

## INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES, OR THE PREACHER

This book has been universally received into the canon of the Scriptures, by Jews and Christians. The former, indeed, had once some controversy<sup>f1</sup> about it; and they thought to have hid it, or put it among the apocryphal books; because, at first sight, some things seemed contradictory to each other<sup>f2</sup>, and to incline to heresy<sup>f3</sup>, atheism, and epicurism, and to assert the eternity of the world<sup>f4</sup>: but they better considered of it; and when they observed those passages were capable of a good sense, and that the whole agreed with the law of God, they changed their minds<sup>f5</sup>. And so likewise it has been rejected by some heretical persons, of the Christian name, as Theodore and Mopsuest, and others; and by deists, and some deistically inclined. But it carries in it such internal evidences of a divine original, as cannot well be denied; it delivers out and inculcates such divine instructions, concerning the duties of men to God, and one another; concerning the contempt of the world, and the carnal pleasures of it; the fear and worship of God, and a future judgment; as none but the wisdom of God could suggest. There are various things in it which seem to be referred to by Christ and his apostles; at least there is an entire agreement between them: among the many things that might be observed, compare (<sup><21105></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:5 12:11) with (<sup><4088></sup>John 3:8 10:16); and (<sup><21109></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:9 12:14) with (<sup><4750></sup>2 Corinthians 5:10 <sup><4045></sup>1 Corinthians 4:5); and (<sup><2072></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:20) with (<sup><6108></sup>1 John 1:8). As to the author of it, there are evident marks of its being written by Solomon; yet, by some Jewish writers, it is ascribed to Isaiah<sup>f6</sup>, which seems exceeding strange; for though he was a great prophet, and an evangelical preacher, yet no king in Jerusalem; whatever may be said for his being of the house of David, and of the royal family, as some have thought: and, besides, there is no agreement in style between this book and the writings of Isaiah. Others of them ascribe it to Hezekiah and his men<sup>f7</sup>: Hezekiah was indeed the son of David, and David in expressly called his father; and he was a prince of great character, both with respect to religion, and to wealth and grandeur; (see <sup><4292></sup>2 Chronicles 29:2 32:27-29 <sup><4285></sup>2 Kings 18:5); which might induce them to such a conceit; though it seems to take its rise from Hezekiah's men being the copiers of some of Solomon's proverbs, (<sup><21201></sup>Proverbs 25:1); but the proof from thence must be exceeding weak; that because they were

the transcribers of some of his proverbs, therefore were the writers of this book; and especially King Hezekiah; for, whatever may be said of his character, it falls greatly short of Solomon's wisdom or riches; and such things are said, with respect to both, in this book, as cannot agree with him: and, on the other hand, it does not appear that he was addicted to wine and women, and gave himself a loose to carnal pleasures, as the writer of this book had formerly done. Grotius thinks it was written by some persons in the times of Zerubbabel, and published under the name of Solomon, as a penitent; which is quite shocking, that an inspired writing should have a false title put to it, and be imposed upon the church of God under a wrong name: besides, the name of Solomon is never mentioned in it; though this, by the way, betrays a conviction that he is intended in the title of it: nor are many persons concerned in it; it appears throughout the whole to be the work of a single person, who often speaks as such in it. That Zerubbabel should be meant by the one shepherd, (<sup>2121</sup>Ecclesiastes 12:11), is a mere fancy; it is better interpreted, as by many, of Jesus Christ: his chief argument for this conjecture is, because there are three or four Chaldee words in it, as he supposes; which yet does not appear, and are nowhere to be found but in Daniel, Ezra, and the Chaldee interpreter: and so there are in the book of Proverbs, (<sup>2181</sup>Proverbs 31:2,3); but it does not follow, that because these words, or others, are but once used in Scripture, that they are not originally Hebrew; since the language was more extensive and better understood in Solomon's time than now, when we have only the copy of the Old Testament in which it is preserved. In short, what is said of the descent and dignity of the writer of this book, of his wisdom, wealth, riches, and grandeur, of his virtues and of his vices, agrees with none as with Solomon; to which may be added, that there is one passage in it, the same he used in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, (<sup>2071</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:20); compared with (<sup>1086</sup>1 Kings 8:46). As to the time in which it was written by him, it seems to have been in his old age, as the Jewish writers observe<sup>18</sup>; after his sin and fall, and recovery out of it, and when he was brought to true repentance for it: it was after he had made him great works, and built houses, his own house and the house of God, which were twenty years in building; it was after he had acquired not only vast riches and treasures, which must require time, but had gotten knowledge of all things in nature; and had seen all the works that are done under the sun, and had made trial of all pleasures that were to be enjoyed; (see <sup>2001</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:26); it was after he had been ensnared by women, which he confesses and laments, (<sup>2076</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:26); and his description

of old age seems to be made, not merely upon the theory of it, but from a feeling experience of the evils and infirmities of it, (~~2111~~ Ecclesiastes 12:1-6). The general scope and design of it is to expose the vanity of all worldly enjoyments; to show that a man's happiness does not lie in natural wisdom and knowledge; nor in worldly wealth; nor in civil honour, power, and authority; nor in the mere externals of religion; but in the fear of God, and the worship of him. It encourages men to a free use of the good things of life in a moderate way, with thankfulness to God; to submit with cheerfulness to adverse dispensations of Providence; to fear God and honour the king; to be dutiful to civil magistrates, and kind to the poor; to expect a future state, and an awful judgment; with many other useful things.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 1

