

ECCLESIASTES 9: 1 For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hatred, man doesn't know it; all is before them.

No man knows, by any present sign, what is before him, Ecc 9:1. All things happen alike to all, Ecc 9:2, Ecc 9:3. Comparison of the state of the dead and the living, Ecc 9:4-6. Enjoy God's mercies, and live to his glory, Ecc 9:7-10. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, Ecc 9:11. Man is ignorant of futurity, Ecc 9:12, Ecc 9:13. The account of the little city, and the poor wise man, Ecc 9:14-18.

Verse 1

The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God - This is a continuation of the preceding subject; and here the wise man draws a conclusion from what he had seen, and from the well-known character of God, that the righteous, the wise, and their conduct, were all in the hand of God, protected by his power, and safe in his approbation: but we cannot judge from the occurrences which take place in life who are the objects of God's love or displeasure.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 2 All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, to the clean, to the unclean, to him who sacrifices, and to him who doesn't sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath.

Verse 2

All things come alike to all - This is very generally true; but God often makes a difference and his faithful followers witness many interventions of Divine Providence in their behalf. But there are general blessings, and general natural evils, that equally affect the just and the unjust. But in this all is right; the evils that are in nature are the effects of the Fall of man; and God will not suspend general laws, or alter them, to favor individual cases. Nor does he design that his approbation or disapprobation shall be shown by any of these occurrences. Every holy man has a testimony of God's approbation in his own heart; and this makes him truly happy, let outward things be as they may. And, in general, what the wicked suffer is the fruit of their own doings. But the general state of nature as to what are called natural evils, is just as it ought to be. There is evil enough to show that man has fallen from God, and good enough to show that God deals with him in mercy. I cannot see that there is any rational cause for me to stumble at the dispensations of Divine Providence on these accounts.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yes also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Verse 3

The heart of the sons of men is full of evil - No wonder then that the curse of God should be frequent in the earth.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 4 For to him who is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Verse 4

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope - While a man lives he hopes to amend, and he hopes to have a better lot; and thus life is spent, hoping to grow better, and hoping to get more. The Vulgate has, "There is none that shall live always, nor has any hope of such a thing." Perhaps the best translation is the following: "What, therefore, is to be chosen? In him that is living there is hope." Then choose that eternal life which thou hopest to possess.

A living dog is better than a dead lion - I suppose this was a proverb. The smallest measure of animal existence is better than the largest of dead matter. The poorest living peasant is infinitely above Alexander the Great.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything, neither do they have any more a reward; for their memory is forgotten.

Verse 5

The living know that they shall die - This is so self-evident that none can doubt it; and therefore all that have this conviction should prepare for death and eternal blessedness.

But the dead know not any thing - Cut off from life, they know nothing of what passes under the sun. Their day of probation is ended, and therefore they can have no farther reward in living a holy life; nor can they be liable to any farther punishment for crimes in a state of probation, that being ended.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy has perished long ago; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.

Verse 6

Also their love, and their hatred - It is evident that he speaks here of the ignorance, want of power, etc., of the dead, in reference only to this life. And though they have no more a portion under the sun, yet he does not intimate that they have none anywhere else. A man threatens to conquer kingdoms, etc. He dies; what are his threats?

ECCLESIASTES 9: 7 Go your way—eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.

Verse 7

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy - Do not vex and perplex yourselves with the dispensations and mysteries of Providence; enjoy the blessings which God has given you, and live to his glory; and then God will accept your works.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 8 Let your garments be always white, and don't let your head lack oil.

Verse 8

Let thy garments be always white - The Jews wore white garments on festal occasions, as emblems of joy and innocence. Be always pure, and always happy. The inhabitants of India are all dressed in clean white cotton, and to this is the allusion in the text.

The Targum says: "At all times let thy garments be washed and pure from the stain of sin. Acquire a good name, which is likened to the oil of anointing, that blessings may be called down up thy head, and goodness not forsake thee."

ECCLESIASTES 9: 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your life of vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity: for that is your portion in life, and in your labour in which you labour under the sun.

Verse 9

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest - Marry prudently, keep faithfully attached to the wife thou hast chosen, and rejoice in the labor of thy hands.

