

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 3

The general design of this chapter is to confirm what is before observed, the vanity and inconstancy of all things; the frailty of man, and changes respecting him; his fruitless toil and labour in all his works; that it is best to be content with present things, and cheerful in them, and thankful for them; that all comes from the hand of God; that such good men, who have not at present that joy that others have, may have it, since there is a time for it; and that sinners should not please themselves with riches gathered by them, since they may be soon taken from them, for there is a time for everything, (~~2KR1~~Ecclesiastes 3:1); of which there is an induction of particulars, (~~2KR2~~Ecclesiastes 3:2-8); so that though every thing is certain with God, nothing is certain with men, nor to be depended on, nor can happiness be placed therein; there is no striving against the providence of God, nor altering the course of things; the labour of man is unprofitable, and his travail affliction and vexation, (~~2KR9~~Ecclesiastes 3:9,10); and though all God's works are beautiful in their season, they are unsearchable to man, (~~2KR11~~Ecclesiastes 3:11); wherefore it is best cheerfully to enjoy the present good things of life, (~~2KR12~~Ecclesiastes 3:12,13); and be content; for the will and ways and works of God are unalterable, permanent, and perfect, (~~2KR14~~Ecclesiastes 3:14,15); and though wicked men may abuse the power reposed in them, and pervert public justice, they will be called to an account for it in the general judgment, for which there is a time set, (~~2KR16~~Ecclesiastes 3:16,17); and yet, such is the stupidity of the generality of men, that they have no more sense of death and judgment than the brutes, and live and die like them, (~~2KR18~~Ecclesiastes 3:18-21); wherefore it is best of all to make a right use of power and riches, or what God has given to men, for their own good and that of others, since they know not what shall be after them, (~~2KR2~~Ecclesiastes 3:22).

Ver. 1. *To every [thing there is] a season*, etc.] A set determined time, when everything shall come into being, how long it shall continue, and in what circumstances; all things that have been, are, or shall be, were foreordained by God, and he has determined the times before appointed for

their being, duration, and end; which times and seasons he has in his own power: there was a determined time for the whole universe, and for all persons and things in it; a settled fixed moment for the world to come into being; for it did not exist from everlasting, nor of itself, nor was formed by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, but by the wisdom and power of God; nor could it exist sooner or later than it did; it appeared when it was the will of God it should; in the beginning he created it, and he has fixed the time of its duration and end; for it shall not continue always, but have an end, which when it will be, he only knows: so there is a determined time for the rise, height, and declension of states and kingdoms in it; as of lesser ones, so of the four great monarchies; and for all the distinct periods and ages of the world; and for each of the seasons of the year throughout all ages; for the state of the church in it, whether in suffering or flourishing circumstances; for the treading down of the holy city; for the prophesying, slaying, and rising of the witnesses; for the reign and ruin of antichrist; for the reign of Christ on earth, and for his second coming to judgment, though of that day and hour knows no man: and as there is a set time in the counsels and providence of God for these more important events, so for every thing of a lesser nature;

and a time to every purpose under the heaven; to every purpose of man that is carried into execution; for some are not, they are superseded by the counsel of God; some obstruction or another is thrown in the way of them, so that they cannot take place; God withdraws men from them by affliction or death, when their purposes are broken; or by some other way; and what are executed he appoints a time for them, and overrules them to answer some ends of his own; for things the most contingent, free, and voluntary, fall under the direction and providence of God. And there is a time for every purpose of his own; all things done in the world are according to his purposes, which are within himself wisely formed, and are eternal and unfrustrable; and there is a time fixed for the execution of them, for every purpose respecting all natural and civil things in providence; and for every purpose of his grace, relating to the redemption of his people, the effectual calling of them, and the bringing them to eternal glory; which are the things that God wills, that he takes delight and pleasure in, as the word^{f79} signifies. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, “to everything under the heaven there is a time”; and Jarchi observes that in the Misnic language the word used so signifies. The Targum is,

“to every man a time shall come, and a season to every business under heaven.”

Ver. 2. *A time to be born*, etc.] The Targum is,

“to beget sons and daughters;”

but rather it is to bear them, there being a time in nature fixed for that, called the hour of a woman, (^{<3840>}Job 14:1);

