

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 7

The wise man having exposed the many vanities to which men are subject in this life, and showed that there is no real happiness in all outward enjoyments under the sun; proceeds to observe what are remedies against them, of which he had interspersed some few hints before, as the fear and worship of God, and the free and, moderate use of the creatures; and here suggests more, and such as will protect from them, or support under them, or teach and instruct how to behave while attended with them, and to direct to what are proper and necessary in the pursuit of true and real happiness; such as care of a good name and reputation, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:1); frequent meditation on mortality, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:2-4); listening to the rebukes of the wise, which are preferable to the songs and mirth of fools, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:5,6); avoiding oppression and bribery, which are very pernicious, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:7); patience under provocations, and present bad times, as thought to be, (^{2100b}Ecclesiastes 7:8-10); a pursuit of that wisdom and knowledge which has life annexed to it, (²¹⁰⁷¹Ecclesiastes 7:11,12); submission to the will of God, and contentment in every state, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:13,14); shunning extremes in righteousness and sin, the best antidote against which is the fear of God, (²¹⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:15-18); such wisdom as not to be offended with everything that is done, or word that is spoken, considering the imperfection of the best of men, the weakness of others, and our own, (²¹⁰⁷⁹Ecclesiastes 7:19-22); and then the wise man acknowledges the imperfection of his own wisdom and knowledge, notwithstanding the pains he had taken, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:23-25); and laments his sin and folly in being drawn aside by women, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:26-28); and opens the cause of the depravity of human nature, removes it from God, who made man upright, and ascribes it to man, the inventor of evil things, (²¹⁰⁷³Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Ver. 1. *A good name [is] better than precious ointment*, etc.] The word “good” is not in the text, but is rightly supplied, as it is by Jarchi; for of no other name can this be said; that which is not good cannot be better. Some understand this of the name of God, which is God himself, who is the

“summum bonum”, and chief happiness of men, and take it to be an answer to the question (²⁰⁶²Ecclesiastes 6:12); this and this only is what is a man’s good, and is preferable to all outward enjoyments whatever; interest in him as a covenant God; knowledge of him in Christ, which has eternal life annexed to it; communion with him; the discoveries of his lovingkindness, which is better than little; and the enjoyment of him to all eternity. This is true of the name of Christ, whose name Messiah which signifies anointed, is as ointment poured forth, and is preferable to it, (²⁰⁰⁸Song of Solomon 1:3 ³⁰⁴⁴John 1:41); so his other names, Jesus a Saviour; Jehovah, our righteousness; Immanuel, God with us; are exceeding precious to those who know the worth of him, and see their need of righteousness and salvation by him; his person, and the knowledge of him; his Gospel, and the fame and report it gives of him; infinitely exceed the most precious and fragrant ointment; see (⁴⁰²⁴2 Corinthians 2:14-16). So the name or names given to the people of God, the new names of Hephzibah and Beulah, the name of sons of God, better than that of sons and daughters; and of Christians, or anointed ones, having received that anointing from Christ which teacheth all things, and so preferable to the choicest ointment, (²⁵⁹⁵Isaiah 56:5 62:3,4 65:15 ⁶⁰²⁷Revelation 2:17) (⁴¹¹⁵Acts 11:26 ³¹²¹1 John 2:20, 27). Likewise to have a name written in heaven, in the Lamb’s book of life, and to have one’s name confessed by Christ hereafter before his Father and his holy angels; or even a good name among men, a name for a truly godly gracious person; for love to Christ, zeal for his cause, and faithfulness to his truths and ordinances; such as the woman got, better than the box of ointment poured on Christ’s head; and which the brother had, whose praise in the Gospel was throughout the churches; and as Demetrius, who had good report of all then, and of the truth itself, (⁴⁰⁵³Matthew 26:13 ⁴⁰⁸⁸2 Corinthians 8:18) (⁶⁰¹²3 John 1:12). Such a good name is better than precious ointment for the value of it, being better than all riches, for which this may be put; (see ²³⁹⁰Isaiah 39:2 ³¹²⁰Proverbs 22:1); and for the fragrant of it, emitting a greater; and for the continuance of it, being more lasting, (³⁹²⁶Psalms 112:6) (³⁰⁰⁶Proverbs 10:6). The Targum is,

“better is a good name the righteous get in this world, thin the anointing oil which was poured upon the heads of kings and priests.”

