

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 5

This chapter contains some rules and directions concerning the worship of God; how persons should behave when they go into the house of God; concerning hearing the word, to which there should be a readiness, and which should be preferred to the sacrifices of fools, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:1). Concerning prayer to God; which should not be uttered rashly and hastily, and should be expressed in few words; which is urged from the consideration of the majesty of God, and vileness of men; and the folly of much speaking is exposed by the simile of a dream, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:2,3). Concerning vows, which should not be rashly made; when made, should be kept; nor should excuses be afterwards framed for not performing them, since this might bring the anger of God upon men, to the destruction of the works of their hands, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:4-6); and, as an antidote against those vanities, which appear in the prayers and vows of some, and dreams of others, the fear of God is proposed, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:7); and, against any surprise at the oppression of the poor, the majesty, power, and providence of God, and his special regard to his people, are observed, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:8). And then the wise man enters into a discourse concerning riches; and observes, that the fruits of the earth, and the culture of it, are necessary to all men, and even to the king, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:9); but dissuades from covetousness, or an over love of riches; because they are unsatisfying, are attended with much trouble, often injurious to the owners of them; at length perish, and their possessors; who, at death, are stripped quite naked of all, after they have spent their days in darkness and distress, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:10-17); and concludes, therefore, that it is best for a man to enjoy, in a free manner, the good things of this life he is possessed of, and consider them as the gifts of God, and be thankful for them; by which means he will pass through the world more comfortably, and escape the troubles that attend others, (~~2KRB~~Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

Ver. 1. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,* etc.] The house of the sanctuary of the Lord, the temple built by Solomon; and so any place of divine worship, where the word of God is preached, and his

ordinances administered. The wise man, having observed many vanities under the sun, directs men to the house of God, where they might learn the nature of them, and how to avoid them; though if care was not taken, they would find or introduce vanity there; which, of all vanities, is the worst, and ought to be guarded against. Wherefore, when men go to any place of divine worship, which to do is their duty and interest, and for their honour, pleasure, and profit, they should take care to “keep [their] feet”, for the singular is here put for the plural, not from going into it; nor does it signify a slow motion towards it, which should be quick, in haste, showing earnestness, fervency, and zeal; but they should keep their feet in proper case, in a suitable condition. The allusion is either to the pulling off of the shoes off the feet, ordered to Moses and Joshua, when on holy ground, (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 3:5 ~~Joshua~~ Joshua 5:15); and which the Jews observed, when they entered the temple on their festivals and sabbaths, even their kings, as Juvenal^{f109} jeers them: not that such a rite should be literally used now, or what is analogous to it; putting off of the hat, in a superstitious veneration of a place; but what was signified by it, as the putting off of the old man, with his deeds, laying aside depraved affections and sordid lusts; two apostles, James and Peter, have taught us this, when we come to the house of God to hear his word, (~~James~~ James 1:21 ~~1 Peter~~ 1 Peter 2:1,2); or the allusion is to the custom of persons in those eastern countries dressing or washing their feet when they visited, especially those of any note; and entered into their houses on any business, as Mephibosheth, when he waited on David, (~~2 Samuel~~ 2 Samuel 19:24); or to the practice of the priests, who washed their feet when they went into the tabernacle of the Lord, (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 30:19,20). Schindler^{f110} says that hence (because of this text) the Jews had before their synagogues an iron fixed in the wall (which we call a “scraper”), on which they cleaned their shoes before they went into the synagogue. All which may denote the purity and cleanness of the conversation of the true worshippers of God; for, as the feet are the instruments of the action of walking, they may intend the conduct and behaviour of the saints in the house of God, where they should take care to do all things according to his word, which is a lamp to the feet, and a light unto the path: moreover, what the feet are to the body, that the affections are to the soul; and these, when a man enters into the house of God for worship, should be set on divine and spiritual things, and not on the world, and the things of it, which will choke the word heard, and make it unprofitable; the thoughts should be composed, sedate, and quiet, and the mind attentive to what is spoken

or done; or otherwise, if diverted by other objects, the service will be useless;