and a time to die; the time of a man’s coming into the world and going out of it, both being fixed by the Lord^{f80}: this is true of all men in general, of all men that come into the world, for whom it is appointed that they shall die; and particularly of Christ, whose birth was at the time appointed by the Father, in the fulness of time; and whose death was in due time, nor could his life be taken away before his hour was come, (^{<4070>}John 7:30 8:20 13:1); and this holds good of every individual man; his birth is at the time God has fixed it; that any man is born into the world, is of God; no man comes into it at his own pleasure or another’s, but at the will of God, and when he pleases, not sooner nor later; and the time of his going out of the world is settled by him, beyond which time he cannot live, and sooner he cannot die, (^{<3845>}Job 14:5); and though no mention is made of the interval of life between a man’s birth and death, yet all events intervening are appointed by God; as the place of his abode; his calling and station of life; all circumstances of prosperity and adversity; all diseases of body, and what lead on to death, and issue in it: the reason why these two are put so close together is, to show the certainty of death; that as sure as a man is born, so sure shall he die; and the frailty and shortness of life, which is but an hand’s breadth, passes away like a tale that is told, yea, is as nothing; so that no account is made of it, as if there was no time allotted it, or that it deserved no mention; and also to observe that the seeds of mortality and death are in men as soon as they are born; as soon as they begin to live they begin to die, death is working in them;

a time to plant; a tree, as the Targum, or any herb;

and a time to pluck up [that which is] planted; a tree or herb, as before, when grown to its ripeness, and fit for use; or when grown old, barren, and unfruitful; there are particular seasons for planting plants, and some for one and some for another. This may be applied in a civil sense to planting and plucking up kingdoms and states; see (^{<4010>}Jeremiah 1:10 18:7-10); as it is by the Jews, particularly to the planting and plucking up of the kingdom of

Israel; the people of Israel were a vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the land of Canaan, and afterwards plucked up and carried captive into Babylon; and afterwards planted again, and then again plucked up by the Romans; and will be assuredly planted in their own land again; (see ^{<B818>}Psalm 80:8) (^{<2480>}Jeremiah 45:4 31:28 32:41); It may be illustrated in a spiritual sense by the planting of the Jewish church, sometimes compared to a vineyard; and the plucking it up, abolishing their church state and ordinances; and by planting Gospel churches in the Gentile world, and plucking them up again, as in the seven cities of Asia; or removing the candlestick out of its place; and by planting particular persons in churches, and removing them again: some indeed that are planted in the house of the Lord are planted in Christ, and rooted and grounded in the love of God; are plants which Christ's Father has planted, and will never be rooted up; but there are others who are planted through the external ministry of the word, or are plants only by profession, and these become twice dead, plucked up by the roots; and there are times for these things, (^{<B924>}Psalm 92:14 ^{<0153>}Matthew 15:13 ^{<A186>}1 Corinthians 3:6-8 ^{<A112>}Jude 1:12).

Ver. 3. *A time to kill, and a time to heal*, etc.] A time to kill may be meant of a violent death, as a time to die is of a natural one; so the Targum,

“a time to kill in war;”

or else, by the hand of the civil magistrate, such who deserve death. Aben Ezra interprets it “to wound”, because of the opposite “to heal”; and so there is a time when wounds and diseases are incurable, and baffle all the skill of the physician, being designed unto death; and there is a time when, by the blessing of God on means, they are healed; the wound or sickness not being unto death: so the Targum paraphrases the last clause,

“to heal one that lies sick.”

This may be applied in a civil sense to calamities in kingdoms, and a restoration of peace and plenty to them; which is the property of God alone, who in this sense kills and makes alive in his own time, (^{<B23>}Deuteronomy 32:39 ^{<0119>}1 Samuel 2:9 ^{<301>}Hosea 6:1); And in a spiritual sense to the ministers of the word, who are instruments of slaying souls by the law, which is the killing letter, and of healing them by the Gospel, which pours in the oil and wine of peace and pardon through the blood of Christ, and so binds up and heals the broken hearted; and there is a time for both;

a time to break down, and a time to build up; to break down a building, and build a waste, as the Targum; to break down cities and the walls of them, as the of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; and to build them up: as in the times of Nehemiah and Zerubbabel: and so in a spiritual sense to break down the church of God, the tabernacle of David, and to raise up and repair the breaches of it; to build up Zion, and the walls of Jerusalem, or to restore the Gospel church state to its glory, for which there is a set time; (see ^{<4091>}Amos 9:11 ^{<4923>}Psalms 102:13, 16).

Ver. 4. *A time to weep, and a time to laugh*, etc.] There is a time for these things, as it goes ill or well with persons, as to their health, estate, or friends; and as it goes ill or well with kingdoms and states. The Jews wept when they were in Babylon, and their mouths were filled with laughter when their captivity was returned, (^{<4970>}Psalms 137:1 126:1,2); and as it goes ill or well with the church of Christ, when there are corruptions in doctrine and worship, a neglect of ordinances, declensions in faith and practice, few instances of conversion, and there are divisions and contentions, it is a time for the mourners in Zion to weep but when God creates Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy, or makes her an eternal excellency, and the praise of the whole earth, then it is a time to rejoice and be glad, (^{<2303>}Isaiah 61:3 65:18); and as it is, with believers, when Christ is withdrawn from them, it is a time to lament, but, when the bridegroom is with them, it is a time of joy; when it is a night of darkness and desertion, weeping endures, but when the morning comes, the day breaks, and the sun of righteousness arises, joy comes with it, (^{<4095>}Matthew 9:15) (^{<4169>}John 16:19,20 ^{<4305>}Psalms 30:5). Now in the present state is the saints' weeping time; in the time to come they will laugh, or be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory, (^{<4062>}Luke 6:21);

a time to mourn, and a time to dance; to mourn at funerals, and to dance at festivals; in a spiritual sense, God sometimes turns the mourning of his people into dancing, or joy, which that is expressive of; (see ^{<4301>}Psalms 30:11).

