

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 2

Solomon, having made trial of natural wisdom and knowledge in its utmost extent, and found it to be vanity, proceeds to the experiment of pleasure, and tries whether any happiness was in that, (^(2:1)Ecclesiastes 2:1). As for that which at first sight was vain, frothy, and frolicsome, he dispatches at once, and condemns it as mad and unprofitable, (^(2:2)Ecclesiastes 2:2); but as for those pleasures which were more manly, rational, and lawful, he dwells upon them, and gives a particular enumeration of them, as what he had made full trial of; as good eating and drinking, in a moderate way, without abuse; fine and spacious buildings; delightful vineyards, gardens, and orchards; parks, forests, and enclosures; fish pools, and fountains of water; a large retinue, and equipage of servants; great possessions, immense riches and treasure; a collection of the greatest rarities, and curiosities in nature; all kinds of music, vocal and instrumental, (^(2:3-8)Ecclesiastes 2:3-8); in all which he exceeded any that went before him; nor did he deny himself of any pleasure, in a lawful way, that could possibly be enjoyed, (^(2:9,10)Ecclesiastes 2:9,10). And yet on a survey of the whole, and after a thorough experience of what could be found herein, he pronounces all vanity and vexation of spirit, (^(2:11)Ecclesiastes 2:11); and returns again to his former subject, wisdom; and looks that over again, to see if he could find real happiness in it, being sadly disappointed in that of pleasure, (^(2:12)Ecclesiastes 2:12). He indeed commends wisdom, and prefers it to folly, and a wise man to a fool; (^(2:13,14)Ecclesiastes 2:13,14); and yet observes some things which lessen its value; and shows there is no happiness in it, the same events befalling a wise man and a fool; both alike forgotten, and die in like manner, (^(2:15,16)Ecclesiastes 2:15,16). And then he takes into consideration business of life, and a laborious industry to obtain wealth; and this he condemns as grievous, hateful, and vexatious, because, after all a man's acquisitions, he knows not to whom he shall leave them, whether to a wise man or a fool, (^(2:17-21)Ecclesiastes 2:17-21). And because a man himself has no rest all his days, nothing but sorrow and grief, (^(2:22,23)Ecclesiastes 2:22,23); wherefore he concludes it is best for a man to enjoy the good things of this life himself; which he confirms by his own

experience, and by an, antithesis between a good man and a wicked one, (^{2X124}Ecclesiastes 2:24-26).

Ver. 1. *I said in mine heart*, etc.] He communed with his heart, he thought and reasoned within himself, and came to this resolution in his own mind; that since he could not find happiness in natural wisdom and knowledge, he would seek for it elsewhere, even in pleasure; in which, he observed, some men placed their happiness; or, however, sought for it there: or, “I said to my heart”, as the Syriac version;

Go to now; or, “go, I pray thee”,^{f46} listen to what I am about to say, and pursue the track I shall now point out to thee;

I will prove thee with mirth; with those things which will cause mirth, joy, and pleasure; and try whether any happiness can be enjoyed this way, since it could not be had in wisdom and knowledge. Jarchi and Aben Ezra render it, “I will mingle”, wine with water, or with spices; or, “I will pour out”, wine in plenty to drink of, “with joy”, and to promote mirth: but the Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, interpret it as we do, and which sense Aben Ezra makes mention of;

therefore enjoy pleasure; which man is naturally a lover of; he was so in his state of innocency, and this was the bait that was laid for him, and by which he was drawn into sin; and now he loves, lives in, and serves sinful pleasures; which are rather imaginary than real, and last but for a season, and end in bitterness: but such sordid lusts and pleasures are not here meant; Solomon was too wise and good a man to give into these, as the “summum bonum”; or ever to think there could be any happiness in them, or even to make a trial of them for that purpose: not criminal pleasures, or an impure, sottish, and epicurean life, are here intended; but manly, rational, and lawful pleasures, for no other are mentioned in the detail of particulars following; and, in the pursuit of the whole, he was guided and governed by his wisdom, and that remained in him, (^{2X128}Ecclesiastes 2:3,9). It may be rendered, “therefore see good”,^{f47}; look upon all the good, pleasant, and delectable things of life; and enjoy them in such a manner as, if possible, happiness may be attained in them;

and, behold, this also [is] vanity; it will be found, by making the experiment, that there is no solid and substantial happiness in it, as it was by himself.

Ver. 2. *I said of laughter, [it is] mad,* etc.] The risible faculty in man is given him for some usefulness; and when used in a moderate way, and kept within due bounds, is of service to him, and conduces to the health of his body, and the pleasure of his mind; but when used on every trivial occasion, and at every foolish thing that is said or done, and indulged to excess, it is mere madness, and makes a man look more like a madman and a fool than a wise man; it lasts but for a while, and the end of it is heaviness, (²⁰⁷⁶Ecclesiastes 7:6 ²⁰⁴³Proverbs 14:13). Or, “I said to laughter, [thou art] mad”^{f48}; and therefore will have nothing to do with thee in the excessive and criminal way, but shun thee, as one would do a mad man: this therefore is not to be reckoned into the pleasure he bid his soul go to and enjoy;

and of mirth, what doth it? what good does do? of what profit and advantage is it to man? If the question is concerning innocent mirth, the answer may be given out of (²¹⁵³Proverbs 15:13 17:22); but if of carnal sinful mirth, there is no good arises from that to the body or mind; or any kind of happiness to be enjoyed that way, and therefore no trial is to be made of it. What the wise man proposed to make trial of, and did, follows in the next verses.