So Alshech,

“a good name is better than the greatness of a king, though anointed with oil;”

and the day of death than the day of one's birth; some render it, in connection with the preceding clause, “as a good name is better, etc. so the day of death than the day of one's birth”^{f153}; that is, the day of a man's death than the day of his birth. This is to be understood not of death simply considered; for that in itself, abstracted from its connections and consequences, is not better than to be born into the world, or come into life, or than life itself; it is not preferable to it, nor desirable; for it is contrary to nature, being a dissolution of it; a real evil, as life, and long life, are blessings; an enemy to mankind, and a terrible one: nor of ether persons, with whom men have a connection, their friends and relations; for with them the day of birth is a time of rejoicing, and the day of death is a time of mourning, as appears from Scripture and all experience; (see ^{<B1C2>}John 16:21 ^{<O41D>}Genesis 40:20) (^{<O446>}Matthew 14:6-10 ^{<O23D>}Genesis 23:2 ^{<B113>}John 11:31,33). It is indeed reported^{f154} of some Heathenish and barbarous people in Thrace, and who inhabited Mount Caucasus, that they mourned at the birth of their children, reckoning up the calamities they are entering into, and rejoiced at the death of their friends, being delivered from their troubles: but this is to be understood of the persons themselves that are born and die; not of all mankind, unless as abstracted from the consideration of a future state, and so it is more happy to be freed from trouble than to enter into it; nor of wicked men, it would have been better indeed if they had never been born, or had died as soon as born, that their damnation might not have been aggravated by the multitude of their sins; but after all, to die cannot be best for them, since at death they are cast into hell, into everlasting fire, and endless punishment: this is only true of good men, that have a good name living and dying; have a good work of grace upon them, and so are meet for heaven; the righteousness of Christ on them, and so have a title to it; they are such who have hope in their death, and die in faith and in the Lord: their death is better than their birth; at their birth they come into the world under the imputation and guilt of sin, with a corrupt nature; are defiled with sin, and under the power of it, liable in themselves to condemnation and death for it: at the time of their death they go out justified from sin through the righteousness of Christ, all being expiated by his sacrifice, and pardoned for his sake; they are washed from the faith of sin by the blood of Christ, and are delivered from the power and being of it by the Spirit and grace of God; and are secured from

condemnation and the second death: at their coming into the world they are liable to sin yet more and more; at their going out they are wholly freed from it; at the time of their birth they are born to trouble, and are all their days exercised with it, incident to various diseases of the body, have many troubles in the world, and from the men of it; many conflicts with a body of sin and death, and harassed with the temptations of Satan; but at death they are delivered from all these, enter into perfect peace and unspeakable joy; rest from all their labours and toils, and enjoy uninterrupted communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit, angels, and glorified saints. The Targum is,

“the day in which a man dies and departs to the house of the grave, with a good name and with righteousness, is better than the day in which a wicked man is born into the world.”

So the Midrash interprets it of one that goes out of the world with a good name, considering this clause in connection with the preceding, as many do.

Ver. 2. [*It is*] *better to go to the house of mourning*, etc.] For deceased relations or friends, who either lie unburied, or have been lately interred; for the Jews kept their mourning for their dead several days afterwards, when their friends visited them in order to comfort them, as the Jews did Martha and Mary, (⁴¹¹³John 11:31). So the Targum here,

“it is better to go to a mourning man to comfort him;”

for at such times and places the conversation was serious and interesting, and turned upon the subjects of mortality and a future state, and preparation for it; from whence useful and instructive lessons are learned; and so it was much better to be there

than to go to the house of feasting: the Targum is,

“than to the house of a feast of wine of scorners;”

where there is nothing but noise and clamour, luxury and intemperance, carnal mirth and gaiety, vain and frothy conversation, idle talk and impure songs, and a jest made of true religion and godliness, death and another world;

for that [is] the end of all men; not the house of feasting, but the house of mourning; or mourning itself, as Jarchi; every man must expect to lose his

relation and friend, and so come to the house of mourning; and must die himself, and be the occasion of mourning: death itself seems rather intended, which is the end of all men, the way of all flesh; for it is appointed for men to die; and so the Targum,

“seeing upon them all is decreed the decree of death;”

and the living will lay [it] to his heart; by going to the house of mourning, he will be put in mind of death, and will think of it seriously, and consider his latter end, how near it is; and that this must be his case shortly, as is the deceased’s he comes to mourn for. So the Targum interprets it of words concerning death, or discourses of mortality he there hears, which he takes notice of and lays to his heart, and lays up in it. Jarchi’s note is,

“their thought is of the way of death.”