After the title of the book, which describes the author of it, by his office, as a preacher; by his descent, as the son of David; and by his dignity, king in Jerusalem, (<sup>2100P</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:1); the principal doctrine insisted on in it is laid down, that the world, and all things in it, are most vain things, (<sup>2100D</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:2). Which is proved in general, by the unprofitableness of all labour to attain them, be they what they will, wisdom, knowledge, riches, honours, and pleasures, (<sup>2100B</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:3); by the short continuance of men on earth, though that abides, (<sup>2100A</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:4); by the constant revolution, going and returning, of the most useful creatures, the sun, winds, and water, (<sup>2100S</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:5-7); by the unfruitful and unsatisfactory labour all things are full of, (<sup>2100R</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:8); by the continual repetition of the same things, and the oblivion of them, (<sup>2100O</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:9-11); and by Solomon's own experience in one particular thing; his search after, and acquisition of, knowledge and wisdom, which he attained a large share of; and which he found attended with labour, difficulty, and little satisfaction; nay, was vanity and vexation of spirit; for, as his knowledge increased, so did his grief and sorrow, (<sup>2100I</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:12-18).

**Ver. 1.** *The words of the preacher*, etc.] Or the preacher's sermon. The whole book is one continued discourse, and an excellent one it is; consisting not of mere words, but of solid matter; of things of the greatest importance, clothed with words apt and acceptable, which the preacher sought out, (<sup>2120</sup>Ecclesiastes 12:10). The Targum is,

“the words of the prophecy, which the preacher, who is Solomon, prophesied.”

According to which this book is prophetic; and so it interprets it, and owns it to be Solomon's. The word “Koheleth”, rendered “preacher”, is by some taken to be a proper name of Solomon; who, besides the name of Solomon, his parents gave him, and Jedidiah, as the Lord called him, had the name of Koheleth; nay, the Jews say<sup>f9</sup>, he had seven names, and to these three add

four more, Agur, Jake, Ithiel, and Lemuel; the word by many is left untranslated<sup>f10</sup>; but it seems rather to be an appellative, and is by some rendered “gathered”, or the “soul gathered”<sup>f11</sup>. Solomon had apostatized from the church and people of God, and had followed idols; but now was brought back by repentance, and was gathered into the fold, from whence he had strayed as a lost sheep; and therefore chooses to call himself by this name, when he preached his recantation sermon, as this book may be said to be. Others rather render it, “the gatherer”<sup>f12</sup>; and was so called, as the Jewish writers say<sup>f13</sup>, either because he gathered and got much wisdom, as it is certain he did; or because he gathered much people from all parts, to hear his wisdom, (~~1066~~ 1 Kings 4:34 10:1); in which he was a type of Christ, (~~0490~~ Genesis 49:10 ~~4326~~ John 3:26 ~~4237~~ Matthew 23:37); or this discourse of his was delivered in a large congregation, got together for that purpose; as he gathered and assembled together the heads and chief of the people, at the dedication of the temple, (~~1000~~ 1 Kings 8:1); so he might call them together to hear the retraction he made of his sins and errors, and repentance for them: and this might justly entitle him to the character of a “preacher”, as we render it, an office of great honour, as well as of great importance to the souls of men; which Solomon, though a king, did not disdain to appear in; as David his father before him, and Noah before him, the father, king, and governor of the new world, (~~4341~~ Psalm 34:11 ~~6005~~ 2 Peter 2:5). The word used is in the feminine gender, as ministers of the Gospel are sometimes expressed by a word of the like kind; and are called maidens, (~~0681~~ Psalm 68:11 ~~4108~~ Proverbs 9:3); to denote their virgin purity, and uncorruptness in doctrine and conversation: and here some respect may be had to Wisdom, or Christ, frequently spoken of by Solomon, as a woman, and who now spoke by him; which is a much better reason for the use of the word than his effeminacy, which his sin or his old age had brought him to. The word “soul” may be supplied, as by some, and be rendered, “the preaching soul”<sup>f14</sup>; since, no doubt, he performed his work as such with all his heart and soul. He further describes himself by his descent,

*the son of David*; which he mentions either as an honour to him, that he was the son of so great, so wise, so holy, and good a man; or as an aggravation of his fall, that being the descendant of such a person, and having had so religious an education, and so good an example before him, and yet should sin so foully as he had done; and it might also encourage him, that he had interest in the sure mercies of David, and in the promises

made to him, that when his children sinned, they should be chastised, yet his lovingkindness and covenant should not depart from them.

*King of Jerusalem*; not of Jerusalem only, but of all Israel, for as yet no division was made; (see <sup><2012></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:12). In Jerusalem, the city of Wisdom, as Jarchi observes, where many wise and good men dwelt, as well as it was the metropolis of the nation; and, which was more, it was the city where the temple stood, and where the worship of God was performed, and his priests ministered, and his people served him; and yet he, their king, that should have set them a better example, fell into idolatry!