Ver. 3. *I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine,* etc.] Not in an immoderate way, so as to intoxicate himself with it, in which there can be no pleasure, nor any show of happiness; but in a moderate, yet liberal way, so as to be innocently cheerful and pleasant, and hereby try what good and happiness were to be possessed in this way. By “wine” is meant, not that only, but everything eatable and drinkable that is good; it signifies what is called good living, good eating and drinking: Solomon always lived well; was brought up as a prince, and, when he came to the throne, lived like a king; but being increased in riches, and willing to make trial of the good that was in all the creatures of God, to see if any happiness was in them; determines to keep a better table still, and resolved to have everything to eat or drink that could be had, cost what it will; of Solomon’s daily provision for his household, (see ¹⁰⁰²1 Kings 4:22,23); the Midrash interprets it, of the wine of the law. It may be rendered, “I sought in mine heart to draw out my flesh with wine”, or “my body”^{f49}; to extend it, and make it fat and plump; which might be reduced to skin and bones, to a mere skeleton, through severe studies after wisdom and knowledge. The Targum is,

“I sought in my heart to draw my flesh into the house of the feast of wine;”

as if there was a reluctance in him to such a conduct; and that he as it were put a force upon himself, in order to make the experiment;

(*yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom*); or, “yet my heart led [me] in wisdom”^{f50}: he was guided and governed by wisdom in this research of happiness; he was upon his guard, that he did not go into any sinful extravagancies, or criminal excesses in eating and drinking;

and to lay hold on folly; that he might better know what folly was, and what was the folly of the sons of men to place their happiness in such things; or rather, he studiously sought to lay hold on folly, to restrain it, and himself from it, that it might not have the ascendant over him; so that he would not be able to form a right judgment whether there is any real happiness in this sort of pleasure, or not, he is, speaking of; for the epicure, the voluptuous person, is no judge of it;

till I might see what [was] that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life; where the “summum bonum”, or chief happiness of man lies; and which he should endeavour to seek after and pursue, that he might enjoy it throughout the whole of his life, while in this world: and that he might still more fully know it, if possible, he did the following things.

Ver. 4. *I made me great works*, etc.] He did not spend his time in trifling things, as Domitian^{f51}, in catching and killing flies; but in devising, designing, directing, and superintending great works of art and skill, becoming the grandeur of his state, and the greatness of his mind: the Midrash restrains it to his great throne of ivory, overlaid with gold, (~~1108~~ 1 Kings 10:18), but it is a general expression, including all the great things he did, of which the following is a particular enumeration;

I builded me houses; among which must not be reckoned the house of God, though that was built by him, and in the first place; yet this was built, not for his own pleasure and grandeur, but for the worship and glory of God: but his own house and palace is chiefly meant, which was thirteen years in building; and the house of the forest in Lebanon, which perhaps was his country seat; with all other houses and offices, for his stores, for his servants, his horsemen, and chariots; see (~~1000~~ 1 Kings 7:1, 2 9:1, 19); and in fine spacious buildings men take a great deal of pleasure, and promise

themselves much happiness in dwelling in them, and in perpetuating their names to posterity by them; see (^{<1901>}Psalm 49:11 ^{<1821>}Job 21:21). The Targum is,

“I multiplied good works in Jerusalem; I builded me houses; the house of the sanctuary, to make atonement for Israel; the king’s house of refreshment, and the conclave and porch; and the house of judgment, of hewn stones, where the wise men sit and do judgment; I made a throne of ivory for the royal seat;”

I planted me vineyards; perhaps those at Engedi were of his planting; however, he had one at Baalhamon, and no doubt in other places, (^{<2114>}Song of Solomon 1:14 8:11); the Targum makes mention of one at Jabne, planted by him; these also add to the pleasure of human life; it is delightful to walk in them, to gather the fruit and drink of the wine of them; see (^{<2172>}Song of Solomon 7:12).