Ver. 5. *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together*, etc.] To cast stones out of a field or vineyard where they are hurtful, and to gather them together to make walls and fences of, or build houses with; and may be understood both of throwing down buildings, as the temple of Jerusalem, so that not one stone was left upon another; of pouring out the stones of the sanctuary, and of gathering them again and laying them on

one another; which was done when the servants of the Lord took pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favoured the dust thereof. Some understand this of precious stones, and of casting them away through luxury, wantonness, or contempt, and gathering them again: and it may be applied, as to the neglect of the Gentiles for a long time, and the gathering of those stones of which children were raised to Abraham; so of the casting away of the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah, and of the gathering of them again by conversion, when they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign on his land, (³⁰⁹⁶Zechariah 9:16);

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing: or “to be far from”^{f81} it; it may not only design conjugal embraces^{f82}, but parents embracing their children, as Jacob did his; and one brother embracing another, as Esau Jacob, and one friend embracing another; all which is very proper and agreeable at times: but there are some seasons so very calamitous and distressing, in which persons are obliged to drop such fondnesses: it is true, in a spiritual sense, of the embraces of Christ and believers, which sometimes are, and sometimes are not, enjoyed, (³⁰⁴⁸Proverbs 4:8 ³¹¹⁶Song of Solomon 2:6,9 3:1-3).

Ver. 6. *A time to get, and a time to lose,* etc.] To get substance, as the Targum, and to lose it; wealth and riches, honour and glory, wisdom and knowledge: or, “to seek, and to lose”^{f83}; a time when the sheep of the house of Israel, or God’s elect, were lost, and a time to seek them again; which was, lone by Christ in redemption, and by the Spirit of God, in effectual calling;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away; to keep a thing, and to cast it away, into the sea, in the time of a great tempest, as the Targum; as did the mariners in the ship in which Jonah was, and those in which the Apostle Paul was, (Jon 1:5 ⁴²⁷⁸Acts 27:38); It may be interpreted of keeping riches, and which are sometimes kept too close, and to the harm of the owners of them; and of scattering them among the poor, or casting them upon the waters; (see ²¹⁶³Ecclesiastes 5:13 11:1 ³¹¹²⁴Proverbs 11:24).

Ver. 7. *A time to rend, and a time to sew,* etc.] To rend garments, in case of blasphemy, and in times of mourning and fasting, and then to sew them up when they are over; (see ²³⁵⁰¹Isaiah 37:1 ³⁰²¹³Joel 2:13); This the Jews apply to the rending of the ten tribes from Rehoboam, signified by the rending of Jeroboam’s garment, (³¹¹¹⁰1 Kings 11:30,31); the sewing up or uniting of which is foretold, (³⁵⁷²²Ezekiel 37:22). Some interpret it of the

rending of the Jewish church state, signified by the rending of the vail, at the death of Christ; and of the constituting the Gospel church state among the Gentiles;

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak*¹⁸⁴; when it is an evil time, a time of calamity in a nation, it is not a time to be loquacious and talkative, especially in a vain and ludicrous way, (³¹⁵³Amos 5:13); or when a particular friend or relation is in distress, as in the case of Job and his friends, (⁸⁰²³Job 2:13); or when in the presence of wicked men, who make a jest of everything serious and religious, (⁴⁹⁰⁴Psalm 39:1); and so when under afflictive dispensations of Providence, it is a time to be still and dumb, and not open the mouth in a murmuring and complaining way, (⁸¹⁰³Leviticus 10:3 ⁴⁹⁰⁹Psalm 39:9 46:10). And, on the other hand, there is a time to speak, either publicly, of the truths of the Gospel, in the ministry of it, and in vindication of them; or privately, of Christian experience: there is a time when an open profession should be made of Christ, his word and ordinances, and when believers should speak to God in prayer and praise; which, should they not, the stones in the wall would cry out.