and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; there are sacrifices to be offered unto God in his house, which are acceptable to him; the sacrifices of beneficence and alms deeds to the poor, with which he is well pleased; and the presentation of the bodies of men, as a holy, living, and acceptable sacrifice unto him; and especially their hearts, and those as broken and contrite, which are the sacrifices of God; as also the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ: and under the former dispensation, while sacrifices were in use by divine appointment, when they were offered up in the faith of the sacrifice of Christ, they were well pleasing to God; but when they were not done in faith, and were without repentance for sin and reformation of life; when men retained their sins with them, and made these a cover for them, and thought by them to make atonement for their crimes, they were no other than the sacrifices of fools, and abominable unto God; see (^{<2011>}Isaiah 1:11-16 ^{<2009>}Jeremiah 7:9,10 ^{<1027>}Proverbs 21:27); when these sacrifices were performed in the best manner, moral duties, as hearing and obeying the word of the Lord, and showing mercy to men, and offering up the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, were preferred unto them, (^{<0952>}1 Samuel 15:22 ^{<2006>}Hosea 6:6 ^{<0680>}Psalm 69:30,31 ^{<1123>}Mark 12:33); and much more to the sacrifices of fools. To be ready, or near^{f111}, is to hear the word of the Lord, as Jarchi interprets it; though Aben Ezra understands it of God being near to hear his people, when they call upon him in truth. The word of the Lord was not only read publicly in the temple and synagogues, but was explained by the priests and prophets, the ecclesiastical rulers of the people; (see ^{<3007>}Malachi 2:7 ^{<4035>}Acts 13:15 15:21); so the Targum,

“draw near thine ear to receive the doctrine of the law, from the priests and wise men:”

and so the people of God should draw near to hear the word; be swift to hear it, attentive to it, and receive it with all reverence, humility, love, and affection; and should not take up with mere outward forms, which is but the sacrifice of fools;

for they consider not that they do evil; or “know not”^{f112}; they think they are doing well, and doing God good service, when they are doing ill; they know not truly the object of worship, nor the spiritual nature of it, nor the right end and true use of it: or, “they know not, [only] to do evil”, so Aben

Ezra supplies it: to do good they have no knowledge: or, “they know not to do the will”, or “good pleasure”^{f113}; that is, of God; this sense of the word Aben Ezra mentions.

Ver. 2. *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter [any] thing before God*, etc.] In private conversation care should be taken that no rash and unadvised words be spoken in haste, as were by Moses and David; and that no evil, nor even any idle word he uttered, since from, the abundance of the heart the mouth is apt to speak, and all is before, the Lord; not a word in the tongue but is altogether known by him, and must be accounted for to him, (⁴⁹⁴⁶³Psalm 106:33 116:11 139:4 ⁴¹²³⁴Matthew 12:34-37). Jerom interprets this of words spoken concerning God; and careful men should be of what they say of him, of his nature and perfections, of his persons, and of his works; and it may be applied to a public profession of his name, and of faith in him; though this should be done with the heart, yet the heart and tongue should not be rash and hasty in making it; men should consider what they profess and confess, and upon what foot they take up and make a profession of religion; whether they have the true grace of God or no: and it will hold true of the public ministry of the word, in which everything that comes uppermost in the mind, or what is crude and undigested, should not be, uttered; but what ministers have thought of, meditated on, well weighed in their minds, and properly digested. Some understand this of rash vows, such as Jephthah’s, is supposed to be, which are later repented of; but rather speaking unto God in prayer is intended. So the Targum,

“thy, heart shall not hasten to bring out speech at the time thou prayest before the Lord;”

anything and everything that comes up into the mind should not be, uttered before God; not anything rashly and hastily; men should consider before they speak to the King of kings; for though set precomposed forms of prayer are not to be used, yet the matter of prayer should be thought of beforehand; what our wants are, and what we should ask for; whether for ourselves or others; this rule I fear we often offend against: the reasons follow;

for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth; his throne is in the heavens, he dwells in the highest heavens, though they cannot contain him; this is expressive of his majesty, sovereignty, and supremacy, and of his omniscience and omnipotence; he is the high and lofty One, that dwells in

the high and holy place; he is above all, and sees and knows all persons and things; and he sits in the heavens, and does whatever he pleases; and therefore all should stand in awe of him, and consider what they say unto him. Our Lord seems to have respect to this passage when he directed his disciples to pray, saying, “Our Father, which art in heaven”, (^(40B)Matthew 6:9 ^(21D)Luke 11:2); and when we pray to him we should think what we ourselves are, that we are on the earth, the footstool of God; that we are of the earth, earthly; dwell in houses of clay, which have their foundation in the dust; crawling worms on earth, unworthy of his notice; are but dust and ashes, who take upon us to speak unto him;

therefore let, by words be few; of which prayer consists; such was the prayer of the publican, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”, (^(21B3)Luke 18:13); and such the prayer which Christ has given as a pattern and directory to his people; who has forbid vain repetitions and much speaking in prayer, (^(40B)Matthew 6:7,8); not that all lengthy prayers are to be condemned, or all repetitions in them; our Lord was all night in prayer himself; and Nehemiah, Daniel, and others, have used repetitions in prayer, which may be done with fresh affection, zeal, and fervency; but such are forbidden as are done for the sake of being heard for much speaking, as the Heathens; and who thought they were not understood unless they said a thing a hundred times over^{f114}; or when done to gain a character of being more holy and religious than others, as the Pharisees.