Ver. 5. *I made me gardens and orchards*, etc.] Of the king’s garden, we read (^{<2304>}Jeremiah 39:4). Adrichomius^{f52} makes mention of a royal garden in the suburbs of Jerusalem, fenced with walls; and was a paradise of fruit trees, herbs, spices, and flowers; abounded with all kind of fruit, exceeding pleasant and delightful to the senses: and, as Solomon was so great a botanist, and knew the nature and use of all kinds of trees and herbs, (^{<1003>}1 Kings 4:33); no doubt but he has a herbal garden, well stocked with everything of that kind, curious and useful; (see ^{<1121>}1 Kings 21:2). Gardens are made for pleasure as well as profit; Adam, as soon as created, was put into a garden, to add to his natural pleasure and felicity, as well as for his employment, (^{<0008>}Genesis 2:8); and the pleasure of walking in a garden, and partaking of the fruits of it, are alluded to by Solomon, (^{<2142>}Song of Solomon 4:12,13,16 5:1 6:9);

and I planted trees in them of all [kind of] fruits; which, as before observed, he had thorough knowledge of, and many of which were brought him from foreign parts; and all served to make his gardens, orchards, parks, forests, and enclosures, very pleasant and delectable. The Targum adds,

“some for food, others for drink, and others for medicine.”

Ver. 6. *I made me pools of water*, etc.] For cascades and water works to play in, as well as to keep and produce fish of all kinds: mention is made of the king’s pools, (^{<1024>}Nehemiah 2:14); the fish pools at Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim, perhaps belonged to Solomon, (^{<2104>}Song of Solomon

7:4); Little more than a league from Bethlehem are pools of water, which at this day are called the fish pools of Solomon; they are great reservoirs cut in the rock, the one at the end of the other; the second being a little lower than the first, and the third than the second, and so communicate the water from one to another when they are full^{f53}; and of which Mr. Maundrell^{f54} gives the following account:

“They are about an hour and a quarter distant from Bethlehem, southward; they are three in number, lying in a row above each other, being so disposed, that the waters of the uppermost may descend into the second, and those of the second into the third; their figure is quadrangular; the breadth is the same in all, amounting to above ninety paces; in their length there is some difference between them, the first being about an hundred sixty paces long; the second, two hundred; the third, two hundred twenty; they are all lined with a wall, and plastered, and contain a great depth of water.”

And to these, he observes, together with the gardens adjoining, Solomon is supposed to allude, (^{2III5}Ecclesiastes 2:5,6). There are to be seen, he says^{f55}, some remains of an old aqueduct, which anciently conveyed the waters from Solomon’s pools to Jerusalem; this is said to be the genuine work of Solomon, and may well be allowed to be in reality what it is pretended for. So Rauwolff^{f56} says,

“beyond the tower of Ader, in another valley, not far from Bethlehem, they show still to this day a large orchard, full of citron, lemon, orange, pomegranate, and fig trees, and many others, which King Solomon did plant in his days; with ponds, canals, and other water works, very pleasantly prepared, as he saith himself, (^{2III5}Ecclesiastes 2:5); this is still in our time full of good and fruitful trees, worthy to be seen for their sakes, and ditches there: wherefore I really believe it to be the same Josephus^{f57} makes mention of, called Ethan, about twelve mile from Jerusalem; where Solomon had pleasant gardens and water pools, to which he used to ride early in a morning.”

Mr. Maundrell^{f58} also makes mention of some cisterns, called Solomon’s cisterns, at Roselayn, about an hour from the ruins of Tyre; of which there are three entire at this day; one about three hundred yards distant from the sea, the other two a little further up; and, according to tradition, they were

made by that great king, in recompence to King Hiram, for supplying materials towards building the temple: but, as he observes, these, though ancient, could not be built before the time of Alexander; since the aqueduct, which conveys the water from hence to Tyre, is carried over the neck of land, by which he joined the city to the continent. Jarchi interprets these pools in this text of places to keep fish alive in, and so the Midrash understands by them fish pools; though they seem to be canals made in the gardens, orchards, and parks;

to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; the young nurseries, which in time grew up to large fruit bearing trees; which, being numerous and thick, looked like a wood or forest, as the word is; and which canals and nurseries both added greatly to the delight and pleasure of those places. In this manner the Indians water their gardens; who commonly have in them a great pit, or kind of fish pool, which is full of rain water; and just by it there is a basin of brick, raised about two feet higher than the ground: when therefore they have a mind to water the garden, it is filled with water from the fish pool, or pit; which, through a hole that is at the bottom, falls into a canal, that is divided into many branches, proportionable in size to their distance from the basin, and carries the water to the foot of each tree, and to each plot of herbs; and when the gardeners think they are watered enough, they stop up, or turn aside, the canals with clods of earth^{f59}. The beauty of a plant, or tree, is thus described by Aelianus^{f60};

“branches generous, leaves thick, stem or trunk firm and stable, roots deep; winds shaking it; a large shadow cast from it; changing with the seasons of the year; and water, partly brought through canals, and partly coming from heaven, to water and nourish it; and such beautiful, well watered, and flourishing trees, contribute much to the pleasure of gardens.”

Ver. 7. *I got [me] servants and maidens*, etc.] Menservants, and maidservants; the Targum adds,

“of the children of Ham, and of the rest of the strange people;”

these were such as he hired, or bought with his money;

and had servants born in my house; and these were all employed by him; either as his retinue and equipage, his attendants and bodyguards; or to take care of his household, his gardens, and pools; or for his horses and chariots, and for various offices; (see ^{<10>}1 Kings 4:26,27) (^{<11>}Ezra 2:58).

