaning to those who have never hungered and thirsted after Him (who is our righteousness).

Jesus was “the anointed of God”—He was thus anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism. (Acts 10:38) The Holy anointing oil of the Old Testament was a combination of lovely fragrances (Cf. Exodus 30:22-25). The name of a person stands for or represents the person himself—His name is “The Anointed One”—He is even as His name—fragrant in beauty beyond human description.

We are glad to affirm that our Lord has many, many times drawn us out in our love for Him. If we *want* His love He will provide the circumstance in which we can find it. You will find His love revealed in His word and in your meditation and prayer before Him. Do you want to spend time with your beloved? Ask Him—he will draw you out by arranging your schedule in such a manner that whereas you had no time or place—then suddenly there it is!—When He has shown us the way, are we ready to run in it? Taking delight in the Lord is a cultivated capacity. Wine and its enjoyments is here contrasted with our Lord and His enjoyments. Which will it be? We cannot kiss two people at the same time.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:2-4

4. Why do we believe the Shulammitte maiden was kidnapped?
5. Where is the maiden when she gives her soliloquy? To whom does she address these words?
6. Why mention wine and perfume?
7. What is meant by saying "Thy name is oil poured forth"?
8. What is meant by the phrase, "therefore do the virgins love thee"?
9. Explain the phrase "draw me."
10. The Shulammitte is waiting for a wedding but it is not as Solomon planned. Explain.
11. What is shared with the daughters of Jerusalem?
12. The Shulammitte surely offers all wives a grand example. How so?
13. What do we mean by saying "no perfume lasts forever"?
14. Explain the thought that your wife has always wanted you with your kisses.
15. Discuss the powerful recall capacities of the olfactory sense.
16. There is a way to always be fragrant. How?
17. Who said the groom was attractive to other women than his bride? Why?
18. There must be a mutual expression of love but someone

must lead. Discuss.

19. What is the large topic of conversation among women? How does this relate to the conduct of the husband?
20. Discuss the lovely intoxicating quality of a true love affair.
21. Why would it be difficult for some persons to relate the words of 1:2-4 to our Lord and His bride, the church?
22. Many people never emotionally respond to their heavenly groom. Why?
23. We are not saying emotional response is all important, nor our only response. What are we saying? Discuss its importance?
24. In our relationship with our Lord what is better than wine?
25. Jesus is "The Anointed One." What does this mean to us?
26. Explain how our groom has often "drawn us."
27. Taking delight in our Lord is a cultivated capacity. Explain.
28. What is meant by saying "We cannot kiss two people at the same time"?

TEXT 1:5, 6

APPEAL

- 5 Black am I, yet comely, ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the hangings of Solomon. Look not on me because I am black, because the sun has scorched me.
- 6 My mother's sons were angry with me, appointed me as keeper of the vineyards—mine own vineyard have I not kept.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:5, 6

15. Isn't "black" too strong a word as used in these verses? What is meant?
16. Does the girl know she is attractive? Is this an advantage or disadvantage? Discuss.

17. How does she compare with both the tents of Kedar and the hangings of Solomon?
18. What made this maiden conscious of the color of her skin?
19. Is there some reason for saying "my mother's sons" instead of "my brothers"?
20. What are the responsibilities of a keeper of a vineyard?
21. What is meant by a reference to her own vineyard?

PARAPHRASE 1:5, 6—APPEAL

SHULAMMITE TO COURT LADIES

- 5 I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem!
 (Black) as the tents of Kedar,
 (Comely) as the tapestries of Solomon.
- 6 Do not disdain me because I am so dark,
 Because the sun has deeply tanned me.
 My brothers were angry with me;
 They made me keeper of their vineyards;
 My own vineyard I could not keep.

COMMENT 1:5, 6

Exegesis

We much prefer the translations which suggest the maid to be "dark" or "sunburnt." Perhaps she becomes somewhat self-conscious of her darker complexion as she mingles among the secluded bleached out women of Solomon's harem. "The tents of Kedar" refers to dwelling places of the descendants of Ishmael who roamed the deserts of northwestern Arabia. Their tents were made of black goats' hair. Such tents are still in use today in several parts of Israel and Arabia. The cloth is a close-weave and waterproof.

The tapestries of Solomon were those beautiful hangings

used in the temple and many of the royal buildings. The rich colors and embroidery work made them a topic of conversation throughout the land.

This maiden offers to all maidens after her a grand example of proper self-image. She quite candidly recognizes both her limitations and potential. She is less than perfect but she is valuable and comely. She offers this evaluation of herself before she hears from "the daughters of Jerusalem."

Peer group pressure has not been suddenly discovered by our generation. If we do not dress alike or comb our hair alike we are scrutinized with a critical eye. The Shulammite was different. She explains her appearance. We do not feel there is veiled criticism in the phrase "my mother's sons," it is but another way of identifying her brothers. Why did they send her out into the hot sun to work the vineyard? They were upset with her for some reason. Perhaps it was her shepherd lover. Maybe they felt she was too young. It would seem they wished to remove her from the family home. She was busy all day in the vineyard and perhaps stayed in a near shelter at night. Such is only conjecture and we must leave it there. The reference to "mine own vineyard" refers to her complexion and grooming, which was in strong contrast to what she saw in the pavillion of Solomon.

Marriage 1:5, 6

As we have observed above: the woman who knows her limitations and does not feel inferior, the one who recognizes her comeliness and is yet not proud will make an ideal wife and mother. It is so important that such an attitude be expressed and maintained among other women. This will not be an easy task. Perhaps we should be reminded that family influence will carry over into marriage relationships. How the wife treated her brothers might be similar to her treatment of her husband. We detect no resentment in the explanation of the treatment she received from her brothers.