Ver. 8. *A time to love, and a time to hate*, etc.] For one to love his friend, and to hate a man, a sinner, as the Targum; to love a friend while he continues such, and hate him, or less love him, when he proves treacherous and unfaithful; an instance of a change of love into hatred may be seen in the case of Amnon, (⁴⁰³⁵2 Samuel 13:15). A time of unregeneracy is a time of loving worldly lusts and sinful pleasures, the company of wicked men, and all carnal delights and recreations; and a time of conversion is a time to hate what was before loved, sin, and the conversion of sinners, the garment spotted with the flesh, the principles and practices, though not the persons, of ungodly men; and even to hate, that is, less love, the dearest friends and relations, in comparison of, or when in competition with, Christ;

a time of war, and a time of peace; for nations to be engaged in war with each other, or to be at peace, which are continually revolving; and there is a time when there will be no more war. In a spiritual sense, the present time, or state of things, is a time of war; the Christian's life is a warfare state, though it will be soon accomplished, in which he is engaging in fighting with spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world: the time to come, or future state, is a time of peace, when saints shall enter into peace, and be no more disturbed by enemies from within or from without. In the Midrash,

all the above times and seasons are interpreted of Israel, and applied to them.

Ver. 9. *What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?*] That is, he has none. This is an inference drawn from the above premises, and confirms what has been before observed, (²⁰⁰³Ecclesiastes 1:3 2:11); Man has no profit of his labour, since his time is so short to enjoy it, and he leaves it to another, he knows not who; and, while he lives, is attended with continual vicissitudes and changes; sometimes it is a time for one thing, and sometimes for its contrary, so that there is nothing certain, and to be depended on; and a man can promise himself nothing in this world pleasant or profitable to him, and much less that will be of any advantage to him hereafter. The Targum adds,

“to make treasures and gather mammon, unless he is helped by Providence above;”

though it is man’s duty to labour, yet all his toil and labour will be fruitless without a divine blessing; there is a time and season for everything in providence, and there is no striving against that.

Ver. 10. *I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men,* etc.] The pains and trouble they are at to get a little wisdom and knowledge, (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 1:13); and so to obtain riches and honour, peace and plenty, which sometimes they do obtain, and sometimes not; and when they do, do not keep them long, for there is a time for everything. This the wise man had observed, in a variety of instances; and he considered the end of God in it, which was for men

to be exercised in it, or “by it”; or “to afflict” or “humble [them] by it”^{f85}; to let them see that all their toil and labour signified little; all depended on a divine blessing, and no happiness was to be had in the creatures; all was vanity and vexation of spirit; (see Gill on “²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 1:13”).

Ver. 11. *He hath made every [thing] beautiful in his time*, etc.] That is, God has made everything; as all things in creation are made by him, for his pleasure and glory, and all well and wisely, there is a beauty in them all: so all things in providence; he upholds all things; he governs and orders all things according to the counsel of his will; some things are done immediately by him, others by instruments, and some are only permitted by him; some he does himself, some he wills to be done by others, and some he suffers to be done; but in all there is a beauty and harmony; and all are

ordered, disposed, and overruled, to answer the wisest and greatest purposes; everything is done in the time in which he wills it shall; be done, and done in the time most fit and suitable for it to be done; all things before mentioned, for which there is a time, and all others: all natural things are beautiful in their season; things in summer, winter, spring, and autumn; frost and snow in winter, and heat in summer; darkness and dews in the night, and light and brightness in the day; and so in ten thousand other things: all afflictive dispensations of Providence; times of plucking up and breaking down of weeping and mourning, of losing and casting away are all necessary, and seasonable and beautiful, in their issue and consequences: prosperity and adversity, in their turns, make a beautiful checker work, and work together for good; are like Joseph's coat, of many colours, which was an emblem of those various providences which attended that good man; and were extremely beautiful, as are all the providences of God to men: and all his judgments will be, when made manifest; when he shall have performed his whole work, and the mystery of God in providence will be finished; which is like a piece of tapestry; when only viewed in parts no beauty appears in it, scarce any thing to be made of it but when all is put together, it is most beautiful and harmonious. The words may be rendered, "the beautiful One hath made all things in his time"^{f86}; the Messiah; who, as a divine Person, is the brightness of his Father's glory; as man, is fairer than the sons, of Adam; as Mediator, is full of grace and truth; is white and ruddy, altogether lovely, exceeding precious to his people: this fair and lovely One has made all things in creation; works with his Father in the affairs of providence; and has done all things well in grace and redemption, (~~BOOK~~John 1:2 5:17 ~~BOOK~~Mark 7:37);

also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end; not a sinful love of the world, and the things of it; not a criminal desire after them, and a carking care for them, whereby persons have no heart and inclination, time and leisure, to search into and find out the works of God; for though all this is in the heart of the sons of men, yet, not placed, there by the Lord: nor an opinion of living for ever; of a long time in this world, the word for "world" having the signification of perpetuity in it; so that they regard not, the work of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands, tomorrow being with them as this day, and much more abundant; but this sense meets with the same difficulty as the former. Rather the meaning is, that God hath set before the minds of men, and in them, the whole world of creatures, the