Ver. 3. *For a dream cometh through the multitude of business*, etc.] Or, “for as a dream”^{f115}, so Aben Ezra; as that comes through a multiplicity of business in the daytime, in which the mind has been busied, and the body employed; and this brings on dreams in the night season, which are confused and incoherent; sometimes the fancy is employed about one thing, and sometimes another, and all unprofitable and useless, as well as vain and foolish;

and a fool’s voice [is known] by multitude of words; either his voice in conversation, for a fool is full of words, and pours out his foolishness in a large profusion of them; or his voice in prayer, being like a man’s dream, confused, incoherent, and rambling. The supplement, “is known”, may be left out.

Ver. 4. *When thou vowest a vow unto God*, etc.] Or “if thou vowest”^{f116}, as the Vulgate Latin version; for vows are free and indifferent things, which persons may make or not; there is no precept for them in the word of God;

instances and examples there are, and they may be lawfully made, when they are in the power of man to perform, and are not inconsistent with the will and word of God; they have been made by good men, and were frequent in former times; but they seem not so agreeable to the Gospel dispensation, having a tendency to ensnare the mind, to entangle men, and bring on them a spirit of bondage, contrary to that liberty wherewith Christ has made them free; and therefore it is better to abstain from them: holy resolutions to do the will and work of God should be taken up in the strength of divine grace; but to vow this, or that, or the other thing, which a man previous to his vow is not obliged unto, had better be let alone: but however, when a vow is made that is lawful to be done,

defer not to pay it; that is, to God, to whom it is made, who expects it, and that speedily, as Hannah paid hers; no excuses nor delays should be made;

for [he hath] no pleasure in fools; that is, the Lord hath no pleasure in them, he will not be mocked by them; he will resent such treatment of him, as to vow and not pay, or defer payment and daily, with him. So the Targum,

“for the Lord hath no pleasure in fools, because, they defer their vows, and do not pay;”

pay that which thou hast vowed; precisely and punctually; both as to the matter, manner, and time of it.

Ver. 5. *Better [is it] that thou shouldest not vow*, etc.] For a vow is an arbitrary thing; a man is not bound to make it, and while he vows not, it is in his own power, and at his option, whether he will do this or that, or not; but when he has once vowed, he is then brought under an obligation, and must perform; (see ^{418B}Acts 5:4); and therefore it is better not to vow; it is more acceptable to God, and, it is better for a man;

than that thou shouldest vow and not pay; for this shows great weakness and folly, levity and inconstancy, and is resented by the Lord.

Ver. 6. *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, etc.] That is, himself, who is corrupt and depraved; either by making a rash vow, which it is not in his power to keep; or such is the corruption of his nature, and the weakness of the flesh, that he cannot keep it; or by making sinful excuses after he has made the vow, and so is guilty of lying, or false swearing, or other sins of the flesh. Jarchi by “flesh” understands his children, on whom

his iniquity may be visited and punished; and the Targum interprets this punishment of the judgment or condemnation of hell; (see ^{<RB>}Proverbs 20:25);

neither say thou before the angel that it [was] an error; that it was done ignorantly and through mistake: that it was not intended, and that this was not the meaning of the vow; and therefore desires to be excused performing it, or to offer a sacrifice in lieu of it. Interpreters are divided about the angel before whom such an excuse should not be made. Some think angel is put for angels in general, in whose presence, and before whom, as witnesses, vows are made; and who were signified by the cherubim in the sanctuary, where they were to be performed, and who are present in the worshipping assemblies of saints, where these things are done, (^{<RB>}1 Timothy 5:21 ^{<RB>}1 Corinthians 11:10); others think the guardian angel is meant, which they suppose every man has; and others that Christ, the Angel of the covenant, is designed, who is in the midst of his people, sees and knows all that is done by them, and will not admit of their excuses; but it is most probable the priest is intended, called the angel, or messenger, of the Lord of hosts, (^{<RB>}Malachi 2:7); to whom such who had made vows applied to be loosed from them, acknowledging their error in making them; or to offer sacrifice for their sin of ignorance, (^{<RB>}Leviticus 5:4,5);

wherefore should God be angry at thy voice; either in making a rash and sinful vow, or in excusing that which was made;

and destroy the work of thine hands? wrought with success, for which the vow was made; and so, instead of its succeeding, is destroyed, and comes to nothing. Vows made by the Jews were chiefly about their houses, or fields, or cattle; (see ^{<RB>}Leviticus 27:28); and so the destruction suggested may signify the curse that God would bring upon any of these, for excusing or not performing the vow made.