**Ver. 2.** *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher*, etc.] This is the preacher's text; the theme and subject he after enlarges upon, and proves by an induction of particulars; it is the sum of the whole book;

*vanity of vanities, all [is] vanity*; most extremely vain, exceedingly so, the height of vanity: this is repeated, both for the confirmation of it, men being hard of belief of it; and to show how much the preacher was affected with it himself, and to affect others with the same. The Targum reads, "vanity of vanities [in] this world"; which is right as to the sense of the passage; for though the world, and all things in it, were made by God, and are very good; yet, in comparison of him, are less than nothing, and vanity; and especially as become subject to it through sin, a curse being brought upon the earth by it; and all the creatures made for the use of men liable to be abused, and are abused, through luxury, intemperance, and cruelty; and the whole world usurped by Satan, as the god of it. Nor is there anything in it, and put it all together, that can give satisfaction and contentment; and all is fickle, fluid, transitory, and vanishing, and in a short time will come to an end: the riches of the world afford no real happiness, having no substance in them, and being of no long continuance; nor can a man procure happiness for himself or others, or avert wrath to come, and secure from it; and especially these are vanity, when compared with the true riches, the riches of grace and glory, which are solid, substantial, satisfying, and are for ever: the honours of this world are empty things, last a very short time; and are nothing in comparison of the honour that comes from God, and all the saints have, in the enjoyment of grace here, and glory hereafter: the sinful pleasures of life are imaginary things, short lived ones; and not to be mentioned with spiritual pleasures, enjoyed in the house of God, under the word and ordinances; and especially with those pleasures, for evermore, at the right hand of God. Natural wisdom and knowledge, the best thing in

the world; yet much of it is only in opinion; a great deal of it false; and none saving, and of any worth, in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, and of God in Christ; all the forms of religion and external righteousness, where there is not the true fear and grace of God, are all vain and empty things. Man, the principal creature in the world, is “vain man”; that is his proper character in nature and religion, destitute of grace: every than is vain, nay, vanity itself; high and low, rich and poor, learned or unlearned; nay, man at his best estate, as worldly and natural, is so; as even Adam was in his state of innocence, being fickle and mutable, and hence he fell, (~~1315~~ Psalm 39:5,11 62:9); and especially his fallen posterity, whose bodies are tenements of clay; their beauty vain and deceitful; their circumstances changeable; their minds empty of all that is good; their thoughts and imaginations vain; their words, and works, and actions, and their whole life and conversation; they are not at all to be trusted in for help, by themselves or others. The Targum is,

“when Solomon, king of Israel, saw, by the spirit of prophecy, that the kingdom of Rehoboam his son would be divided with Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; and that Jerusalem, and the house of the sanctuary, would be destroyed, and the people of the children of Israel would be carried captive; he said, by his word, Vanity of vanities in this world, vanity of vanities; all that I and my father David have laboured for, all is vanity!”

**Ver. 3.** *What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?*] This is a general proof of the vanity of all things, since there is no profit arises to a man of all his labour; for, though it is put by way of question, it carries in it a strong negative. All things a man enjoys he gets by labour; for man, through sin, is doomed and born unto it, (~~1316~~ Job 5:7); he gets his bread by the sweat of his brow, which is a part of the curse for sin; and the wealth and riches got by a diligent hand, with a divine blessing, are got by labour; and so all knowledge of natural and civil things is acquired through much labour and weariness of the flesh; and these are things a man labours for “under the sun”, which measures out the time of his labour: when the sun riseth, man goeth forth to his labour; and, by the light and comfortable warmth of it, he performs his work with more exactness and cheerfulness; in some climates, and in some seasons, its heat, especially at noon, makes labour burdensome, which is called, bearing “the heat and burden of the day”, (~~1317~~ Matthew 20:12); and, when it sets, it closes the time of service and labour, and therefore the servant earnestly

desires the evening shadow, (~~802~~Job 7:2). But now, of what profit and advantage is all this labour man takes under the sun, towards his happiness in the world above the sun? that glory and felicity, which lies in super celestial places in Christ Jesus? none at all. Or, “what remains of all his labour?”<sup>f15</sup> as it may be rendered; that is, after death: so the Targum,

“what is there remains to a man after he is dead, of all his labour which he laboured under the sun in this world?”

nothing at all. He goes naked out of the world as he came into it; he can carry nothing away with him of all his wealth and substance he has acquired; nor any of his worldly glory, and grandeur, and titles of honour; these all die with him, his glory does not descend after him; wherefore it is a clear case that all these things are vanity of vanities; (see ~~802~~Job 1:21 ~~507~~1 Timothy 6:7 ~~19916~~Psalm 49:16,17 ~~2055~~Ecclesiastes 5:15). And, indeed, works of righteousness done by men, and trusted in, and by which they labour to establish a justifying righteousness, are of no profit and advantage to them in the business of justification and salvation; indeed, when these are done from right principles, and with right views, the labour in them shall not be in vain; God will not forget it; it shall have a reward of grace, though not of debt.