Some understand this as the words of the libertine objector: "Live joyfully with the woman whom thou lovest best." But this does not comport so well with the scope of the place.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where you are going.

Verse 10

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do - Examine here the What the How, and the Why.

I. What is necessary to be done in this life, in reference to another?

1. Turn from sin.

2. Repent.
 3. Frequent the ordinances of God, and associate with the upright.
 4. Read the Scriptures.
 5. Pray for pardon.
 6. Believe on the Lord Jesus, that thou mayest obtain it.
 7. Look for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 8. Bring forth in their seasons the fruits of it - (1) Repentance, (2) Faith; and (3) The Holy Spirit.
 9. Live to get good.
 10. And to do good.
 11. And refer every purpose and act to the eternal world.
- II. How should these be done? With thy might.
1. Be fully convinced of the necessity of these things.
 2. Be determined to act according to this conviction.
 3. Then act with all thy strength; put forth all thy power in avoiding evil, repenting of sin, etc., etc.
- III. Why should this be done?
1. Because thou art a dying man.
 2. Thou art going into the grave.
 3. When thou leavest this life, thy state of probation, with all its advantages, is eternally ended.
 4. If thou die in sin, where God is thou shalt never come. For,
 1. There is no work by which thou mayest profit;
 2. No device by which thou mayest escape punishment;
 3. No knowledge of any means of help; and,
 4. No wisdom - restoration of the soul to the favor and image of God, in that grave whither thou goest. Therefore, work while it is called to-day.

My old MS. Bible translates this nervously: Whatever thinge may thin hond don, besily wirch: for nouter were, ne resoun, ne wisdom, ne keenning schuln be a nentis hell, whither thou gost. Properly speaking, every sinner is going to hell, and the wisdom of God calls upon him to turn and live.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.

Verse 11

The race is not to the swift - It is not by swiftness, nor by strength and valor, that races are gained and battles won. God causes the lame often to take the prey, the prize; and so works that the weak overthrow the strong; therefore, no man should confide in himself. All things are under the government, and at the disposal of God.

But time and chance - **תע** eth, time or opportunity, and **פג** pega, incident or occurrence: -

Happeneth to them all - Every man has what may be called time and space to act in, and opportunity to do a particular work. But in this Time and Opportunity there is Incident, what may fall in; and Occurrence, what may meet and frustrate an attempt. These things should be wisely weighed, and seriously balanced; for those four things belong to every human action. While you have Time, seek an Opportunity to do what is right; but calculate on hinderances and oppositions, because time and opportunity have their Incident and Occurrence. Coverdale translates this verse well: "I sawe that in runnyng, it helpeth not to be swift; in batayll, it helpeth not to be stronge; to fedyng, it helpeth not to be wyse; to riches, it helpeth not to be sutyll; to be had in favoure, it helpeth not to be connyng; but that all lyeth in time and fortune."

ECCLESIASTES 9: 12 For man also doesn't know his time. As the fish that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly on them.

Verse 12

As the birds that are caught - Man acts so heedlessly, notwithstanding all his wisdom, and all his warnings, that he is often taken, as a fish is, by the baited hook; and the bird by the baited snare. And thus, an evil time, like the snare, gin, trap, hook, falleth suddenly upon them; and they are taken in a moment, and have no means of escaping. How frequently do we see these comparisons illustrated!

ECCLESIASTES 9: 13 I have also seen wisdom under the sun in this way, and it seemed great to me.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.

Verse 14

There was a little city, and few men within it - Here is another proof of the vanity of sublunary things; the ingratitude of men, and the little compensation that genuine merit receives. The little history mentioned here may have either been a fact, or intended as an instructive fable. A little city, with few to defend it, being besieged by a great king and a powerful army, was delivered by the cunning and address on a poor wise man; and afterwards his townsmen forgot their obligation to him.

Those who spiritualize this passage, making the little city the Church, the few men the Apostles, the great king the Devil, and the poor wise man Jesus Christ, abuse the text.