Ver. 7. *For in the multitude of dreams, and many words, [there are] also [divers] vanities*, etc.] Or as, “in a multitude of dreams, [there are] many vanities, [so] also in a multitude of words”^{f117}; as dreams are vain things, or there are abundance of vain things that come into the mind in dreams; so vain and idle are the many excuses which are made for the non-performance of vows; or there are many vain things which are uttered in making of them, or in long prayers to God; or in discourses concerning him; to all which is opposed the fear of God;

but fear thou God; give no heed to dreams, nor to the many words of men, which are vain and foolish; but keep close to the word of God, and worship him internally and externally, in spirit and in truth; for herein lies the sum and substance of religion; (see ^{<2123>}Ecclesiastes 12:13); The Targum is,

“for in the multitude of the dreams of the false prophets believe not, nor in the vanities of the authors of enchantments, and the many speeches of ungodly men; but serve the wise and just, and of them seek doctrine, and fear before the Lord;”

(see ^{<2238>}Jeremiah 23:28);

Ver. 8. *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of justice in a province*, etc.] Which is a very disagreeable sight, but often seen; the poor are oppressed, and judgment and justice perverted, and that in a very violent and flagrant manner, in open courts of judicature, in the several provinces and kingdoms of the world;

marvel not at the matter; as though it was some strange and uncommon thing, when nothing is more common: or “marvel not at the will” or “pleasure”^{f118}; that is, of God, who suffers such things to be. So the Targum, Jarchi, and Aben Ezra, interpret it; stumble not at it, nor arraign the wisdom and justice of God; let not that temptation prevail in thee as it has done in some good men, who have been tempted from hence to think there was nothing in religion, nor no providence attending the affairs of this world; do not be frightened and astonished, and hurried into such a thought; nor be distressed at the calamities and oppressions of poor and innocent men;

for [he that is] higher than the highest regardeth: that is, God, who is the most high in all the earth; higher, than the kings of the earth, and all high and haughty oppressors; higher indeed than the heavens, and the angels there: he “regards” all his people, his eyes are on them, and he never withdraws them from them; he regards their cries, and hears and answers them; he regards their oppressors, and their oppressions; and will, in his own time, deliver them; or he “keeps”^{f119} his people as the apple of his eye, in the hollow of his hand, night and day, lest any hurt them; he keeps them by his power through faith unto salvation. It may be rendered, “the high One from on high observes”^{f120}; God, who is the high and lofty One, looks down from the high heavens where he dwells, and takes notice of all the sons of men, and considers all their works; (see ^{<2883>}Psalms 33:13-15);

and [there be] higher than they; either the holy angels, who are higher than tyrannical oppressors, higher in nature, and excel in strength and power; and these are on the side of the oppressed, have the charge of saints, and encamp about them; and, whenever they have an order, can destroy their enemies in a moment: or rather the three divine Persons are meant, by the plural expression used, Father, Son, and Spirit; Jehovah the Father is above men, the greatest of men, in the things in which they deal proudly; he is greater than all, and none can pluck his sheep out of his hands, and worry them: Christ, the Son of the Highest, is higher than the kings, of the earth; he is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and able to deliver and save his people; and the Holy Spirit is the power of the Highest, and is greater than he or they that are in the world, the avowed enemies of the saints. Aben Ezra interprets it of the secret of the name of God, which he says is inexplicable. So the Midrash understands it of the holy blessed God; and in another tract it is said, on mention of this passage, there are three superiors above them in the way of emanation, and of them it is said^{f121}, “there be higher than they.”

Ver. 9. *Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all*, etc.] Or, “the excellency of the earth in” or “above all things [is] this”^{f122}; that God most high rules over all the earth, and is higher than the kings of it, and all oppressors in it; or in all respects there is a preference, a superior excellency in the country as opposed to the city, especially in this, that there are not so many tumults, riots, and oppressions there; though this is mostly understood of the preference and superior excellency of agriculture, or tillage of the earth. So the Targum,