**Ver. 4.** [*One*] *generation passeth away, and [another] generation cometh,* etc.] This shows that a man can have no profit of all his labour under the sun, because of his short continuance; as soon almost as he has got anything by his labour, he must leave it: not only particular persons, but families, nations, and kingdoms; even all the inhabitants of the world, that are contemporaries, live together in the same age, in a certain period of time; these gradually go off by death, till the whole generation is consumed, as the generation of the Israelites in the wilderness were. Death is meant by passing away; it is a going out of time into eternity; a departure out of this world to another; a quitting of the earthly house of this tabernacle for the grave, the house appointed for all living; it is man’s going to his long home: and this is going the way of all the earth; in a short time a whole race or generation of men go off the stage of the world, and then another succeeds<sup>f16</sup>; they come in by birth; and men are described from their birth by such as “come into the world”; for which there is a set time, as well as for going out, (~~809~~John 1:9 ~~208~~Ecclesiastes 3:2); and these having been a while in the world, go off to make room for another generation; and so things have been from the beginning of the world, and



will be to the end of it. Homer<sup>f17</sup> illustrates this by the succession of leaves of trees; as is the generation of trees, he says, such is that of men; some leaves, the wind sheds them on the ground; others the budding forest puts forth, and they grow in their room in the springtime; so is the generation of men; one is born, and another ceases. Now death puts an end to all a man's enjoyments got by labour, his riches, honour, and natural knowledge; these all cease with him, and therefore he has no profit of all his labour under the sun;

*but the earth abideth for ever*; for a long time, until the dissolution of all things; and then, though that and all in it will be burnt up, yet it will rather be changed than destroyed; the form of it will be altered, when the substance of it will continue; it will not be annihilated, but renewed and refined. This is mentioned to show that the earth, which was made for man, of which he is the inhabitant and proprietor, is more stable than he himself; he soon passes off from it, but that continues; he returns to the earth, from whence he came, but that remains as it did; he dies, and leaves the earth behind him, and all his acquisitions in it; and therefore what profit has he of all his labours on it? Besides, that remains to have the same things transacted on it, over and over again, as has been already; God, that made it for men to dwell in, has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of men's habitations in it; he has appointed who shall dwell on it, and where, in successive generations; and till all these men are born and gone off, age after age, the earth shall continue, and then pass through its last change. The Targum is,

“the earth stands for ever, to bear the vengeance that is to come upon the world for the sins of the children of men.”

The Midrash Tanchuma, as Jarchi observes, interprets it of all the righteous of Israel, called the earth; and he himself, of the meek that shall inherit the earth: says R. Isaac<sup>f18</sup>,

“one kingdom comes, and another goes, but Israel abideth for ever.”

**Ver. 5.** *The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*] The sun rises in the morning and sets at evening in our hemisphere, according to the appearance of things; and then it makes haste to go round the other hemisphere in the night: it “pants”, as the word<sup>f19</sup> signifies; the same figure is used by other writers<sup>f20</sup>; like a man out

of breath with running; so this glorious body, which rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race, and whose circuit is from one end of the heavens to the other, (<sup><1916></sup>Psalm 19:5,6); is in haste to get to the place where he rose in the morning, and there he makes no stop, but pursues his course in the same track again. By this instance is exemplified the succession of the generations of men one after another, as the rising and setting of the sun continually follows each other; and also sets forth the restless state of things in the world, which, like the sun, are never at a stand, but always moving, and swiftly taking their course; and likewise the changeable state of man, who, like the rising sun, and when at noon day, is in flourishing circumstances, and in the height of prosperity, but as this declines and sets, so he has his declining times and days of adversity. Moreover, like the rising sun, he comes into this world and appears for a while, and then, like the setting sun, he dies; only with this difference, in which the sun has the preference to him, as the earth before had; the sun hastens and comes to its place from whence it arose, but man lies down and rises not again till the heavens be no more, and never returns to his place in this world, that knows him no more, (<sup><1870></sup>Job 7:10 14:12). The Jews<sup>f21</sup> say, before the sun of one righteous, man sets, the sun of another righteous man rises.

**Ver. 6.** *The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north,* etc.] The word “wind” is not in this clause in the original text, but is taken from the next, and so may be rendered, “it goeth towards the south”, etc. that is, the sun<sup>f22</sup> before mentioned, which as to its diurnal and nocturnal course in the daytime goes towards the south, and in the night towards the north; and as to its annual course before the winter solstice it goes to the south, and before the summer solstice to the north, as interpreters observe. And the Targum not only interprets this clause, but even the whole verse, of the sun, paraphrasing the whole thus,

“it goes all the side of the south in the daytime, and goes round to the side of the north in the night, by the way of the abyss; it goes its circuit, and comes to the wind of the south corner in the revolution of Nisan and Tammuz; and by its circuit it returns to the wind of the north corner in the revolution of Tisri and Tebet; it goes out of the confines of the east in the morning, and goes into the confines of the west in the evening.”

But Aben Ezra understands the whole of the wind, as our version and others do, which is sometimes in the south point of the heavens, and is presently in the north;

*it whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according to his circuits*; which may be meant of the circuits of the sun, which has a great influence on the wind, often raising it in a morning and laying it at night; but it is the wind itself which whirls and shifts about all the points of the compass, and returns from whence it came, where the treasures of it are. Agreeably to Solomon's account of the wind is Plato's definition of it,

“the wind is the motion of the air round about the earth<sup>f23</sup>.”

This also exemplifies the rotation of men and things, the instability, inconstancy, and restless state of all sublunary enjoyments; the unprofitableness of men's labours, who, while they labour for riches and honour, and natural knowledge, labour for the wind, and fill their belly with east wind, which cannot satisfy, (<sup>20516</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:16 <sup>1815D</sup>Job 15:2); as well as the frailty of human life, which is like the wind that passes away and comes not again; and in this respect, like the rest of the instances, exceed man, which returns to its place, but man does not, (<sup>1800E</sup>Job 7:7 <sup>1988D</sup>Psalms 78:39).