Ver. 3. *Sorrow [is] better than laughter*, etc.] Sorrow, expressed in the house of mourning, is better, more useful and commendable, than that foolish laughter, and those airs of levity, expressed in the house of feasting; or sorrow on account of affliction and troubles, even adversity itself, is oftentimes much more profitable, and conduces more to the good of men, than prosperity; or sorrow for sin, a godly sorrow, a sorrow after a godly sort, which works repentance unto salvation, that needeth not to be repented of, is to be preferred to all carnal mirth and jollity. It may be rendered, “anger [is] better than laughter”^{f155}; which the Jews understand of the anger of God in correcting men for sin; which is much better than when he takes no notice of them, but suffers them to go on in sin, as if he was pleased with them; the Midrash gives instances of it in the generation of the flood and the Sodomites: and the Targum inclines to this sense,

“better is the anger, with which the Lord of that world is angry against the righteous in this world, than the laughter with which he derides the ungodly.”

Though it may be better, with others, to understand it of anger in them expressed against sin, in faithful though sharp rebukes for it; which, in the issue, is more beneficial than the flattery of such who encourage in it; (see ~~27:5~~ Proverbs 27:5,6);

for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better: when the sadness is not hypocritical, as in the Scribes and Pharisees, but serious and real, arising from proper reflections on things in the mind; whereby the

heart is drawn off from vain, carnal, and sensual things; and is engaged in the contemplation of spiritual and heavenly ones, which is of great advantage to it: or by the severity of the countenance of a faithful friend, in correcting for faults, the heart is made better, which receives those corrections in love, and confesses its fault, and amends.

Ver. 4. *The heart of the wise [is] in the house of mourning*, etc.] When his body is not; when it does not suit him to go thither in person, his mind is there, and his thoughts are employed on the useful subjects of the frailty and mortality of human nature, of death, a future judgment, and a world to come; which shows him to be a wise man, and concerned for the best things, even for his eternal happiness in another state;

but the heart of fools [is] in the house of mirth; where jovial company is, merry songs are sung, and the cup or glass passes briskly round, and all is gay and brilliant: here the fool desires to be oftener than he is, and when he cannot; which shows the folly of his mind, what a vain taste he has, and how thoughtless he is of a future state, and of his eternal welfare.

Ver. 5. *[It is] better to hear the rebuke of the wise*, etc.] To listen to it diligently, receive it cordially, and act according to it; though it may be disagreeable to the flesh, and give present pain, yet the effect and issue will be good, and show that man to be wise that hears it, as well as he that gives it; (see ^{<19E0>}Psalm 141:1 ^{<105>}Proverbs 15:31,32 17:10);

than for a man to hear the song of fools; the vain and impure songs that foolish men sing in the house of mirth; or the flatteries of foolish men, which tickle and please the mind, as music and songs do: or, “than a man that hears the song of fools”^{f156}, and is pleased with it.

Ver. 6. *For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so [is] the laughter of the fool*, etc.] As thorns are weak, useless, and unprofitable; yea, hurtful and pernicious, and only fit for burning; so are foolish and wicked men, (^{<1216>}2 Samuel 23:6 ^{<2704>}Isaiah 27:4); and as the noise and sound of the one under a pot is very short, they make a blaze for a while, and is soon over; so though the laughter of a fool is loud and noisy, it makes no melody, no more than the noise of thorns; and is but for a moment, and will be soon changed for weeping and howling, which will last for ever; (see ^{<1816>}Job 20:5);

this also [is] vanity; the carnal mirth of wicked men.

Ver. 7. *Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad*, etc.] Which is to be understood either passively, when he is oppressed by others, or sees others oppressed; it raises indignation in him, disturbs his mind, and he is ready to pass a wrong judgment on the dispensations of Providence, and to say rash and unadvised things concerning them, (^{<497AD>}Psalm 73:2,3,12-14); or actively, of oppression with which he oppresses others; when he gives into such measures, his wisdom departs from him, his mind is besotted, he acts the part of a madman, and pierces himself through with many sorrows. Some understand this of wealth got in an ill way; or of gifts given to bribe men to do injury to others; and which the following clause is thought to explain;

and a gift destroyeth the heart; blinds the eyes of judges other ways wise; perverts their judgment, and causes them to pass a wrong sentence, as well as perverts justice: or, “and destroys the heart of gifts”^{f157}; a heart that is possessed of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge; or a munificent heart, a heart disposed to give bountifully and liberally, that oppression destroys and renders useless.