“the excellency of the praise of tilling the earth is above all things:”

and to the same purpose Jarchi and Aben Ezra; and the profit arising from it is enjoyed by all; it is for all, even the beasts of the field have grass from hence, as well as man has bread corn, and all other necessities;

the king [himself] is served by the field; his table is served with bread corn, and flesh, and wine, and fruits of various sorts, the produce of the earth, which spring from it, or are nourished by it; were it not for husbandry the king himself and his family could not subsist; and therefore it becomes kings to encourage it, and not oppress those who are employed in it: or “the king [is a] servant to the field”^{f123}; some kings have addicted themselves to husbandry, and been great lovers of it, as Uzziah was, (~~1400~~2 Chronicles 26:10); and some of the Chinese emperors, as their histories^{f124}

show; and the kings of Persia^{f125}: Vulcan, in the shield of Achilles, represented the reapers, gatherers, and binders of sheaves at work in the field, and a king standing among the sheaves with a sceptre in his hand, looking on with great pleasure, while a dinner is prepared by his orders for the workmen^{f126}; many of the Roman generals, and high officers, were called from the plough, particularly Cincinnatus^{f127}; and these encouraged husbandry in their subjects, as well as took care of their own farms. There is another sense of the words given, besides many more;

“and the most excellent Lord of the earth (that is, the most high God) is the King of every field that is tilled; (that is, the King of the whole habitable world;) or the King Messiah, Lord of his field, the church, and who is the most eminent in all the earth^{f128}.”

The Midrash interprets it of the holy blessed God.

Ver. 10. *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver*, etc.] The tillage of the earth is necessary, a very laudable and useful employment, and men do well to busy themselves in it; without this, neither the common people nor the greatest personages can be supplied with the necessaries of life; but then an immoderate love of money is criminal, which is here meant by loving silver, one kind of money, which when loved beyond measure is the root of all evil; and besides, when a man has got ever so much of it, he is not satisfied, he still wants more, like the horse leech at the vein cries Give, give; or he cannot eat silver, so Jarchi; or be “fed with money”, as Mr. Broughton renders it; and herein the fruits of the earth, for which the husbandman labours, have the preference to silver; for these he can eat, and be filled and satisfied with them, but he cannot eat his bags of gold and silver;

nor he that loveth abundance with increase; that is, he that coveteth a great deal of this world’s things shall not be satisfied with the increase of them, let that be what it will; or, he shall have “no increase”^{f129}, be ever the better for his abundance, or enjoy the comfort and benefit of it: or, “he that loveth abundance [from whence there is] no increase”^{f130}; that loves to have a multitude of people about him, as manservants and maidservants; a large equipage, as Aben Ezra suggests, which are of very little use and service, or none at all;

this [is] also vanity: the immoderate love of money, coveting large estates and possessions, and to have a train of servants. Jarchi allegorically

interprets silver and abundance, of the commands, and the multitude of them.

Ver. 11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them,* etc.]

When a man's substance increases by trade, or otherwise, very often so it is that his family increases, and he has more mouths to feed, and backs to clothe; or his estate growing larger, if he lives suitably to it, he must keep more servants; and these, as they have but little work to do, are described by their eating, rather than by their working; and besides, such a growing man in the world has more friends and visitors that come about him, and eat with him, as well as the poor, which wait upon him to receive his alms: and if his farms, and his fields, and his flocks, are enlarged, he must have more husbandmen, and labourers, and shepherds to look after them, who all must be maintained. So Pheraulas in Xenophon^{f131} observes,

“that now he was possessed of much, that he neither ate, nor drank, nor slept the sweeter for it; what he got by his plenty was, that he had more committed to his keeping, and more to distribute to others; he had more care and more business, with trouble; for now, says he, many servants require food of me, many drink, many clothing, some need physicians, etc. it must needs be, adds he, that they that possess much must spend much on the gods, on friends, and on guests;”

and what good [is there] to the owners thereof, saving the beholding [of them] with their eyes? he can go into his grounds, his fields, and his meadows to behold his flocks and his herds, and can say, all these are mine; he can go into his chambers and open his treasures, and feed his eyes with looking upon his bags of gold and silver, his jewels, and other riches; he can behold a multitude of people at his table, eating at his expense, and more maintained at his cost: and, if a liberal man, it may be a pleasure to him; if otherwise, it will give him pain: and, excepting these, he enjoys no more than food and raiment; and often so it is, that even his very servants have in some things the advantage of him, as follows. The Targum is,

“what profit is there to the owner thereof who gathers it, unless he does good with it, that he may see the gift of the reward with his eyes in the world to come?”

Jarchi interprets it after this manner,

“when men bring many freewill offerings, the priests are increased that eat them; and what good is to the owner of them, the Lord, but the sight of his eyes, who says, and his will is done?”