whole book of nature, in which they may see and read much of the wisdom power, and goodness of God in his works; and to some he gives an inclination and desire hereunto; but yet the subject before them is so copious, there is such a world of matter presented to them, and their capacity so small, and life so short, that they cannot all their days find out the works of God, either of creation or providence, to perfection; or find out what God works, from the beginning of the world to the end of it; for, of what he has wrought, but a small portion is known by them, and they know less still what shall be done hereafter: some of God's works of providence are set on foot and but begun in the life of some men; they do not live to see them finished, and therefore cannot find them out; and others are so dark and obscure, that they are obliged to say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" see (~~6119~~Romans 1:19,20 11:33); and though everything is beautiful in its time, yet till they are made manifest, and all viewed together; they will not be perfectly understood, or the beauty of them seen, (~~6650~~Revelation 15:4). For God has put something "hidden", or "sealed up", in the midst of them, as it may be rendered^{f87}, so that they cannot be perfectly known.

Ver. 12. *I know that [there is] no good in them,* etc.] In these things; as the Arabic version; in the creatures, as Jarchi; in all sublunary enjoyments; in everything the wise man had made a trial of before, as natural Wisdom and knowledge, worldly pleasure, riches, and wealth; the "summun bonum", or happiness of men, did not lie in these things; this he knew by experience, and had the strongest assurance of it: or in them, that is, the children of men, as the Targum: there is no real good thing in them, nor comes out of them, nor is done by them; they cannot think a good thought, nor do a good action, of themselves. Or rather the sense is, I know there is nothing better for them than what follows:

but for [a man] to rejoice; not in sin and sinful pleasures, in a riotous, voluptuous, and epicurean manner; but to be cheerful, and enjoy the blessings of life in a comfortable way, and with a thankful heart; and especially to rejoice in spiritual things, and above all in Christ; and not in any self-boastings or carnal confidences, all such rejoicing is evil; (see ~~2007~~Ecclesiastes 9:7 ~~3004~~Philippians 4:4 ~~3016~~James 4:16). The Targum is,

"but that they rejoice in the joy of the law;"

but it is much better to rejoice in the things of the Gospel, which is indeed a joyful sound;

and to do good in his life: to himself and family, by making use of the good things of life, and not withholding and hoarding them up; and to others, to all men, as opportunity offers, and especially to the household of faith; and not only by liberality and alms deeds, but by doing all good works, from right principles and to right ends, and that always, as long as he lives, (~~4019~~ Galatians 6:9,10 ~~4075~~ Luke 1:75).

Ver. 13. *And also that every man should eat and drink*, etc.] Not to excess, but in moderation; and yet freely, plentifully, and cheerfully; and not alone, but giving the poor a portion with him; and in all having in view the glory of God, (~~4608~~ 1 Corinthians 10:31);

and enjoy the good of all his labour; take the comfort of what he has been labouring for, and not lay it up for, and leave it to, he knows not who: the Targum is,

“and see good in his days, and cause his children, at the time of his death, to inherit all his labour;”

it [is] the gift of God; not only to have, but to enjoy, and make a proper use of the mercies of life. This is the same doctrine which is delivered (~~2024~~ Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Ver. 14. *I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever*, etc.] Which some, as Jarchi, understand of the works of creation, the heavens and the earth, which are however of long standing and duration; and though they shall be dissolved and perish, as to their form and quality, yet not as to the substance of them: the earth particularly is said to abide for ever, (~~2004~~ Ecclesiastes 1:4); the sun and moon, and stars, keep their course or station; and the several seasons of the year have their constant revolution, and shall as long as the earth endures; see (~~0082~~ Genesis 8:22 ~~4815~~ Jeremiah 31:35,36 33:20,21); the several kinds of creatures God has made, in the earth, air, and sea, though the individuals die, their species remain; and man, the chief of creatures, though he dies, shall live again, and live for ever; so the Arabic version,

“I have learned that all the creatures which God hath made shall perpetually remain in the same order and condition:”

though Abarbinel^{f88} interprets this of the continuance of the world for a certain time, and then of the destruction of it; which he thinks is supported by (²⁰⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 3:15), and which is to be understood of the creation of one world after another; and that which is past he explains of the world that is destroyed. But rather this is to be understood of the decrees of God, which are his works “ad intra”; the thoughts of his heart, that are to all generations; the counsel of his will, which always stands, and is performed; his mind, which is one, the same always, and invariable, and which he never changes; his pleasure he always does; his purposes and appointments, which are always accomplished, never frustrated and made void: for he is all wise in forming them, all knowing, and sees the end from the beginning, so that nothing unforeseen can turn up to hinder the execution of them; he is unchangeable, and never alters his will; and all powerful, able to effect his great designs; and faithful and true, cannot deny himself, nor ever lie nor repent. To this sense is the Targum,

“I know, by a spirit of prophecy, that all which the Lord does in the world, whether good or evil, after it is decreed from his mouth, it shall be for ever.”