Villalpandus computes the number of his servants to be forty eight thousand; if there were any pleasure and happiness in such a numerous attendance, Solomon had it;

also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; oxen, cows, horses, asses, camels, mules, etc. also sheep and goats; which, as they were profitable, so it was pleasant to see them grazing on the hills and valleys, in the fields, mountains, and meadows.

Ver. 8. *I gathered me also silver and gold*, etc.] In great quantities: the weight of gold which came to him in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents; (see ^{<1094>}1 Kings 9:14,28 10:14,22, 27);

and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; whatsoever was valuable and precious, such as is laid up in the cabinets of kings, as jewels and precious stones; and everything rare and curious, to be found in all provinces of the earth, or which were brought from thence as presents to him; the Targum is,

“and the treasures of kings and provinces, given to me for tribute:”

wherefore, if any pleasure arises from these things, as do to the virtuosi, Solomon enjoyed it. Moreover, among the treasures of kings were precious garments of various sorts, as were in the treasury of Ahasuerus ^{f61}; and when Alexander took Shushan, he found in the king’s treasures, of Hermionic purple, to the value of five thousand talents, which had been laid up there almost two hundred years ^{f62}; and to such treasure Christ alludes, (^{<1069>}Matthew 6:19);

I got me men singers and women singers; the harmony and music of whose voices greatly delight; (see ^{<1065>}2 Samuel 19:35); the Targum interprets it both of instruments of music for the Levites to use in the temple, and of singing men and women at a feast: and such persons were employed among other nations ^{f63}, on such occasions, to entertain their guests; and are called the ornaments of feasts ^{f64}; as were also “choraules”, or pipers ^{f65};

and the delights of the sons of men; [as] musical instruments, and that of all sorts; such as David his father invented; and to which he might add more, and indeed got all that were to be obtained; see (^{<1065>}Amos 6:5). The two last words, rendered “musical instruments, of all sorts”, are differently interpreted; the Targum interprets them of hot waters and baths, having

pipes to let out hot water and cold; Aben Ezra, of women taken captive; Jarchi, of chariots and covered wagons; the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, of cup bearers, men, and women, that pour out wine and serve it; and the Vulgate Latin version, of cups and pots, to pour out wine. It seems best to understand it of musical instruments, or of musical compositions^{f66}; sung either with a single voice, or in concert; which, according to Bochart^{f67}, were called “sidoth”, from Sido, a Phoenician woman of great note, the inventor of them or rather from giving unequal sounds, which, by their grateful mixture and temperament, broke and destroyed^{f68} one another.

Ver. 9. *So I was great*, etc.] Became famous for the great works wrought by him before mentioned;

and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; the Targum adds, “in riches”; but it seems rather to respect his fame and glory among men; though in general it may include his increase of wealth, power, and honour, and everything that contributed to his external happiness;

also my wisdom remained with me; the Targum adds, “and it helped me”; which he exercised and showed in the government of his kingdom, in the conduct of his family, in his personal deportment and behaviour; amidst all his pleasures, he did not neglect the study of natural knowledge, nor give himself up to sordid and sinful lusts; and so was a better judge of pleasure, whether true happiness consisted in it or not.

Ver. 10. *And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them*, etc.] Though this sense is only mentioned, all are designed; he denied himself of nothing that was agreeable to him, that was pleasing to the eye, to the ear, to the taste, or any other sense; he indulged himself in everything, observing a proper decorum, and keeping himself within the due bounds of sobriety and good sense;

I withheld not my heart from any joy: the Targum says, “from all joy of the law”; but it is to be understood of natural pleasure, and of the gratifications of the senses in a wise and moderate manner;

for my heart rejoiced in all my labours; he took all the pleasure that could be taken in the works he wrought for that purpose before enumerated;

and this was my portion of all my labour; pleasure was what he aimed at, and that he enjoyed; this was the fruit and issue of all his laborious works;

the part allotted him, the inheritance he possessed, and the thing he sought after.

Ver. 11. *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do,* etc.] He had looked at them, and on them, over and over again, and had taken pleasure therein; but now he sits down and enters into a serious consideration of them, what prodigious expenses he had been at; what care and thought, what toil and labour of mind, he had taken in contriving, designing, and bringing these works to perfection; what pleasure and delight he had found in them, and what happiness upon the whole arose from them: he now passes his judgment, and gives his sentiments concerning these things, having had it in his power to make himself master of everything delightful, which he did; was a competent judge, and thoroughly qualified to give a just estimate of matters; and it is as follows;

and, behold, all [was] vanity and vexation of spirit; nothing solid and substantial in the whole; no true pleasure and real joy, and no satisfaction or happiness in that pleasure; these pleasing things perished with the using, and the pleasure of them faded and died in the enjoyment of them; and instead of yielding solid delight, only proved vexations, because the pleasure was so soon over, and left a thirst for more, and what was not to be had; at most and best, only the outward senses were fed, the mind not at all improved, nor the heart made better, and much less contented; it was only pleasing the fancy and imagination, and feeding on wind;

and [there was] no profit under the sun; by those things; to improve and satisfy the mind of man, to raise him to true happiness, to be of any service to him in the hour of death, or fit him for an eternal world. Alshech interprets the labour mentioned in this text of the labour of the law, which brings no reward to a man in this world.