But the Targum is not less whimsical: "The little city is the human body; few men in it, few good affections to work righteousness; the great king, evil concupiscence, which, like a strong and powerful king, enters into the body to oppress it, and besieges the heart so as to cause it to err; built great bulwarks against it - evil concupiscence builds his throne in it wheresoever he wills, and causes it to decline from the ways that are right before God; that it may be taken in the greatest nets of hell, that he may burn it seven times, because of its sins. But there is found in it a poor wise man - a good, wise, and holy affection, which prevails over the evil principle, and snatches the body from the judgment of hell, by the strength of its wisdom. Yet, after this deliverance, the man did not remember what the good principle had done for him; but said in his heart, I am innocent," etc.

What a wonderful text has this been in the hands of many a modern Targumist; and with what force have the Keachonians preached Christ crucified from it!

Such a passage as this receives a fine illustration from the case of Archimedes saving the city of Syracuse from all the Roman forces besieging it by sea and land. He destroyed their ships by his burning-glasses, lifted up their galleys out of the water by his machines, dashing some to pieces, and sinking others. One man's wisdom here prevailed for a long time against the most powerful exertions of a mighty nation. In this case, wisdom far exceeded strength. But was not Syracuse taken, notwithstanding the exertions of this poor wise man? No. But it was betrayed by the baseness of Mericus, a Spaniard, one of the Syracusan generals. He delivered the whole district he commanded into the hands of Marcellus, the Roman consul, Archimedes having defeated every attempt made by the Romans, either by sea or land: yet he commanded no company of men, made no sorties, but confounded and destroyed them by his machines. This happened about 208 years before Christ, and nearly about the time in which those who do not consider Solomon as the author suppose this book to have been written. This wise man was not remembered; he was slain by a Roman soldier while deeply engaged in demonstrating a new problem, in order to his farther operations against the enemies of his country. See Plutarch, and the historians of this Syracusan war.

When Alexander the Great was about to destroy the city Lampsacus, his old master Anaximenes came out to meet him. Alexander, suspecting his design, that he would intercede for the city, being determined to destroy it, swore that he would not grant him any thing he should ask. Then said Anaximenes, "I desire that you will destroy this city." Alexander respected his oath, and the city was spared. Thus, says Valerius Mancimus, the narrator, (lib. 7: c. iii., No. 4. Extern)., by this sudden turn of sagacity, this ancient and noble city was preserved from the destruction by which it was threatened. "Haec velocitas sagacitatis oppidum vetusta nobilitate inclytum exitio, cui destinatum erat, subtraxit."

A stratagem of Jaddua, the high priest, was the means of preserving Jerusalem from being destroyed by Alexander, who, incensed because they had assisted the inhabitants of Gaza when he besieged it, as soon as he had reduced it, marched against Jerusalem, with the determination to raze it to the ground; but Jaddua and his priests in their sacerdotal robes, meeting him on the way, he was so struck with their appearance that he not only prostrated himself before the high priest, and spared the city, but also granted it some remarkable privileges. But the case of Archimedes and Syracuse is the most striking and appropriate in all its parts. That of Anaximenes and Lampsacus is also highly illustrative of the maxim of the wise man: "Wisdom is better than strength."

ECCLESIASTES 9: 15 Now a poor wise man was found in it, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 16 Then I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

Verse 16

The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard - I cannot help pursuing this illustration a little farther. The soldier who found Archimedes busily employed in drawing figures upon the sand, put to him some impertinent question, withal rudely obtruding himself on his operations. To whom this wonderful mathematician replied, "Stand off, soldier, and do not spoil my diagram;" on which the bloody savage struck him dead!

ECCLESIASTES 9: 17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him who rules among fools.

Verse 17

The words of wise men are heard in quiet - In the tumult of war the words of Archimedes were not heard; and his life was lost.

ECCLESIASTES 9: 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.

Verse 18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war - So proved in the case of Archimedes.

But one sinner - Such as the Roman butcher above mentioned.

Destroyeth much good - Such as were the life and skill of the Syracusan mathematician. One sinner has often injured the work of God; one stumbling-block has sometimes destroyed a revival of religion. Sin acts like a ferment; whatever comes in contact with it, it assimilates to itself.