Ver. 8. *Better [is] the end of a thing than the beginning thereof*, etc.] If the thing is good, other ways the end of it is worse; as the end of wickedness and wicked men, whose beginning is sweet, but the end bitter; yea, are the ways of death, (^{<318D>}Proverbs 5:4 16:25); and so the end of carnal professors and apostates, who begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh, (^{<488B>}Galatians 3:3 ^{<602D>}2 Peter 2:20,21); but the end of good things, and of good men, is better than the beginning; as the end of Job was, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual, (^{<388E>}Job 8:7 42:12); see (^{<437F>}Psalm 37:37 ^{<400D>}Matthew 10:22 ^{<265>}Luke 16:25);

[and] the patient in spirit [is] better than the proud in spirit; patience is a fruit of the Spirit of God; and is of great use in the Christian’s life, and especially in bearing afflictions, and tends to make men more humble, meek, and quiet; and such are highly esteemed of God; on them he looks, with them he dwells, and to them he gives more grace; when such who are proud, and elated with themselves, their riches or righteousness, are abominable to him; (see ^{<265>}Luke 16:15 18:14).

Ver. 9. *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*, etc.] With men, for every word that is said, or action done, that is not agreeable; encourage not, but repress, sudden angry emotions of the mind; be not quick of resentment, and at once express anger and displeasure; but be slow to wrath, for such a

man is better than the mighty, (~~3019~~James 1:19) (~~3062~~Proverbs 16:32); or with God, for his corrections and chastisements; so the Targum,

“in the time that correction from heaven comes upon thee, do not hasten in thy soul to be hot (or angry) to say words of rebellion (or stubbornness) against heaven;”

that advice is good,

“do nothing in anger^{f158},”

for anger resteth in the bosom of fools; where it riseth quick, and continues long; here it soon betrays itself, and finds easy admittance, and a resting dwelling place; it easily gets in, but it is difficult to get it out of the heart of a fool; both which are proofs of his folly, (~~3026~~Proverbs 12:16 14:17); (see ~~4006~~Ephesians 4:26); the bosom, or breast, is commonly represented as the seat of anger by other writers^{f159}.

Ver. 10. *Say not thou, what is [the cause] that the former days were better than these?* etc.] This is a common opinion, that in all ages prevails among men, that former times were better than present ones; that trade flourished more, and men got more wealth and riches, and lived in greater ease and plenty; and complain that their lot is cast in such hard times, and are ready to lay the blame upon the providence of God, and murmur at it, which they should not do;

for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this: this is owing to ignorance of former times; which, if rightly inquired into, or the true knowledge of them could be come at, it would appear that they were no better than the present; and that there were always bad men, and bad things done; frauds, oppressions, and violence, and everything that can be complained of now: or if things are worse than they were, this should be imputed to the badness of men; and the inquirer should look to himself, and his own ways, and see if there is not a cause there, and study to redeem the time, because the days are evil; and not arraign the providence of God, and murmur at that, and quarrel with it; as if the distributions of it were unequal, and justice not done in one age as in another

Ver. 11. *Wisdom [is] good with an inheritance*, etc.] It is good of itself. Or, “is as good as an inheritance”^{f160}, as it may be rendered; it is a portion of itself, especially spiritual and divine wisdom. The Targum interprets it, the wisdom of the law, or the knowledge of that; but much more excellent

is the wisdom of the Gospel, the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom; the knowledge of which, in an experimental way, is preferable to all earthly inheritances: but this with an inheritance is good, yea, better than without one; for wisdom, without riches, is generally overlooked and despised in men; see (<2096>Ecclesiastes 9:16); when wealth, with wisdom, makes a man regarded; this commands respect and attention; as well as he is in a better condition to do good, if willing to share, and ready to distribute;

and [by it there is] profit to them that see the sun; mortals in this present state, who are described as such that see the sun rise and set, and enjoy the heat and light of it, receive much advantage from men who are both wise and rich: or, “and [it is] an excellency to them that see the sun”; it is an excellency to mortals and what gives them superiority to others, that they have both wisdom and riches.

Ver. 12. *For wisdom [is] a defence, [and] money [is] a defence*, etc.] Or, a “shadow” of refreshment and protection, under which men sit with pleasure and safety; a man by his wisdom, and so by his money, is able to defend himself against the injuries and oppressions of others, and especially when both meet in one and the same man. Jarchi renders and interprets it,

“he that is in the shadow of wisdom is in the shadow of money, for wisdom is the cause why riches come;”

and so the Targum,

“as a man is hid in the shadow of wisdom, so he is hid in the shadow of money, when he does alms with it;”

compare with this (<2169>Luke 16:9); (see <2179>Ecclesiastes 7:19 <2196>Ecclesiastes 9:16 <2181>Proverbs 18:11). Theognis^{f161} has a saying much like this,