**Ver. 7.** *All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea [is] not full*, etc.] Which flow from fountains or are formed by hasty rains; these make their way to the sea, yet the sea is not filled therewith, and made to abound and overflow the earth, as it might be expected it would. So Seneca says<sup>f24</sup> we wonder that the accession of rivers is not perceived in the sea; and Lucretius<sup>f25</sup> observes the same, that it is wondered at that the sea should not increase, when there is such a flow of waters to it from all quarters; besides the wandering showers and flying storms that fall into it, and yet scarce increased a drop; which he accounts for by the exhalations of the sun, by sweeping and drying winds, and by what the clouds take up. Homer<sup>f26</sup> makes every sea, all the rivers, fountains, and wells, flow, from the main ocean. Hence Pindar<sup>f27</sup> calls the lake or fountain Camarina the daughter of the ocean. But Virgil<sup>f28</sup> makes the rivers to flow into it, as the wise man here; with which Aristotle<sup>f29</sup> agrees. So Lactantius<sup>f30</sup> says, “mare quod ex fluminibus constat”, the sea consists of rivers. Both may be true, for, through secret passages under ground, the waters of it are caused to pass back again to their respective places from whence they flowed, as follows;

*unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again*; this also illustrates the succession of men, age after age, and the revolution of things in the world, their unquiet and unsettled state; and the unsatisfying nature of all things; as the sea is never full with what comes into it, so the mind of man is never satisfied with all the riches and honour he gains, or the knowledge of natural things he acquires; and it suggests that even water, as fluctuating a body as it is, yet has the advantage of men; that though it is always flowing and reflowing, yet it returns to its original place, which man does not. And from all these instances it appears that all things are vanity, and man has no profit of all his labour under the sun.

**Ver. 8.** *All things [are] full of labour*, etc.] Or “are laborious”<sup>f31</sup>; gotten by labour, and attended with fatigue and weariness; riches are got by labour, and those who load themselves with thick clay, as gold and silver be, weary themselves with it; honour and glory, crowns and kingdoms, are weighty cares, and very fatiguing to those that have them; much study to acquire knowledge is a weariness to the flesh; and as men even weary themselves to commit iniquity, it is no wonder that religious exercises should be a weariness to a natural man, and a carnal professor;

*man cannot utter [it]*; or declare all the things that are laborious and fatiguing, nor all the labour they are full of; time would fail, and words be wanting to express the whole; all the vanity, unprofitableness, and unsatisfying nature of all things below the sun; particularly

*the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing*; both one and the other require new objects continually; the pleasure of these senses is blunted by the same objects constantly presented; men are always seeking new ones, and when they have got them they want others; whatever curious thing is to be seen the eye craves it; and, after it has dwelt on it a while, it grows tired of it, and wants something else to divert it; and so the ear is delighted with musical sounds, but in time loses the taste of them, and seeks for others; and in discourse and conversation never easy, unless, like the Athenians, it hears some new things, and which quickly grow stale, and then wants fresh ones still: and indeed the spiritual eye and ear will never be satisfied in this life, until the soul comes into the perfect state of blessedness, and beholds the face of God, and sees him as he is; and sees and hears what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard below. The Targum is,

“all the words that shall be in the world, the ancient prophets were weary in them, and they could not find out the ends of them; yea, a man has no power to say what shall be after him; and the eye cannot see all that shall be in the world, and the ear cannot be filled with hearing all the words of all the inhabitants of the world.”

**Ver. 9.** *The thing that hath been, it [is that] which shall be*, etc.] The thing that has been seen and heard is no other than what shall be seen and heard again; so that what is now seen and heard is only what has been seen and heard before; it is but the same thing over again; and that is the reason why the eye and ear are never satisfied; the same objects, as the visible heavens and earth, and all therein, which have been from the beginning, these are they which shall be, and there is nothing else to be seen and heard, and enjoyed;

*and that which is done, [is] that which shall be done*; what is done in the present age, nay, in this year, month, or day, shall be done over again in the next;

*and [there is] no new [thing] under the sun*; which is to be understood of things natural, as the works of creation, which were finished from the beginning of the world, and continue as they were ever since, (<sup>804B</sup>Hebrews 4:3 <sup>604A</sup>2 Peter 3:4); the various seasons of day and night, of summer and winter, of spring and autumn, of heat and cold, of seed time and harvest, come in course, as they always did; these ordinances never fail, (<sup>0042</sup>Genesis 8:22 <sup>241B</sup>Jeremiah 31:35,36 33:20,21). The things before mentioned, the constant succession of men on earth, who are born into the world and die out of it, just as they always did; the sun rises and sets at its appointed time, as it did almost six thousand years ago; the winds whirl about all the points of the compass now as formerly; the rivers have the same course and recourse, and the sea its ebbing and flowing, they ever had; the same arts and sciences, trades and manufactures, obtained formerly as now, though in some circumstances there may be an improvement, and in others they grow worse; (see <sup>0042</sup>Genesis 4:2,20-22) (<sup>0230B</sup>Exodus 31:3-5); and even such things as are thought of new invention, it may be only owing to the ignorance of former times, history failing to give us an account of them; thus the art of printing, the making of gunpowder, and the use of guns and bombs, and of the lodestone and mariner's compass, were thought to be of no long standing; and yet, according to the Chinese histories, that people were in possession of these

things hundreds of years before; the circulation of the blood, supposed to be first found out by a countryman of ours in the last century, was known by Solomon, and is thought to be designed by him in (<sup>-2116</sup>Ecclesiastes 12:6); and the like may be observed of other things. The emperor Mark Antonine<sup>f32</sup> has the very phrase *οὐδεν καινον*, “nothing new”: so Seneca<sup>f33</sup>,

“nothing new I see, nothing new I do.”