Ver. 12. *The sleep of a labouring man [is] sweet, whether he eat little or much,* etc.] Or “of a servant”^{f132}, who enjoys sleep equally as a king; a tiller of the ground, as Jarchi; who also interprets it of one that serves the Lord, as likewise the Targum; a beloved one of his, to whom he gives sleep, (^{4C7D}Psalm 127:2). A refreshing sleep is always reckoned a great mercy and blessing, and which labouring men enjoy with sweetness^{f133}; for if they have but little to eat at supper, yet coming weary from their work, sleep is easily brought on when they lie down, and sound sleep they have, and rise in the morning lively and active, and fit for business; or, if they eat more plentifully, yet through their labour they have a good digestion, and their sleep is not hindered: so that should it be answered to the above question, what has the master more than the servant, though he eats and drinks more freely, and of the best, and lives voluptuously? yet it may be replied, that, in the business of sleep, the labouring man has the preference to him; which must be owned to be a great blessing of life, and is often interrupted by excessive eating and drinking;

but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep; either the abundance of food which he eats, which loads his stomach, and fills his head with vapours, and makes him restless, so that he can get no sleep, or what he does get is very uncomfortable: or the abundance of his riches fills him with cares, what he shall do with them, and how to keep and increase them; and with fears, lest thieves should break in and take them away from him, so that he cannot sleep quietly^{f134}. The Targum is,

“sweet is the sleep of a man that serves the Lord of the world with a perfect heart; and he shall have rest in the house of his grave, whether he lives a few years or more, &c;”

and much to the same purpose Jarchi; and who says, it is thus interpreted in an ancient book of theirs, called Tanchuma.

Ver. 13. *There is a sore evil [which] I have seen under the sun,* etc.] Or “an evil sickness”^{f135}. A sinful disease in the person with whom it is found, and very disagreeable to others to behold; it is enough to make one sick to see it; and what he is about to relate he himself was an eyewitness of:

[namely], riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt; laid up in barns and granaries, as the fruits of the earth; or in chests and coffers, as gold and silver, for the use and service of the owners of them; and which yet have been to their real injury; being either used by them in a luxurious and intemperate way, so have brought diseases on their bodies, and damnation to their souls; or not used at all for their own good, or the good of others, which brings the curse of God upon them, to their ruin and destruction, both here and hereafter: and oftentimes so it is, and which no doubt had fallen under the observation of Solomon, that some who have been great misers, and have hoarded up their substance, without using them themselves, or sharing them with others, have not only been plundered of them, but, for the sake of them, their lives have been taken away in a most barbarous manner, by cutthroats and villains; sometimes by their own servants, nay, even by their own children. Riches ill gotten and ill used are very prejudicial to the owners; and if they are well got, but ill used, or not used at all, greatly hurt the spiritual and eternal state of men; it is a difficult thing for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and a covetous man cannot; if a professor, the word he hears is choked and made unprofitable; he errs from the faith, and pierces himself through with many sorrows now, and is liable to eternal damnation hereafter. The Targum interprets it of a man that gathers riches, and does no good with them; but keeps them to himself, to do himself evil in the world to come.

Ver. 14. *But those riches perish by evil travail,* etc.] Or, “by an evil business or affair”^{f136}. That is, such riches as are not well got, or are not used as they should be, these waste away and come to nothing; either by the owner’s bad management, and misconduct in trade and business; or by fire, tempest, thieves, and robbers, and many other ways and means: these are very certain things; and there are various ways by which they make themselves wings and flee away, under the direction of a divine providence;

and he begetteth a son, and [there is] nothing in his hand; the riches he had hoarded up, he designed for his son; but being stripped of them by one means or another, when he comes to die, has nothing to leave his son: or if his riches do not perish in his own lifetime, yet they are quickly consumed by his son, who, in a short time, has nothing to live upon; and so being brought up a gentleman, and in no business, is in a worse condition than such who have been brought up to work for their living, and in no expectation of an estate after the decease of their friends. The Targum understands it in this latter sense, paraphrasing the words thus,

“and those riches, which he shall leave his son after his death, shall perish, because he hath gotten them in an evil way; and they shall not remain in the hand of the son whom he hath begotten; neither shall anything remain in his hand.”