“riches and wisdom are always inexpugnable to mortals;”

but the excellency of knowledge [is, that] wisdom giveth life to them that have it; or, “the excellency of the knowledge of wisdom giveth life”^{f162}, etc. not of natural wisdom, or the knowledge of natural and civil things, the vanity of this is exposed, before by the wise man; but the knowledge of God in Christ; the knowledge of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God; and of the Gospel, and of all divine and spiritual things: this is a superior

excellency to riches, which often expose a man's life to danger, cannot preserve him from a corporeal death, much less from an eternal one. When this is the excellency of spiritual knowledge, that spiritual life goes along with it; such as are spiritually enlightened are spiritually quickened; live by faith on Christ, whom they know; and, through the knowledge of him, have all things pertaining to life and godliness, and have both a right and meetness for eternal life; yea, this knowledge is life eternal, (^{<B7B>}John 17:3); (see ^{<60B>}2 Peter 1:3); and this is the pure gift of Wisdom, or of Christ, and not owing to the merit of men, or works done in obedience to the law, which cannot give this life; (see ^{<B7D>}John 17:2 10:28) (^{<B7E>}Romans 6:23 ^{<B7F>}Galatians 3:21).

Ver. 13. *Consider the work of God*, etc.] This is dressed to those who thought the former days better than the present, and were ready to quarrel with the providence of God, (^{<207D>}Ecclesiastes 7:10); and are therefore advised to consider the work of God; not the work of creation, but of providence; which is the effect of divine sovereignty, and is conducted and directed according to the counsel of his will, and is always wisely done to answer the best ends and purposes: everything is beautiful in its season; contemplate, adore, and admire the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, displayed therein; it is such as cannot be made better, nor otherwise than it is;

for who can make [that] straight which he hath made crooked? or which seems to be so, irregular and disagreeable? No man can mend or make that better he finds fault with and complains of; nor can he alter the course of things, nor stay the hand, nor stop the providence of God: if it is his pleasure that public calamities should be in the world, or in such a part of it, as famine, pestilence, or the sword; or any affliction on families, and particular persons, or poverty and meanness in such and such individuals, there is no hindering it; whatever he has purposed and resolved, his providence effects, and there is no frustrating his designs; it signifies nothing for a creature to murmur and complain; it is best to submit to his will, for no alteration can be made but what he pleases. Some understand this of natural defects in human bodies, with which they are born, or which attend them, as blindness, lameness, etc. so the Targum,

“consider the work of God, and his strength, who made the blind, the crooked, and the lame, to be wonders in the world; for who can

make straight one of them but the Lord of the world, who made him crooked?”

Others, of spiritual defects in such who walk in crooked ways, and are hardened in them; who can correct them, and make them other ways, if God does not give them his grace to convert them, and soften their hard hearts? he hardens whom he will, and who hath resisted his will? Jarchi’s paraphrase is,

“who can make straight after death what he has made crooked in life?”

(see Gill on “⁻²⁰¹⁵Ecclesiastes 1:15”). Alshech interprets it of the first man Adam.

Ver. 14. *In the day of prosperity be joyful*, etc.] Or, “in a good day”^{f163}. When things go well in the commonwealth, in a man’s family, and with himself, health, peace, and plenty, are enjoyed, a man’s circumstances are thriving and flourishing; it becomes him to be thankful to God, freely and cheerfully to enjoy what is bestowed on him, and do good with it: or, “be in good”^{f164}; in good heart, in good spirits, cheerful and lively; or, “enjoy good”, as the Vulgate Latin version; for what God gives to men is given them richly to enjoy, to make use of themselves, and be beneficial unto others; so the Targum,

“in the day the Lord does well to thee be thou also in goodness, and do good to all the world;”

(see ⁻⁸⁶⁰Galatians 6:10); Jarchi’s paraphrase is,

“when it is in thine hand to do good, be among those that do good;”

but in the day of adversity consider; or, “in the day of evil”^{f165}; consider from whence affliction comes; not out of the dust, nor by chance, but from God, and by his wise appointment; and for what it comes, that sin is the cause of it, and what that is; and also for what ends it is sent, to bring to a sense of sin, and confession of it, and humiliation for it; to take it away, and make good men more partakers of holiness: or, “look for the day of adversity”^{f166}; even in the day of prosperity it should be expected; for there is no firmness and stability in any state; there are continual vicissitudes and changes. The Targum is,

“that the evil day may not come upon thee, see and behold;”

be careful and circumspect, and behave in a wise manner, that so it may be prevented. Jarchi’s note is,