This will likewise hold good in moral things; the same vices and virtues are now as ever, and ever were as they are; men in every age were born in sin, and were transgressors from the womb; from their infancy corrupt, and in all the stages of life; there were the same luxury and intemperance, and unnatural lusts, rapine and violence, in the days of Noah and Lot, as now; in Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the old world, as in the present age; and there were some few then, as now, that were men of sobriety, honesty, truth, and righteousness. There is nothing to be excepted but preternatural things, miraculous events, which may be called new, unheard of, and wonderful ones; such as the earth’s opening and swallowing men alive at once; the standing still of the sun and moon for a considerable time; the miracles wrought by the prophets of the Old and the apostles of the New Testament, and especially by Christ; and particularly the incarnation of Christ, or his birth of a virgin, that new thing made in the earth; these and such like things are made by the power of, he divine Being, who dwells above the sun, and is not bound by the laws of nature. Spiritual things may also be excepted, which are the effects of divine favour, or the produce of efficacious grace; and yet these things, though in some sense new, are also old; or there have been the same things for substance in former ages, and from the beginning, as now; such as the new covenant of grace; the new and living way to God; new creatures in Christ; a new name; the New Testament, and the doctrines of it; new ordinances, and the new commandment of love; and yet these, in some sense, are all old things, and indeed are the same in substance: there is nothing new but what is above the sun, and to be enjoyed in the realms of bliss to all eternity; and there are some things new<sup>f34</sup>, new wine in Christ’s Father’s kingdom, new glories, joys, and pleasures, that will never end.

**Ver. 10.** *Is there [any] thing whereof it may be said, see, this [is] new?* etc.] This is an appeal to all men for the truth of the above observation, and carries in it a strong denial that there is anything new under the sun; and is

an address to men to inquire into the truth of it, and thoroughly examine it, and see if they can produce any material objection to it; look into the natural world, and the same natural causes will be seen producing the same effects; or into the moral world, and there are the same virtues, and their contrary; or into the political world, and the same schemes are forming and pursuing, and which issue in the same things, peace or war; or into the learned world, and the same languages, arts, and sciences, are taught and learned; and the same things said over again<sup>f35</sup>: or into the mechanic world, and the same trades and businesses are carrying on: or the words may be considered as a concession, and carry in them the form of an objection, “there is a thing<sup>f36</sup> whereof it may be said”, or a man may say, “see, this is new”; so the Targum; there were some things in Solomon’s time it is allowed that might be objected, as there are in ours, to which the answer is,

*it hath been already of old time which was before us*; what things are reckoned new are not so; they were known and in use in ages past, long before we had a being. R. Alshech takes the words to be an assertion, and not an interrogation, and interprets it of a spiritual temple in time to come, which yet was created before the world was.

**Ver. 11.** [*There is no remembrance of former [things]*, etc.] Which is the reason why some things that are really old are thought to be new; because either the memories of men fail them, they do not remember the customs and usages which were in the former part of their own lives, now grown old; or they are ignorant of what were in ages past, through want of history, or defect in it; either they have no history at all, or what they have is false; or if true, as there is very little that is so, it is very deficient; and, among the many things that have been, very few are transmitted to posterity, so that the memory of things is lost; therefore who can say with certainty of anything, this is new, and was never known in the world before? and the same for the future will be the case of present things; (see <sup>2026</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:16);

*neither shall there be any remembrance of [things] that are to come with [those] that shall come after*; this will be the case of things present and future, that they will be buried in oblivion, and lie unknown to posterity that shall come after the things that are done; and if any person or persons should rise up and do the same things, they may be called new, though they are in fact old, for want of knowing that they were before. The Targum is,

“there is no remembrance of former generations; and even of later ones, that shall be, there will be no remembrance of them, with the generations of them that shall be in the days of the King Messiah.”