Ver. 12. *And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly,* etc.] Being disappointed in his pursuit of pleasure, and not finding satisfaction and happiness in that, he turns from it, and reassumes his study of natural wisdom and knowledge, to make a fresh trial, and see whether there might be some things he had overlooked in his former inquiries; and whether upon a revise of what he had looked into he might not find more satisfaction than before; being convinced however that the pursuit of pleasure was less satisfying than the study of wisdom, and therefore relinquished the one for the sake of the other: and in order, if possible, to

gain more satisfaction in this point, he determined to look more narrowly, and penetrate into the secrets of wisdom, and find out the nature of it, and examine its contraries; that by setting them in a contrast, and comparing them together, he might be the better able to form a judgment of them. Jarchi interprets “wisdom” of the law, and “madness” and “folly” of the punishment of transgression. Alshech also by “wisdom” understands the wisdom of the law, and by madness external wisdom, or the knowledge of outward things. But Aben Ezra understands by “madness” wine, with which men being intoxicated become mad; and by “folly” building houses, and getting riches;

for what [can] the man [do] that cometh after the king? meaning himself; what can a man do that comes after such a king as he was, who had such natural parts to search into and acquire all sorts of knowledge; who was possessed of such immense riches, that he could procure everything that was necessary to assist him in his pursuit of knowledge; and who wanted not industry, diligence, and application, and who succeeded above any before or after him? wherefore what can any common man do, or anyone that comes after such a person, and succeeds him in his studies, and treads in his steps, and follows his example and plan, what can he do more than is done already? or can he expect to outdo such a prince, or find out that which he could not? nay, it is as if he should say, it is not only a vain thing for another man to come after me in the search of knowledge, in hopes of finding more than I have done; but it is a fruitless attempt in me to take up this affair again; for, after all that I have done, what can I do more? so that these words are not a reason for his pursuit of wisdom, but a correction of himself for it; I think the words may be rendered, “but what [can] that man do [that] comes after the king?” so the particle is sometimes used^{f69}; meaning himself, or his successor, or any other person; since it was only going over the same thing again, running round the circle of knowledge again, without any new improvement, or fresh satisfaction, according to the following answer;

[even] that which hath been already done; it is only doing the same thing over again. The Targum and Jarchi interpret it of the vain attempt of a man to supplicate a king after a decree is passed and executed. The Midrash by the king understands God himself, and interprets it of the folly of men not being content with their condition, or as made by him. So Gussetius renders it, “who made him”^{f70}; that is, the king; even God, the three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; the word being plural.

Ver. 13. *Then I sat that wisdom excelleth folly*, etc.] However, this upon a review of things he could not but own, that natural wisdom and knowledge, though there was no true happiness and satisfaction in them, yet they greatly exceeded folly and madness;

as far as light excelleth darkness; as the light of the day the darkness of the night; the one is pleasant and delightful, the other very uncomfortable; the one useful to direct in walking, the other very unsafe to walk in: light sometimes signifies joy and prosperity, and darkness adversity; the one is used to express the light of grace, and the other the darkness of sin and ignorance; now as the natural light exceeds darkness, and prosperity exceeds adversity and calamities, and a state of grace exceeds a state of sin and wickedness, so wisdom exceeds folly.

Ver. 14. *The wise man's eyes [are] in his head*, etc.] And so are the eyes of every man; but the sense is, he makes use of them, he looks about him, and walks circumspectly; he takes heed to his goings, he foresees the evil, and avoids it; or the danger he is exposed unto, and guards against it. Some understand it, in a more spiritual and evangelical sense, of Christ, who is the head of the body the church, and of every true believer; of everyone that is wise unto salvation, whose eyes are on him alone for righteousness, salvation, and eternal life; or on whom Christ's eyes are; who is said to have seven eyes, with which he guides, guards, and protects his people;

but the fool walketh in darkness; his eyes are to the ends of the earth; he walks incautiously, without any circumspection or guard; he knows not where he is, nor where he is going, nor where he shall set his foot next, nor at what he may stumble; wherefore a wise man is to be preferred to a fool, as wisdom is to folly. The Midrash interprets the wise man of Abraham, and the fool of Nimrod;

and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all; the wise man and the fool; or, "but I myself perceived"^{f71}, etc. though it is allowed that a wise man is better than a fool; yet this also must be owned, which Solomon's experience proved, and every man's does, that the same things befall wise men and fools; they are liable to the same diseases of body, and disasters of life; to poverty and distress, to loss of estate, children, and friends, and to death itself.