“when evil comes upon the wicked, be among those that see, and not among those that are seen;”

and compares it with (²¹⁶⁴Isaiah 66:24); It may be observed, that there is a set time for each of these, prosperity and adversity; and that the time is short, and therefore called a day; and the one is good, and the other is evil; which characters they have according to the outward appearance, and according to the judgment and esteem of men; otherwise, prosperity is oftentimes hurtful, and destroys fools, and adversity is useful to the souls of good men;

God also hath set the one over against the other; they are both by his appointment, and are set in their proper place, and come in their proper time; succeed each other, and answer to one another, as day and night, summer and winter, and work, together for the good of men;

to the end that man should find nothing after him; should not be able to know what will be hereafter; what his case and circumstances will be, whether prosperous or adverse; since things are so uncertain, and so subject to change, and nothing permanent; and therefore can find nothing to trust in and depend upon, nothing that he can be sure of: and things are so wisely managed and disposed, that a man can find no fault with them, nor just reason to complain of them; so the Vulgate Latin version, “not find just complaints against him”; and to the same purpose the Syriac version, “that he may complain of him”; the Targum is,

“not find any evil in this world.”

Ver. 15. *All [things] have I seen in the days of my vanity*, etc.] Or, “all these things”^{f167}. What goes before and follows after, the various changes men are subject unto, both good and bad; these he had made his observations upon, throughout the course of his life, which had been a vain one, as every man’s is, full of evil and trouble; (see ²¹⁶²Ecclesiastes 6:12); perhaps the wise man may have some respect to the times of his apostasy; and which might, among other things, be brought on by this; observing good men afflicted, and the wicked prosper, which has often been a stumbling to good men;

there is a just [man] that perisheth in his righteousness; not eternally; no truly just man ever perished, who is made so by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; for though the righteous man is said to be scarcely saved, yet he is certainly saved: it can be true only in this sense of one that is only outwardly righteous, that trusts to his own righteousness, in which he may perish; but this is to be understood temporally and corporeally; one that is really just may perish in his name, in his substance, as well as at death, and that on account of his righteousness; he may lose his good name and character, and his substance, for righteousness's sake; yea, his life also, as Abel, Naboth, and others; this is the case "sometimes", as Aben Ezra observes, not always: or a just man, notwithstanding his righteousness, dies, and sometimes lives but a short time; which sense the antithesis seems to require;

and there is a wicked [man] that prolongeth [his life] in his wickedness; is very wicked, and yet, notwithstanding his great wickedness, lives a long time in the world; (see ^{<800>}Job 21:7).

Ver. 16. *Be not righteous over much*, etc.] This is not meant of true and real righteousness, even moral righteousness, a man cannot be too holy or too righteous; but of a show and ostentation of righteousness, and of such who would be thought to be more righteous and holy than others, and therefore despise those who, as they imagine, do not come up to them; and are very rigid and censorious in their judgment of others, and very severe in their reproofs of them; and, that they may appear very righteous persons, will do more than what the law requires of them to do, even works of supererogation, as the Pharisees formerly, and Papists now, pretend, and abstain from the lawful use of things which God has given to be enjoyed; and macerate their bodies by abstinence, fastings, pilgrimages, penance, scourges, and the like, as the Eremites among the Christians, and the Turks, as Aben Ezra on the place observes; and many there be, who, by an imprudent zeal for what they judge right, and which sometimes are mere trifles, and by unseasonable reproofs for what is wrong, expose themselves to resentment and danger. Some understand this of political and punitive justice, exercising it in too strict and rigorous a manner, according to the maxim, "summum jus saepe summa injuria est"^{f168}; and Schultens^{f169}, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, renders it, "be not too rigid"; and others, in a contrary sense, of too much mercy and pity to offenders. So the Midrash; and Jarchi illustrates it by the case of Saul, who had mercy on the wicked, and spared Agag. The Targum is,

“be not over righteous at a time that a sinner is found guilty of slaughter in thy court of judicature, that thou shouldest spare and not kill him;”

neither make thyself over wise; above what is written, or pretend to be wiser than others. So the Arabic version, “show not too much wisdom”; do not affect, as not to be more righteous than others, so not more wise, by finding fault with present times, or with the dispensations of Providence, or with the manners and conduct of men; setting up for a critic and a censurer of men and things; or do not pry into things, and seek after a knowledge of them, which are out of your reach, and beyond your capacity;

why shouldest thou destroy thyself? either by living too strictly and abstemiously, or by studying too closely, or by behaving in such a manner to men, as that they will seek thy destruction, and bring it on thee: or “why shouldest thou”, or “whereby”, or “lest, thou shouldest be stupid”^{f170}; lose thy sense and reason, as persons who study the knowledge of things they have not a capacity for: or why shouldest thou become foolish in the eyes of all men by thy conduct and behaviour? or, “why shouldest thou be desolate”^{f171}; alone, and nobody care to have any conversation and acquaintance with thee?