This holds good of all his works, and acts of grace; election of persons to eternal life stands firm, not on the foot of works, but of grace, and has its certain effect; it can never be made void, nor be surer than it is; it will ever take place, and continue in its fruit and consequences: the covenant of grace, as it is made from everlasting, continues to everlasting; its promises never fail, its blessings are the sure mercies of David: redemption by Christ is eternal; such as are redeemed from sin, Satan, and the law, are ever so, and shall never be brought into bondage to either again: the work of grace upon the heart being begun, shall be performed and perfected; the graces wrought in the soul, as faith, hope, and love, ever remain; the blessings of grace bestowed, as pardon, justification, adoption, and salvation, are never reversed, but ever continue; such as are regenerated, pardoned, justified, adopted, and saved, shall be ever so; and the work of God, as it is durable, so perfect;

nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; the works of nature have been finished and perfected from the foundation of the world; the decrees of God are a complete system of his will, according to which he does all things invariably, in providence and grace; the covenant of grace is ordered in all things, and nothing wanting in it; the work of redemption is

completely done by Christ, who is a rock, and his work is perfect; and the work of grace on the heart, though at present imperfect, shall be perfected; nor is it in the power of men to add anything to it, nor take anything from it;

and God doth [it], that [men] should fear before him; his works of creation being done in so much wisdom, and giving such a display of his power and goodness, command art awe of him in his creatures, (^{<49816>}Psalm 33:6-9); his works of providence, being all according to his wise purposes and decrees, should be patiently and quietly submitted to; and men should be still, and know that he is God, and humble themselves under his mighty hand: his decrees, respecting the present or future state of men, do not lead to despair, nor to a neglect of means, nor to a dissolute life, but tend to promote the fear of God and true holiness, which they are the source of; and the blessings of grace have a kind influence on the same; particularly the blessing of pardoning grace, which is with God, that he may be feared, (^{<49104>}Psalm 130:4 ^{<20815>}Hosea 3:5); and one principal part of the work of grace on the heart is the fear of God; and nothing more strongly engages to the whole worship of God, which is often meant by the fear of him, than his grace vouchsafed to men; (see ^{<38228>}Hebrews 12:28 ^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14). The Targum refers this to the vengeance of God in the world: and Jarchi, to the unusual phenomena in it; as the flood, the sun's standing still and going backward, and the like.

Ver. 15. *That which hath seen is now; and that which is to be hath already been,* etc.] That which has been from the beginning now is; that which cometh, and what shall be in the end of days, has been already, as the Targum. Jarchi interprets this of God and his attributes, which are always the same; he is the "I am that I am", (^{<10814>}Exodus 3:14); the immutable and eternal Jehovah, which is, and was, and is to come, invariably the same. Or rather it designs his decrees and purposes; what has been decreed in his eternal mind is now accomplished; and what is future has been already in his decrees; nor does anything come to pass but what he has appointed. So it is interpreted, in an ancient tract^{f89} of the Jews, of

"what was before it came into the world, so that there is nothing new under the sun; now it is obliged to come into this world, as it is said, "before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee", (^{<2006>}Jeremiah 1:5)."

This will also hold true of natural things, and of the identity of them; of some individuals, as the sun, moon, and stars, which are as they always were, and will be; the sun rises and sets as it used to do; and the moon increases and decreases, as it always has done; and the stars keep the same station or course, and so they ever will, as they have: the same seasons are now in their turn as heretofore, and such as will be have been already; as summer, winter, spring, autumn, seedtime, harvest, cold, heat, night, and day: the same kinds and species of creatures, that have been, are; and what will be have been already; so that there is no new thing under the sun; the same thing is here expressed as in (²⁰¹⁰Ecclesiastes 1:9);

and God requireth that which is past; his decrees and purposes to be fulfilled, which are past in his mind; the same seasons to return which have been; and the same kinds and species of creatures to exist which have already. The words may be rendered, “and God seeketh that which is pursued”, or “persecuted”^{f90}: and accordingly the whole will bear a different sense; and the preacher may be thought to have entered upon a new subject, which he continues in some following verses, the abuse of power and authority: and the meaning then is, the same acts of injustice, violence, and persecution, have been done formerly as now, and now as formerly; and what hereafter of this kind may be, will be no other than what has been; from the beginning persecution was; Cain hated and slew his brother, because of his superior goodness; and so it always has been, is, and will be, that such who are after the flesh persecute those who are after the spirit; but God will make inquisition for blood, and require it at the hands of those that shed it; he will seek out the persecuted, and vindicate him, and, avenge his persecutor. This way the Midrash, Jarchi, and Alshech, and the Septuagint version, render the words; and so the Syriac version, “God seeketh him that is afflicted, who is driven away”; and to this agrees the Targum,

“and in the great day which shall be, the Lord will require the mean and poor man of the hands of the wicked that persecute him.”