Ver. 15. *As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came*, etc.] This may be understood either of the covetous rich man, or of his son; and that supposing what is before said should not be the case of either of them, but they should possess their substance as long as they live; yet, when they come to die, they will be stripped of them all; of their gold and silver, their plate and jewels, and rich household furniture; of their cattle and possessions, farms and estates, which are no longer theirs; and even of their very clothes, and be as naked as they were when they came into the world; and which is indeed the case of every man, (^{<K02>}Job 1:21); and is used as an argument, and a very forcible one, against covetousness;

and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand; nothing of his substance, which he has got by his labour, and hoarded up with great care; not the least portion of it can he carry away with him when he dies; not any of his jewels, nor bags of gold and silver; and if any of these should be put into his grave, which has been sometimes done at the interment of great personages, these are of no manner of use and service to him, either to comfort and refresh his body, or to save his soul from hell, and procure it an entrance into the heavenly glory; (see ^{<S00>}1 Timothy 6:7 ^{<010>}Proverbs 11:4). The Targum allegorizes this in a very orthodox way, not very usual, in favour of original sin, and against the doctrine of merit;

“as he goes out of his mother’s womb naked, without a covering, and without any good; so he shall return to go to the house of his grave, indigent of merit, as he came into this world; and no good reward shall he receive by his labour, to take with him into the world to which he goes, that it may be for merit in his hand.”

Ver. 16. *And this also [is] a sore evil, [that] in all points as he came, so shall he go*, etc.] This seems not to be an evil or vanity, distinct from the former; but the same repeated and confirmed, and expressed, if possible, in stronger terms, that a man is in all respects alike, when he goes out of the world, as when he came in. A man’s birth is signified by “coming”, that is, out of his mother’s womb, and into the world; and which is a description of

every man born into it, (~~RB~~John 1:9); he is of the earth, earthly; comes forth like a flower, and springs up as grass; he comes not of himself, nor casually, but by means of his parents; and according to the determinate will of God, and to answer some end or other: and his death is signified by “going”: a going the way of all flesh; a going out of the world; a going to the grave, the house of all living, a man’s long home; it is like going from one house to another; for death is not an annihilation of man, but a remove of him from hence elsewhere; and a man’s birth and death are in all points alike. This is to be understood of natural and civil things; of riches and honours, which men cannot carry with them; and with respect to them, they are as they were born, naked and stripped of them; and with respect to the body, the parts of it then are the same, though more grown; it is as naked as it was born; and a man is as much beholden to his friends for his grave as for his swaddling clothes; it becomes what it was at first, earth and dust; and as a man comes not into the world at his own will and pleasure, so neither does he go out of it at his will, but the Lord’s. The Midrash interprets it thus,

“as a man comes into the world, with crying, weeping, and sighing, and without knowledge, so he goes out.”

Likewise this is only true of natural and unregenerate men as to moral things; as they are born in sin, they die in sin; with only this difference, an addition of more sin; as they come into the world without the image of God, without a righteousness, without holiness, and without the grace of God, so they go out of it without these things: but this is not true of saints and truly gracious persons; they come into the world with sin, but go out of it without it; being washed in the blood of Christ, justified by his righteousness, and all their sins expiated and pardoned through his sacrifice: they are born without a righteousness, but do not die without one; Christ has wrought out an everlasting righteousness for them; this is imputed to them; is received by faith; given them; they are found in it, living and dying; and this introduces them into heaven and happiness: they are born without holiness, but do not live and die without it; they are regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and at the moment of death made perfectly holy. This only therefore is true of men, as natural, and with respect to natural and civil things: the Targum interprets it,

“as he comes into this world void of merit, so he shall go into that;”

and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? for riches, which are as unsatisfying as the wind; which are as shifting, and as swift to flee away, as that; and can no more be held, when it is the will of God they should go, and especially at death, than the wind is to be held in the fist of men; and which are as unprofitable as that in the hour of death.

Particularly, what profit has a man of all his riches, which he has got by labour, when he neither makes use of them in life for his own good, nor the good of others; and when he comes to die, they leave him and stand him in no stead; and especially having been unconcerned about his immortal soul; and having been wholly taken up in the pursuit of such vain and transitory things? (see ⁴⁰⁶⁵Matthew 16:26).

Ver. 17. *All his days also he eateth in darkness*, etc.] To all that has been said is added another evil, that attends such whose hearts are inordinately set on riches; that all their days, throughout the whole of their lives, they live a most uncomfortable life; for eating is here put for their whole manner of living: such not only eat coarse bread, and very mean food of any sort, but wear sordid apparel, and live in a poor cottage, in a very obscure and miserable manner. Aben Ezra understands it literally of the night, to which time such a man defers eating, that he might lose no time in his labour; and that it might not be seen what sort of food he eats, and how sparingly, and that others might not eat with him; and what he does eat is not eaten freely, but grudgingly, and with anguish and distress of mind, without any real pleasure and joy; and much less with the light of God's countenance, the discoveries of his love, and communion with him: the Targum is,