Ver. 15. *Then said I in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me,* etc.] The wisest of kings, and the wisest of men; that is, he looked over things in his mind, and considered what had befallen him, or what were his present circumstances, or what would be his case, especially at death; and said within himself, the same things happen to me, who have attained to the highest pitch of wisdom, as to the most errant fool; and therefore no true happiness can be in this sort of wisdom. The Targum paraphrases it thus,

“as it happened to Saul the son of Kish, the king who turned aside perversely, and kept not the commandment he received concerning Amalek, and his kingdom was taken from him; so shall it happen to me;”

and why was I then more wise? the Targum adds, than he, or than any other man, or even than a fool; why have I took so much pains to get wisdom? what am I the better for it? what happiness is there in it, seeing it gives me no advantage, preference, and excellency to a fool; or secures me from the events that befall me?

Then I said in my heart, that this also [is] vanity; this worldly wisdom has nothing solid and substantial in it, as well as pleasure; and it is a vain thing to seek happiness in it, since this is the case, that the events are the same to men that have it, as to one that has it not.

Ver. 16. *For [there is] no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever,* etc.] The Targum interprets it, in the world to come; but even in this world the remembrance of a wise man, any more than of a fool, does not always last; a wise man may not only be caressed in life, but may be remembered after death for a while; the fame of him may continue for a little time, and his works and writings may be applauded; but by and by rises up another genius brighter than he, or at least is so thought, and outshines him; and then his fame is obscured, his writings are neglected and despised, and he and his works buried in oblivion; and this is the common course of things. This shows that Solomon is speaking of natural wisdom, and of man’s being wise with respect to that; and his remembrance on that account; otherwise such who are truly good and wise, their memory is blessed; they are had in everlasting remembrance, and shall never be forgotten in this world, nor in that to come, when the memory of the wicked shall rot; whose names are only written in the dust (^{247B}Jeremiah 17:13 ^{248B}John 8:6), and not in the Lamb’s book of life;

seeing that which now [is], in the days to come shall all be forgotten:

what now is in the esteem of men, and highly applauded by them; what is in the mouths of men, and in their minds and memories, before long, future time, after the death of a man, as the Targum, or in some time after, will be thought of no more, and be as if it never had been, or as if there never had been such men in the world. Many wise men have been in the world, whose names are now unknown, and some their names only are known, and their works are lost; and others whose works remain, yet in no esteem: this is to be understood in general, and for the most part; otherwise there may be some few exceptions to this general observation.

And how dieth the wise [man]? as the fool; they are both liable to death; it is appointed for men, wise or unwise, learned or unlearned, to die, and both do die; wisdom cannot secure a man from dying; and then wise and fools are reduced to the same condition and circumstances; all a man's learning, knowledge, and wisdom, cease when he dies, and he is just as another man is; in that day all his learned thoughts perish, and he is upon a level with the fool. Solomon, the wisest of men, died as others; a full proof of his own observation, and which his father made before him, (^{<B94B10>}Psalm 49:10). But this is not true of one that is spiritually wise, or wise unto salvation; the death of a righteous man is different from the death of a wicked man; both die, yet not alike, not in like manner; the good man dies in Christ, he dies in faith, has hope in his death, and rises again to eternal life. The Targum is,

“and how shall the children of men say, that the end of the righteous is as the end of the wicked?”

Ver. 17. *Therefore I hated life*, etc.] Not strictly and simply understood, since life is the gift of God; and a great blessing it is, more than raiment, and so dear to a man, that he will give all he has for it: but comparatively, in comparison of the lovingkindness of God, which is better than life; or in comparison of eternal life, which a good man desires to depart from this world, for the sake of enjoying it. The sense seems to be this, that since the case of wise men and fools was equal, he had the less love for life, the less regard to it, the less desire to continue in it; no solid happiness being to be enjoyed in anything under the sun: though some think that he was even weary of life, impatient of it, as Job, Jonah, and others have been. The Targum is,

“I hate all evil life:”

Alshech interprets it of the good things of this world, which were the cause of hurt unto him; and Aben Ezra understands, by life, living persons;

because the work that is wrought under the sun [is] grievous unto me; which was either wrought by himself; particularly his hard studies, and eager pursuits after knowledge and wisdom, which were a weariness to his flesh; or which were done by others, especially evil ones: so the Targum,

“for evil to me is an evil work, which is done by the children of men under the sun in this world;”

for all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit; (see Gill on “²⁰¹⁴Ecclesiastes 1:14”).

Ver. 18. *Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun,* etc.] The great works he made, the houses he built; the vineyards, gardens, and orchards he planted, etc. what he got by his labour, his riches and wealth; and what he also got, not by the labour of his hands, but of his mind. Some understand this of the books he wrote; which were a weariness to his body, and fatigue to his mind; and which he might fear some persons would make an ill use of: Aben Ezra interprets it of his labour in this book. All which he had no great regard unto, since it was to be left to another;

because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; because he could not enjoy the fruits of his labour himself, at least but a very short time: but must be obliged to leave all to another, his possessions, estates, riches, and treasure; which a man cannot carry with him when he dies, but must leave all behind him, to his heirs and successors¹⁷². The Targum is,

“because I shall leave it to Rehoboam my son, who shall come after me; and Jeroboam his servant shall come and take ten tribes out of his hands, and possess half the kingdom.”