R. Alshech interprets it of the resurrection of the dead.

**Ver. 12.** *I the preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*] Solomon having given a general proof of the vanity of all things here below, and of the insufficiency of them to make men happy, proceeds to particular instances, and begins with human wisdom and knowledge, which of all things might be thought to be most conducive to true happiness; and yet it falls short of it: he instances in himself for proof of it; and he could not have pitched on anyone more proper and pertinent to the purpose, who had all the advantages of obtaining wisdom, was assiduous in his pursuit of it, and made a proficiency in it above all mankind; wherefore he must be owned to be a proper judge, and whatever is concluded by him may be taken for granted as certain; and this is the sum of the following verses to the end of the chapter. Now let it be observed, that he was a “preacher”, not a private person, and must have a good share of knowledge to qualify him for teaching and instructing others; and, more than this, he was a king, and did not want money to purchase books, and procure masters to instruct him in all the branches of literature; and when he entered upon the more profound study of wisdom, and especially when he said this, it was not in his infancy or childhood, or before he came to the throne, but after; even after he had asked, wisdom of God to govern, and it had been given him; yea, after he had been a long time king, as he now was; though the Jewish writers, as the Targum, Jarchi, and others, conclude from hence that he was not now a king, but become a private person, deposed or driven from his throne, which does not appear: moreover, he was king of Israel, not over a barbarous people, where darkness and ignorance reigned, but over a “wise and understanding people”, as they are called (<sup>(Deuteronomy 4:6)</sup>); and he was king over them in Jerusalem too, the metropolis of the nation; there he had his royal palace, where were not only the temple, the place of divine worship, but a college of prophets, and a multitude of priests, and an abundance of wise and knowing men, whom he had opportunity of conversing with frequently; to which may be added, his large correspondence abroad; persons from all kings and kingdoms came to hear his wisdom, as the queen of Sheba; and by putting questions to him, and so exercising his talents, not a little contributed to the improvement of them. Now a person so qualified must be a judge of wisdom, and what he



says deserves attention; and it may be observed, that what he says, as follows, is “in verbo regis et sacerdotis”, on the word of a king and preacher, who would never risk his honour, or forfeit his character, by saying an untruth.

**Ver. 13.** *And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom,* etc.] As he had all advantages and opportunities, so he did not want for industry and application to obtain knowledge; he gave his mind to it; he took up a resolution not to be discouraged by any difficulties, but to break through them, if possible; he set about the work with great readiness and cheerfulness; he had a price in his hand to get wisdom, and he had a heart unto it; (see <sup><076></sup>Proverbs 17:16); and he pursued it with all diligence, with all his might and main: nor did he content himself with a superficial knowledge of things; but “searched” after the most recondite and abstruse learning, and penetrated into the utmost recesses of it, to find out all that was to be known; and this he did “by” using all the “wisdom” and sagacity, the light and strength of reason, and all those bright natural parts, which God had given him in a very extraordinary manner. And his inquiry was very extensive; it was

*concerning all [things] that are done under heaven;* into the nature of all things, animate and inanimate; trees, herbs, plants, fossils, minerals, and metals; beasts, birds, fish, and all creeping things; see (<sup><103></sup>1 Kings 4:33); with everything else in nature: he sought to make himself master of all arts and sciences; to get knowledge of all trades and manufactures; to understand everything in politics, relating to kingdoms and states, and the government of them; to observe all the actions of men, wise and foolish, that he might know the difference, and be a judge of what was right and wrong. And his observation upon the whole is,

*this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith:* he found by experience it was a heavy task, which God had put upon the children of men, to get wisdom and knowledge in the way it was to be gotten; which was very burdensome and wearisome to the flesh; nay, he found it was an <sup>f37</sup>“evil business”, as it may be rendered; or there was something sinful and criminal, which God suffered men in their pursuit after knowledge to fall into, and which their studies exposed them to; as to indulge a vain and sinful curiosity, to pry into things unlawful, and to be wise above what is written; or to be too anxious in attaining natural knowledge, to the neglect of things of great importance; or to abuse or

trust in knowledge attained unto, or be vainly elated and puffed up with it. Or this may be understood of the evil of punishment, which God inflicts on men for the sin of eating of the tree of knowledge; and that as he is doomed to get his bread, so his knowledge, with the sweat of his brow, that is, with great pains and labour; which otherwise would have been more easily obtained: but this God has done to “afflict” or “humble”<sup>f38</sup> men, as the word may be rendered; to afflict or punish them for sin; and to humble them by showing them how weak are the powers and faculties of their minds, that so much pains must be taken to get a small share of knowledge. The Targum is,

“and I saw all the works of the children of men obnoxious to an evil business; the Lord gave to the children of men, to be afflicted with it.”

**Ver. 14.** *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun*, etc.] All things done by the Lord, that were on the earth, and in it, and in the sea; he considered them, and endeavoured to search into the nature of them; and did attain to a very great knowledge of them, so that he could speak of them to the instruction of others; (see <sup><1063></sup>1 Kings 4:33); and all that were done by men, by their head, or by their hands; all that were written or wrought by them; all their philosophical works and experiments, and all their mechanic operations; as well as all their good and bad works, in a moral sense; so the Targum,

“I saw all the deeds of the children of men, which are done under the sun in this world;”

*and, behold, all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit*; not only the things known, but the knowledge of them; it is mere vanity, there is nothing solid and substantial in it, or that can make a man happy; yea, on the contrary, it is vexatious and distressing; it is not only a weariness to the flesh to obtain it, but, in the reflection of it, gives pain and uneasiness to the mind: it is a “breaking of the spirit”<sup>f39</sup> of the man, as the Targum, Jarchi, and Alshech, interpret the phrase; it wastes and consumes his spirit, as well as his time, and all to no purpose; it is, as some ancient Greek versions and others render it, and not amiss, a “feeding on wind”<sup>f40</sup>; what is useless and unprofitable, and like labouring for that; (see <sup><2156></sup>Hosea 12:1 <sup><2157></sup>Job 15:2) (<sup><2156></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:16); and so Aben Ezra.