Ver. 17. *Be not over much wicked*, etc.] Not that a man should be wicked at all; but some, observing that wicked men prolong their days in wickedness, are encouraged to go into greater lengths in sin than they have yet done, and give up themselves to all iniquity; and run into excess of not, into the grossest and most scandalous enormities. Some render it, “do not disturb” or “frighten thyself”^{f172}, distress and distract thyself with the business of life, bustling and stirring, restless and uneasy, to get wealth and riches; but be easy and satisfied with what is enjoyed, or comes without so much stir and trouble; this is the original sense of the word. The meaning seems to be, either do not multiply sin, add unto it, and continue in it; or do not aggravate it, making sins to be greater and more heinous than they are, and a man’s case worse than it is, and so sink into despair; and thus it stands opposed to an ostentatious show of righteousness;

neither be thou foolish; or give up thyself to a profligate life, to go on in a course of sin, which will issue in the ruin of body and soul; or in aggravating it in an excessive manner;

why shouldest thou die before thy time? bring diseases on thy body by a wicked course of living, which will issue in death; or fall into the hands of the civil magistrate, for capital offences, for which sentence of death must pass and be executed, before a man comes to the common term of human life; (see ^(~~1683~~)Psalm 55:23 90:10); or, as Mr. Broughton renders it, “before thy ordinary time”; not before the appointed time^{f173}. The Targum is,

“be the cause of death to thy soul;”

or through despair commit suicide.

Ver. 18. [*It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this*, etc.] This advice, as the Arabic version, in the several branches of it; neither to be over much righteous or wicked, and over much wise or foolish; to avoid the one and the other, to keep clear of extremes, and pursue the path that is safest; such advice as this it is right to lay hold on, embrace, and hold fast;

yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand; from what follows concerning the fear of God; or “this [and] this” may be rendered “this [and] that”^{f174}, and the sense be, lay hold on this, that is, the last part of the advice, not to be over much wicked or foolish, which is often the cause of an immature death; and do not slacken or be remiss in regarding that other and first part of it, not to be over much righteous or wise;

for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all; or escape them all; the phrase is become Rabbinical, that, is, he shall be free or exempt from them all; from over much righteousness and over much wisdom, and over much wickedness or over much folly; the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, is the best preservative from, and antidote against, these things; for a man that fears God is humble, and renounces his own righteousness, and distrusts his own wisdom; he fears to commit sin, and shuns folly.

Ver. 19. *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise*, etc.] Against such extremes as before mentioned; it is a guard about him, as well as a guide unto him; it is a defence unto him, as before observed, (^(~~2072~~)Ecclesiastes 7:12); and is better than strength of body, or weapons of war, (^(~~2096~~)Ecclesiastes 9:16,18); and a wise man does greater things by it than a strong man with them, and is safer with it than he can be by them. Some understand this of Christ, the Wisdom of God, without whom a good man can do nothing, but all things through him strengthening him; and who being a strong tower and place of refuge to him, he is safer in him than if he was in the strongest garrison,

and under the protection of ever so large a number of valiant men: Christ, and grace from him, strengthen

more than ten mighty [men] which are in the city; that is, than many mighty men, or men of war, which guard a city; the city of Jerusalem, or any other. The Targum applies this to Joseph, and paraphrases it,

“the wisdom of Joseph the son of Jacob helped him to make him wiser than all his ten righteous brethren.”

Ver. 20. *For [there is] not a just man upon earth*, etc.] Or “although”, or “notwithstanding”^{f175}, wisdom is so beneficial, and guards and strengthens a good man, yet no man has such a share of it as to live without sin; there was not then one on earth, there never had been, one, nor never would be, nor has been, excepting the man Christ Jesus; who indeed, as man, was perfectly just, while here on earth, and went about doing good, and never sinned in all his life; but this cannot be said of any other, no, not of one that is truly and really just; not externally and in his own opinion only, but who is made so by the obedience of Christ, or by his righteousness imputed to him, while he is here on earth; otherwise in heaven, where the spirits of just men are made perfect, there it may be said of them what follows, but nowhere else;

that doeth good, and sinneth not; it is the character of a just man to do good, to do that which is according to the will of God, from a principle of love to him, through faith in him, in the name and strength of Christ, and with a view to the glory of God; to do good in such a sense wicked men cannot; only such who are made good by the grace of God, are regenerated and made new creatures in Christ, are quickened by his Spirit, and are true believers in him; who appear to be what they are, by the fruits of good works they bring forth; and this not in a mercenary way, or in order to obtain life and righteousness, but as constrained by the grace of God, by which they are freely justified; and yet these are not free from sin, as appears by their confessions and complaints, by their backslidings, slips, and falls, and their petitions for fresh discoveries of pardoning grace; and even are not without sin, and the commission of it, in religious duties, or while they are doing good; hence their righteousness is said to be as filthy rags, and mention is made of the iniquity of holy things, (²³⁶Isaiah 64:6 ²³⁸Exodus 28:38). The Targum is,