Ver. 19. *And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise [man] or a fool?* etc.] The king that should be after him, as the Targum, that should be his successor and heir; and so whether he would make a good or bad use of what was left; whether he would keep and improve it, or squander it away; suggesting, that could he be sure he would be a wise man that should come into his labours, it would be some satisfaction to him that he had laboured, and such a man should have the benefit of it; but as it was a precarious thing what he would be, he could take no pleasure in reviewing his labours he was about to leave. Some think that Solomon here gives a hint of the

suspicion he had, that his son Rehoboam, his successor and heir, would turn out a foolish man, as he did;

yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise, under the sun; be he what he will, all will come into his hands; and he will have the power of disposing of all at his pleasure; not only of enjoying it, but of changing and altering things; and perhaps greatly for the worse, if he does not entirely destroy what has been wrought with so much care and industry, toil and labour, wisdom and prudence; the thought of all which was afflicting and distressing: and therefore he adds,

This [is] also vanity; and shows there is no happiness in all that a man does, has, or enjoys; and this circumstance, before related, adds to his vexation and unhappiness.

Ver. 20. *Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair,* etc.] Of ever finding happiness in anything here below. He “turned about”¹⁷³, as the word signifies dropped his severe studies of wisdom, and his eager pursuits of pleasure; and desisted from those toilsome works, in which he had employed himself; and went from one thing to another, and settled and stuck at nothing, on purpose to relax his mind, as the Syriac version renders it; to divest it of all anxious thought and care, and call it off from its vain and fruitless undertakings; and be no more concerned about or thoughtful

of all the labour which I took under the sun; and what will be the consequence and issue of it; but quietly leave all to an all wise disposing Providence; and not seek for happiness in anything under the sun, but in those things that are above it; not in this world, but in the world to come.

Ver. 21. *For there is a man whose labour [is] in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity,* etc.] Who does all he does, in natural, civil, and religious things, in the state, in his family, and the world, and whatsoever business he is engaged, in the wisest and best manner, with the utmost honesty and integrity, according to all the rules of wisdom and knowledge, and of justice and equity; meaning himself; the Midrash interprets this of God;

yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it [for] his portion; to his son, heir, and successor; who never took any pains, or joined with him, in acquiring the least part of it; and yet all comes into his

hands, as his possession and inheritance: the Targum interprets this of a man that dies without children; and so others^{f74} understand it of his leaving his substance to strangers, and not to his children.

This also [is] vanity, and a great evil; not anything sinful and criminal, but vexatious and distressing.

Ver. 22. *For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart?* etc.] What profit has he by it, when there is so much vexation in it, both in getting it, and in the thought of leaving it to others? What advantage is it to him, when it is all acquired for and possessed by another; and especially of what use is it to him after his death? Even of all

wherein he hath laboured under the sun? the Targum adds, “in this world”; though he has been labouring all his days, yet there is not one thing he has got by his labour that is of any real advantage to him, or can yield him any solid comfort and satisfaction, or bring him true happiness, or lead him to it.

Ver. 23. *For all his days [are] sorrows, and his travail grief,* etc.] All his days are full of sorrows, of a variety of them; and all his affairs and transactions of life are attended with grief and trouble; not only the days of old age are evil ones, in which he can take no pleasure; or those times which exceed the common age of man, when he is got to fourscore years or more, and when his strength is labour and sorrow; but even all his days, be they fewer or more, from his youth upward, are all evil and full of trouble, (^{<0470>}Genesis 47:9 ^{<1840>}Job 14:1);

yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night; which is appointed for rest and ease; and when laid down on his bed for it, as the word signifies; yet, either through an eager desire of getting wealth, or through anxious and distressing cares for the keeping it when gotten, he cannot sleep quietly and comfortably, his carking cares and anxious thoughts keep him waking; or, if he sleeps, his mind is distressed with dreams and frightful apprehensions of things, so that his sleep is not sweet and refreshing to him.

This is also vanity; or one of the vanities which belong to human life.

Ver. 24. *[There is] nothing better for a man [than] that he should eat and drink,* etc.] Not in an immoderate and voluptuous manner, like the epicure and the atheist, that disbelieve a future state and the resurrection of the

dead, and give up themselves to all sinful and sensual gratifications; but in a moderate way, enjoying in a cheerful and comfortable manner the good creatures of God, which he has given; being contented with them, thankful for them, and looking upon them as the blessings of divine goodness, and as flowing from the love of God to him; and thus freely using, and yet not abusing them. Some render it, “it is not good for a man to eat”^{f75}, etc. immoderately and to excess, and to place his happiness in it: or, “there is no good with man”^{f76}; it is not in the power of man to use the creatures aright. Jarchi renders it by way of interrogation, “is it not good?” which comes to the same sense with ours, and so the Vulgate Latin version;

and [that] he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour; not leave off labouring; nor eat and drink what he has not laboured for, or what is the fruit of other men’s labour; but what is the effect of his own, and in which he continues; and this is the way to go on in it with cheerfulness, when he enjoys the good, and reaps the benefit and advantage of it; which is certainly preferable to a laying up his substance, and leaving it to he knows not who.