**Ver. 15.** [*That which is] crooked cannot be made straight*, etc.] By all the art and cunning, wisdom and knowledge of man, that he can attain unto; whatever he, in the vanity of his mind, may find fault with in the works of God, either of nature of providence, and which he may call crooked, it is not in his power to make them straight, or to mend them; (see <sup><2073></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:13). There is something which, through sin, is crooked, in the hearts, in the nature, in the principles, ways and works, of men; which can never be made straight, corrected or amended, by all the natural wisdom and knowledge of men, which shows the insufficiency of it: the wisest philosophers among men, with all their parade of wit and learning, could never effect anything of this kind; this only is done by the Spirit and grace of God; (see <sup><23216></sup>Isaiah 42:16);

*and that which is wanting cannot be numbered*; the deficiencies in human science are so many, that they cannot be reckoned up; and the defects in human nature can never be supplied or made up by natural knowledge and wisdom; and which are so numerous, as that they cannot be understood and counted. The Targum is,

“a man whose ways are perverse in this world, and dies in them, and does not return by repentance, he has no power of correcting himself after his death; and a man that fails from the law and the precepts in his life, after his death hath no power to be numbered with the righteous in paradise:”

to the same sense Jarchi’s note and the Midrash.

**Ver. 16.** *I communed with my own heart*, etc.] That is, looked into it, examined it, and considered what a stock and fund of knowledge he had in it, after all his researches into it; what happiness accrued to him by it, and what judgment upon the whole was to be formed upon it; and he spoke within himself after this manner:

*saying, lo, I am come to great estate*; or become a great man; famous for wisdom, arrived to a very great pitch of it; greatly increased in it, through a diligent application to it;

*and have gotten more wisdom than all [they] that have been before me in Jerusalem*; or, “that before me were over Jerusalem”<sup>f41</sup>; governors of it, or in it; not only than the Jebusites, but than Saul, the first king of Israel, or than even his father David; or, as Gussetius<sup>f42</sup>, than any princes, rulers, and civil magistrates in Jerusalem, in his own days or in the days of his father;

and also than all the priests and prophets, as well as princes, that ever had been there: and indeed he was wiser than all men, (<1003>1 Kings 4:30-32); and even than any that had been in Jerusalem, or any where else, or that should be hereafter, excepting the Messiah; (see <1002>1 Kings 3:12 10:27 <1002>Matthew 12:42). And seeing this is said of him by others, and even by the Lord himself, it might not only be said with truth by himself, but without ostentation; seeing it was necessary it should be said to answer his purpose, which was to show the vanity of human wisdom in its highest pitch; and it was nowhere to be found higher than in himself;

*yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*; or, “saw much wisdom and knowledge”<sup>f43</sup>; he thoroughly understood it, he was a complete master of it; it was not a superficial knowledge he had attained unto, or a few lessons of it he had committed to memory; some slight notions in his head, or scraps of things he had collected together, in an undigested manner; but he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with everything worthy to be known, and had digested it in his mind.

**Ver. 17.** *And I gave my heart to know wisdom*, etc.] Which is repeated, for the confirmation of it, from (<2013>Ecclesiastes 1:13), and that it might be taken notice of how assiduous and diligent he had been in acquiring it; a circumstance not to be overlooked;

*and to know madness and folly*: that he might the better know wisdom, and learn the difference between the one and the other, since opposites illustrate each other; and that he might shun madness and folly, and the ways thereof, and expose the actions of mad and foolish men: so Plato<sup>f44</sup> says, ignorance is a disease, of which there are two kinds, madness and folly. The Targum, Septuagint, and all the Oriental versions, interpret the last word, translated “folly”, by understanding, knowledge, and prudence; which seems to be right, since Solomon speaks of nothing afterwards, as vexation and grief to him, but wisdom and knowledge: and I would therefore read the clause in connection with the preceding, thus, “and the knowledge of things boasted of”, vain glorious knowledge; “and prudence”, or what may be called craftiness and cunning; or what the apostle calls “science falsely so called”, (<5003>1 Timothy 6:20); (see <2003>Proverbs 12:8 <2005>Daniel 8:25);

*I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit*; (see Gill on “<2014>Ecclesiastes 1:14”); the reason follows.

**Ver. 18.** *For in much wisdom [is] much grief*, etc.] In getting it, and losing it when it is gotten: or “indignation”<sup>f45</sup>, at himself and others; being more sensible of the follies and weakness of human nature;

*and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow*: for, the more he knows, the more he would know, and is more eager after it, and puts himself to more pains and trouble to acquire it; and hereby becomes more and more sensible of his own ignorance; and of the difficulty of attaining the knowledge he would come at; and of the insufficiency of it to make him easy and happy: and besides, the more knowledge he has, the more envy it draws upon him from others, who set themselves to oppose him, and detract from his character; in short, this is the sum of all human knowledge and wisdom, attained to in the highest degree; instead of making men comfortable and happy, it is found to be mere vanity, to cause vexation and disquietude of mind, and to promote grief and sorrow. There is indeed wisdom and knowledge opposite to this, and infinitely more excellent, and which, the more it is increased, the more joy and comfort it brings; and this is wisdom in the hidden part; a spiritual and experimental knowledge of Christ, and of God in Christ, and of divine and evangelical truths; but short of this knowledge there is no true peace, comfort, and happiness. The Targum is,

“for a man who multiplies wisdom, when he sins and does not turn by repentance, he multiplies indignation from the Lord; and he who increases knowledge, and dies in his youth, increases grief of heart to those who are near akin to him.”