And what follows seems to confirm this sense.

Ver. 16. *And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment*, etc.] Courts of judicature, where judges sit, and, causes are brought before them, and are heard and tried; such as were the Jewish sanhedrim, of which the Midrash and Jarchi interpret it;

[that] wickedness [was] there, wicked judges sat there, and wickedness was committed by them; instead of doing justice they perverted it; condemned the righteous, and acquitted the wicked; and oppressed the widow, fatherless, and stranger, whose cause, being just, they should have defended. So the Targum,

“in which lying judges condemn the innocent.”

Well does the wise man say he saw this “under the sun”, for there is nothing of this kind above it; nor approved of by him that is above it;

and the place of righteousness, [that] iniquity [was] there; this signifies the same as before, only it is expressed in different words. The Midrash and Jarchi interpret this of the middle gate in Jerusalem, where Nergal Sharezer, and other princes of the king of Babylon, sat, and which Solomon foresaw by a spirit of prophecy; but the better sense is, that Solomon had observed a great deal of this kind in reading the histories and annals of nations; knew that much of this sort was practised in other countries, and had seen a great deal of it in his own, done in inferior courts, and by subordinate officers; and though he was a wise and righteous prince, yet was not able to rectify all these abuses, for want of sufficient proof, which yet he lamented, and it gave him a concern; compare with this (⁻²⁰²²⁻Isaiah 1:21-23).

Ver. 17. *I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked*, etc.] This he considered in his mind, and set it down for a certain truth, and which relieved him under the consideration of the sad perversion of justice; and made him easy under it, and willing to leave things to him that judgeth righteously, and wait his time when everything that was now wrong would be set right: he knew from reason, from tradition, and from the word of God, that there was a judgment to come, a general, righteous, and eternal one; that this judicial process would be carried on by God himself, who is holy, righteous, just, and true, omniscient, and omnipotent; and, being the Judge of all the earth, would do right; when he would vindicate the righteous, and clear them from all calumnies and charges; acquit and justify them, and condemn the wicked, pass a just sentence on them, and execute it;

for [there is] a time there for every purpose, and for every work; or “then”, as Noldius; in the day of the great judgment, as the Targum adds; and which continues to paraphrase the words thus,

“for a time is appointed for every business, and for every work which they do in this world they shall be judged there;”

there is a time fixed, a day appointed, for the judgment of the world; though of that day and hour knows no man; yet, it is settled, and will certainly come, (^{<4473>}Acts 17:31 ^{<426>}Matthew 24:36); and when it is come, every purpose, counsel, and thought of men’s hearts, will be made manifest, as well as every work, good or bad, open or secret, yea, every idle word, and men will be judged according to these; (see ^{<4045>}1 Corinthians 4:5 ^{<4750>}2 Corinthians 5:10 ^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:14) (^{<4026>}Matthew 12:36,37 ^{<6014>}Jude 1:14,15).

Ver. 18. *I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men,* etc.] He thought of the condition of the children of men, their sinful and polluted state; he weighed and considered in his mind their actions, conversation, and course of life; and was concerned how it would go with them at the day of judgment on account of the same. Some render it, “I said in mine heart after the speech of the children of men”^{f91}; speaking in their language, and representing the atheist and the epicure, as some think the wise man does in the following verses; though he rather speaks his own real sentiments concerning men, as they are in their present state, and as they will appear in the day of judgment;

that God might manifest them; or “separate them”^{f92}; as the chaff from the wheat, and as goats from the sheep; as will be done at the day of judgment, (^{<4180>}Matthew 3:10 25:30,33); or “that they might clear God”^{f93}; as they will, when he shall judge and condemn them;

and that they might see that they themselves are beasts; as they are through the fall, and the corruption of nature, being born like the wild ass’s colt, stupid, senseless, and without understanding of spiritual things; nay, more brutish than the beasts themselves, than the horse and the mule that have no understanding, (^{<4319>}Psalms 32:9); “mulo incitior”, as is Plautus’s^{f94} phrase; (see ^{<4992>}Psalms 49:12,20 ^{<4812>}Job 11:12) (^{<2008>}Isaiah 1:3 ^{<2480>}Jeremiah 8:7); this is now made manifest to the people of God by the word and Spirit; is seen, known, and acknowledged by them, (^{<4972>}Psalms 73:21 ^{<2812>}Proverbs 30:2); and the wicked themselves will see, know, and own what beasts they are and have been, at the day of judgment; how they have lived and died like beasts; how like brute beasts they have corrupted themselves in things they knew naturally; and that as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, spoke evil of things they understood not,

and perished in their own corruption, (^{<6110>}Jude 1:10) (^{<6112>}2 Peter 2:12); and that they have been beasts to themselves, as Jarchi renders and interprets it; made beasts of themselves by their brutish gratifications; have been cruel to themselves, ruining and destroying their own souls; or among themselves, and to one another, “homo lupus homini”; hence wicked men are compared to lions, foxes, evening wolves, vipers, and the like. So Mr. Broughton renders it, “how they are beasts, they to themselves.”