This also I saw, that it [was] from the hand of God; not only the riches a man possesses, but the enjoyment of them, or a heart to make use of them; (see ²⁰⁵⁸Ecclesiastes 5:18,19). The Midrash interprets this eating and drinking, of the law and good works: and the Targum explains it, causing the soul to enjoy the good of doing the commandments, and walking in right ways; and observes, that a man that prospers in this world, it is from the hand of the Lord, and is what is decreed to be concerning him.

Ver. 25. *For who can eat?* etc.] Who should eat, but such a man that has laboured for it? or, who has a power to eat, that is, cheerfully, comfortably, and freely to enjoy the good things of life he is possessed of, unless it be given him of God? (see ²⁰⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 6:1,2);

or who else can hasten [hereunto] more than I? the word “chush”, in Rabbinical language, is used of the five senses, seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting: and R. Elias says^{f77}, there are some that so interpret it here, “who has [his] sense better than I?” a quicker sense, particularly of smelling and tasting what he eats, in which lies much of the pleasure of eating; and this is of God; which interpretation is not to be despised. Or, “who can prepare?” according to the Arabic sense of the word^{f78}; that is, a better table than I? No man had a greater affluence of good things than Solomon, or had a greater variety of eatables and drinkables; or had it in

the power of his hands to live well, and cause his soul to enjoy good; or was more desirous to partake of pleasure, and hasten more to make the experiment of it in a proper manner; and yet he found, that a heart to do this was from the Lord; that this was a gift of his; and that though he abounded in the blessings of life, yet if God had not given him a heart to use them, he never should have really enjoyed them.

Ver. 26. *For [God] giveth to a man that [is] good in his sight,* etc.] No man is of himself good, or naturally so, but evil, very evil, as all the descendants of Adam are; there are some that are good in their own eyes, and in the sight of others, and yet not truly good; they are only really good, who are so in the sight of God, who sees the heart, and knows what is in man; they are such who are made good by his efficacious grace; who are inwardly, and not merely outwardly so; who are good at heart, or who have good hearts, clean hearts, new and right spirits created in them; who have a good work of grace upon their hearts, and the several graces of the Spirit implanted there; who have the good Spirit of God in them, in whose heart Christ dwells by faith; and who have the good word of Christ dwelling in them, and have a good treasure of rich experience of the grace of God; and who, in one word, are born again, renewed in the spirit of their minds, and live by faith on Jesus Christ. The phrase is rendered, “whoso pleaseth God”, (²⁰⁷⁶Ecclesiastes 7:26); and he is one that is accepted with God in Christ, his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; who is clothed with his righteousness, made comely through his comeliness, and so is irreprovable in his sight; and who by faith looks to and lays hold on this righteousness, and does all he does in the exercise of faith, without which it is impossible to please God. To such a man God gives

wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; wisdom to acquire knowledge, to keep, use, and improve it; and joy, to be cheerful and thankful for the good things of life: or rather this may design, not natural wisdom, but spiritual wisdom, wisdom in the hidden part, so as to be wise unto salvation, and to walk wisely and circumspectly, a good man’s steps being ordered by the Lord; and knowledge of God in Christ, and of Christ, and of the things of the Gospel, and which relate to eternal life; and so spiritual joy, joy and peace in believing, in the presence of God, and communion with him; joy in Christ, and in hope of the glory of God, even joy unspeakable, and full of glory; all which, more or less, at one time or another, God gives to those who are truly good; and which is not to be found in worldly wisdom, pleasure, riches, power, and authority: the Targum is,

“to the man, whose works are right before God, he gives wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come;”

but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up; to gather mammon, and to heap up a large possession, as the Targum; to gather together a great deal of riches, but without wisdom and knowledge to use them, without any proper enjoyment of them, or pleasure in them; all he has is a deal of trouble and care to get riches, without any comfort in them, and he has them not for his own use: the Midrash illustrates this of the good man and sinner, by the instances of Abraham and Nimrod, of Isaac and Abimelech, of Jacob and Laban, of the Israelites and Canaanites, of Hezekiah and Sennacherib, and of Mordecai and Haman. But

that he may give to [him that is] good before God; so it is ordered by divine Providence sometimes, that all that a wicked man has been labouring for all his days should come into the hands of such who are truly good men, and will make a right use of what is communicated to them.

This also [is] vanity, and vexation of spirit; not to the good man, but to the wicked man: so the Targum,

“it is vanity to the sinner, a breaking of spirit;”

it grieves him that such a man should have what he has been labouring for; or it would, if he knew it.