“all his days he dwelleth in darkness, that he may taste his bread alone;”

and [he hath], much sorrow and wrath with his sickness; either the sickness of his mind, his covetousness; or the sickness of his body, emaciated by withholding from himself the necessaries of life: or when he comes upon a sick bed, he is filled with sorrow and indignation, that he must live no longer, to accumulate more wealth, and accomplish his projects and designs; and that he must leave his wealth, he has been at so much pains to gather together. Or, “and he is much angry”^{f137}; when things do not answer in trade according to his wishes; when his substance diminishes, or, however, does not increase as he desires; when he is cheated by fraudulent men, or robbed by thieves: “and he hath sickness”^{f138}; either of body or mind, or both, because matters do not

succeed as he would have them; and through fretfulness at losses and crosses, and disappointments; and through cares in getting and keeping what he has: “and wrath”; at all about him, whom he is ready to charge with slothfulness or unfaithfulness to him; and even at the providence of God, that does not give him the desired success; so that he has no manner of pleasure and comfort in life.

Ver. 18. *Behold that which I have seen*, etc.] Observed, considered and approved of, and which he recommended and excited attention to, and is as follows;

[it is] good and comely [for one] to eat and to drink; to make use of the creatures God has given for service in a free and liberal manner, without excess, and with moderation; and not deprive a man’s self of those things he may lawfully partake of, and are necessary for him: to do this is good for himself, and for the health of his body; and is right in the sight of God, and is comely before men; it is not only lawful, but laudable. There is another version and sense of the words, “it is good to eat and drink him that is fair”^{f139}, or comely; Christ, who is fairer than the children of men; to live by faith on him, to eat his flesh, and drink his blood; but this, however true, spiritual, and evangelical, it seems foreign to the text. It follows,

and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him; this last clause, “which God giveth him”, is not to be connected with “the good of all his labour”; though it is true, that whatever good is got by labour is the gift of God; but with “all the days of his life”; for the life of man, and all the days of it, be they more or fewer, are the gift of God, and according to his determinate will and pleasure; and throughout this time a man should enjoy, in a comfortable way, with thankfulness to God, the good things he has gotten by his labour and industry, through the blessing of God along with them. This Solomon frequently inculcates; Aben Ezra says, this is the third time, but it seems to be the fourth; (see ²¹⁰²⁴Ecclesiastes 2:24 3:13,22);

for it [is] his portion; that is, in this life; for otherwise, if a good man, he has a better portion in another: this is the part which God has allotted to him here; and it is his duty, and for his good and comfort, to make use of it.

Ver. 19. *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth*, etc.] Which include the whole of a man’s substance; all his estate, personal and

real; and all his goods and possessions, movable and immovable, as gold, silver, cattle, fields, and farms; which are all the gift of God, by whatsoever means they may be acquired or possessed;

and hath given him power; or, “caused him to have dominion”^{f140}, over his wealth and riches, and not be a slave to them, as many are: but to have so much command of them and of himself, as

to eat thereof; comfortably enjoy them; and dispose of them to his own good, the good of others, and the glory of God. It follows,

and to take his portion; which God hath allotted him; to take it thankfully, and use it freely and comfortably;

and to rejoice in his labour; in the things he has been labouring for, in a cheerful use of them; blessing God for them, and taking the comfort of them;

this [is] the gift of God; to have such power over his substance, and not be a slave to it, and to enjoy the fruits of his labour, in a cheerful and comfortable manner; this is as much the gift of God as riches themselves^{f141}.

Ver. 20. *For he shall not much remember the days of his life*, etc.] Be they more or fewer, as Jarchi: he will not think life long and tedious; nor dwell upon, and distress himself with, the troubles he has met with, or is likely to meet with; but, being content with the good things God has given him, and freely and cheerfully enjoying them, he passes away his time delightfully and pleasantly. Some, as Aben Ezra observes, and which he approves of, and is agreeably to the accents, render the words, “if he [has] not much, he remembers the days of his life”^{f142}; if he has but little of the good things of this life, he remembers how few his days are he has to live; and doubts not he shall have enough to carry him to the end of his days, and therefore is quite easy and content; he calls to mind how he has been supplied all his days hitherto, and is persuaded that that God, who has provided for him, will continue his goodness to him, and that he shall not want any good thing; and therefore does not distress himself with what is to come;

because God answereth [him] in the joy of his heart; he calls upon God for a blessing on his labours, asks of him his daily food, and desires what may be proper and sufficient for him, or what he judges is necessary and convenient; and God answers his prayers and petitions, and good wishes,

by filling his heart with food and gladness; and giving him that cheerfulness of spirit, and thankfulness of heart, in the enjoyment of every blessing; and especially if along with it he lifts up the light of his countenance, and grants him joy in the Holy Ghost; he will go on so pleasantly and comfortably as to forget all his former troubles; and it will dissipate his doubts and fears about how he shall live for the future.