Ver. 19. *For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts*, etc.] Aben Ezra says this verse is according to the thoughts of the children of men that are not wise; but rather the wise man says what he does according to his own thoughts, and proceeds to prove the likeness and equality of men and beasts;

even one thing befalleth them; the same events belong to one as to another; the same diseases and disasters, calamities and distresses: Noah’s flood carried away one as well as another; they both perished in it; several of the plagues of Egypt were inflicted on both; and both are beholden to God for their health, preservation, and safety; see (^{<0072>}Genesis 7:21 ^{<0088>}Exodus 8:18 9:9,25 ^{<0016>}Psalms 36:6);

as the one dieth, so dieth the other; the Targum compares a wicked man and an unclean beast together, in the former clause; and paraphrases this after this manner,

“as an unclean beast dies, so dies he who is not turned to repentance before his death.”

he dies unclean in his sins, stupid, senseless; no more thoughtful of his future state, and of what will become of his precious and immortal soul, than a beast that has none; (see ^{<0044>}Psalms 49:14); perhaps unjust judges, persecuting tyrants, may particularly be regarded: who, though princes, shall not only die like men, but even like beasts, (^{<0017>}Psalms 82:7);

yea, they have all one breath; the same vital breath, or breath of life, which is in the nostrils of the one as of the other; they breathe and draw in the same air, and have the same animal and vegetative life, and equally liable to lose it, (^{<0017>}Genesis 2:7 7:22);

so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: he has reason and speech, which a beast has not; which gives him a preference to them, did he make a right use of them; but, as an animal, he has no preeminence, being

liable to the same accidents, and to death itself: the Targum excepts the house of the grave, man being usually buried when he dies, but a beast is not: yea, in some things a beast has the preeminence of a man; at least some have, in strength, agility, quickness of the senses, etc.

for all [is] vanity; all the gratifications of the senses; all riches, honours, pleasures, power, and authority, especially when abused.

Ver. 20. *All go unto one place*, etc.] The earth^{f95} from whence they came;

all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again; Adam's body was made of the dust of the earth, and so all his posterity, all of them; in which they agree with beasts, who are made of the dust also; and, when they die, return to it; (see ^{<OR>}Genesis 2:7 3:19 ^{<PA>}Psalm 104:29).

Ver. 21. *Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward?* etc.] There is indeed a difference between a man and a beast; though they have one breath, they have not one spirit or soul; man has a rational and immortal soul, which, when he dies, goes upwards to God that gave it; to be judged by him, and disposed of by him, in its proper apartment, until the day of the resurrection of the body;

and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? when the beast dies, its spirit goes down to the earth, from whence it came, and is resolved into it, and is no more. But who is it that sees, or can see and know with the eyes of his body, the difference of these two spirits, or the ascent of the one, and the descent of the other?, Or who knows by the dint of reason, by the strength of his own understanding, without a divine revelation, that man has an immortal soul which goes upwards at death, when that of a beast goes downwards? No man, clearly and fully, as appears from the doubts and half faith of the wisest Heathens concerning it: or rather who knows and considers this difference between the spirit of a man and the spirit of a beast, and thinks within himself what a precious and immortal soul he has, and is concerned for the salvation of it? Very few; and hence it is they live and die like beasts, as they do. The Midrash interprets this of the souls of the righteous that go up to heaven, and of the souls of the wicked that go down to hell.

Ver. 22. *Wherefore I perceive that [there is] nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works*, etc.] The Targum is, "in his good works"; not as justifying him before God, but as vindicating him before men, from unjust censures and charges: rather the sense is, that this is the

wise man's conclusion, and this his sentiment, upon the whole; that there is nothing better for a man, than cheerfully to enjoy the fruit of his labours; to eat and drink in moderation, freely, joyfully, and thankfully; and make use of his riches, power, and authority, for his own good, the good of his family for the present, and the good of his fellow creatures; (see ~~2021~~ Ecclesiastes 2:21 3:13);

for that [is] his portion; what is allotted to him, and thus enjoyed, is a very good one, and for which he has reason to be thankful;

for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him? to see who shall succeed him, and what use they will make of what he leaves them; he shall never return after death to see anything of this kind, nor shall any acquaint him with it; he shall not be able to know when he is dead what shall befall his sons, whether they will prosper or no, so Jarchi; wherefore it is best for him to enjoy his substance himself in a comfortable way, and be beneficial to others, and not oppressive to them. The Midrash illustrates it thus,

“who shall bring David to see what Solomon did? and who shall bring Solomon to see what Rehoboam did?”