Communion 1:5, 6

The Christian is indeed "black but comely." We do not refer to an inward blackness of sin from Adam's transgression, but of the effects of external influences upon him. Because he has responded to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life" (I John 2:15-17) he has entered the blackness of death in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1ff). But he is also very comely—he is created in the image of God and has all the potential of a child of heaven. He can be made whiter than snow; he can be raised out of his death into new life (Colossians 3:1ff). Among the "daughters of Jerusalem" the Christian must maintain his integrity. He is a sinner like those about him, but God so loved him that he is now the comely child of God. We all have a strong tendency to either think too much of ourselves and emphasize our comeliness or deprecate ourselves unnecessarily and remember how black we are. We can say in genuine humility—"I am a black sinner made comely by grace." We could see a comparison in the action of the brothers of this text to our fellow sinners. They have had an influence upon us and we could blame our sinning upon them. A little thought will let us both know that we were the ones outwardly responsible. In this same context we can say we were so busy in the affairs of this world we never even considered what tragic influence it was having upon our standing before God.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:5, 6

29. Why not use the term "black"?
30. What probably produces the awareness that she was "sun-burnt"?
31. What were "the tents of Kedar"?
32. Why refer to "the hangings of Solomon"?
33. This maiden offers a grand example of proper self-image. How?

34. How does "peer-pressure" relate to the circumstances described here?
35. Why was she a keeper of vineyards?
36. In what way does this Shulammite become a pattern for a good wife and mother?
37. What was the attitude of this sister toward her brothers?
38. Explain how the Christian is "black but comely."
39. We have a strong tendency to emphasize either our blackness or our comeliness. Explain.

TEXT 1:7

SOLILOQUY 1:7

- 7 Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest thy flock, where thou makest it to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that is veiled beside the flocks of thy companions?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:7

22. To whom are these words addressed?
23. Why does she want to know where the flocks are fed?
24. What is meant by "one that is veiled"?
25. What danger seems to be present in the circumstances described?

PARAPHRASE 1:7

SHULAMMITE'S SOLILOQUY (aloud)

- 7 Tell me O thou whom I dearly love, where thou doest pasture thy flock, where thou doest make it rest at noon; for why should I wander about like a wanton among the flocks of thy companions?

COMMENT 1:7

Exegesis 1:7

In her imagination the maiden has left the chambers of the King. She is out again in the open fields of her home in northern Canaan. She can see her beloved shepherd with his flock. She wants to sit down with him at the same oasis at noon. She longs for his personal interest and concern for her, so she simulates a situation where he can express his concern and show personal interest. "Suppose I cannot find his flock, and I must wander across the fields from flock to flock? What will the companion shepherds of my beloved think of me? The obvious conclusion would be that I am a prostitute in search of business. Do not let me be thus misrepresented—it is the anthesis of my true self. Help me!"

Marriage 1:7

There is much to learn in this one verse. Women are given to day-dreaming—witness the immense popularity of the afternoon soap operas on TV. But contrary to what men believe they are not dreaming about men as such—but about the love and concern men should have for women. Yes, the maiden wanted to be with the shepherd—longed earnestly to see him. But for what reason? So he might take an interest and show personal concern for her. This is not primarily an erotic interest but a total-person interest. It is the nature of your wife to seek protection and help.

Communion 1:7

Surely we can address our Lord with the words of this verse: "O thou whom my soul loveth." Far more than a mere academic relationship exists between the bride and the eternal

shepherd. The two works of the shepherd are the two needs of our soul: food and rest. We can observe other sheep who are fed and rested. We long for this same relationship. Our request will not go unanswered. There is food and rest for anyone who will come unto Him—take upon him His yoke—he shall find rest and will be led into the green pastures.

Other shepherds have flocks—we have often wandered among these flocks and found neither food nor rest.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:7

40. In her imagination she has left the chambers of Solomon—Where is she?
41. She wants personal attention and interest from her shepherd lover. What does she do to get it?
42. Do you feel we have fairly represented women in their day-dreaming? Discuss.
43. Show how the two works of the shepherd are the two needs of our soul. Discuss.

TEXT 1:8

COURT LADIES RESPONSE 1:8 (ironical)

- 8 If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherd's tents.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:8

26. Evidently the musings of the maid of Shunem was expressed out loud. Why the sharp retort?
27. Did anyone say the heroine of this story was the "fairest among women"? Why used here?

28. The humble beginnings of the Shulammite are here emphasized. Why?
29. Are we to identify the maid as a shepherdess?

PARAPHRASE 1:8

8 If thou know not, O fairest among women! Go, follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture thy kids by the shepherds' booths.

COMMENT 1:8

Exegesis 1:8

It would seem the ladies of the court would be glad to be rid of their rival. "If you want your shepherd lover—go find him," they seem to say. It is impossible to shine as light and not reflect upon the darkness. The simple expression "I am comely" is here exaggerated to mean "the fairest of women." Perhaps the women of the harem would reflect Solomon's attitude. They are expressing in jealousy his estimate of the newest arrival. What a humble task is suggested to the potential bride of King Solomon. Women were given the task of caring for the newborn of the flock. We see in the sarcastic words of these women a humble peasant girl leading a little flock of young sheep or goats across the far reaches of the hills of Galilee. With difficulty she directs them to the protection of the shepherds' booths.

Marriage 1:8

"All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" II Timothy. Girls who accept our Lord as their life-style will without question stand out among women without Christ