“that does good all his days, and sins not before the Lord.”

Aben Ezra justly gives the sense thus,

“who does good always, and never sins;”

and observes that there are none but sin in thought, word, or deed. The poet^{f176} says,

“to sin is common to all men;”

no man, though ever so good, is perfect on earth, or free from sin; see (<1K85>1 Kings 8:46 <1P19>Proverbs 20:9 <1J18>1 John 1:8). Alshech’s paraphrase is,

“there is not a righteous man on earth, that does good, and sins not;
awhh bwj b, “in that good;”

which is the true sense of the words.

Ver. 21. *Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken*, etc.] Seeing so it is, that imperfection attends the best of men, no man is wise at all times, foolish words and unguarded expressions will sometimes drop from him, which it is better to take no notice of; they should not be strictly attended to, and closely examined, since they will not bear it. A man should not listen to everything that is said of himself or others; he should not curiously inquire what men say of him; and what he himself hears he should take no notice of; it is often best to let it pass, and not call it over again; to feign the hearing of a thing, or make as if you did not hear it; for oftentimes, by rehearsing a matter, or taking up words spoken, a deal of trouble and mischief follows; a man should not “give [his] heart”^{f177} to it, as it is in the Hebrew text; he should not give his mind to what is said of him, but be careless and indifferent about it; much less should he lay it up in his mind, and meditate revenge for it. The Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, restrain it to words spoken by wicked men, whose tongues are their own, and will say what they please; among these may be ranked, more especially, detractors, whisperers, backbiters, and talebearers, who should not be listened unto and encouraged; though there is no necessity of thus limiting the sense, which is more general, and may include what is said by any man, even good men, since they have their infirmities; it seems chiefly to have respect to defamatory words, by what follows;

lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; speak slightly, scoffingly, and reproachfully of thee, as Shimei of David; which must be very disagreeable

and vexatious to hear from one so mean and abject, and who is dependent on him, earns his bread of him, and gets his livelihood in his service; and to whom, perhaps, he has been kind, and so is guilty of base ingratitude, which aggravates the more; or, if not, if what he says is just, to hear it must give great uneasiness.

Ver. 22. *For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth*, etc.] Or “thy conscience”, as the Vulgate Latin version, which is as a thousand witnesses; which, if a man attends to, he will be convinced of his own faults, failings, and infirmities, he is frequently in the commission of. Particularly,

that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others; either in heart, or with the tongue; thought ill of them, wished ill to them; spoke contemptibly of them, reviled and reproached them; called them by bad names, and abused them; and said some very hard and severe words concerning them, in a passionate fit, being provoked; and afterwards repented of it, being better informed of the state of the case, or being convinced of the evil of passion and rash speaking; and therefore such should consider the like passions and infirmities of others, and pass over them, and forgive them: so Alshech,

“if thou hast cursed others, and dost desire men should forgive thee, so do thou also forgive;”

(see ⁴⁰⁶⁴Matthew 6:14,15). The word “oftentimes”, in the first clause, is to be connected, not with the word “knoweth”, as if a man often knew this, but with the word “cursed”; suggesting, that a man may be often guilty of this himself, and therefore should be more sparing of his censures of others; (see ⁴⁰⁰⁸Matthew 7:1-5).

Ver. 23. *All this have I proved by wisdom*, etc.] Referring either to all that he had been discoursing of hitherto in this book, concerning the vanity of natural wisdom and knowledge, of pleasure, power, and riches; or to the several useful instructions given in this chapter, particularly concerning patiently bearing everything from the hands of God or men,

(²⁰⁰⁸Ecclesiastes 7:8-22). This, by the help and use of that wisdom which God had given him, he had made trial of, and found it to be right, and therefore recommended it to others; though he acknowledges that, with all his wisdom, he was from perfection;

I said, I will be wise; but it [was] far from me; he determined, if possible, to attain to the perfection of wisdom, and made use of all means to come at

it; that he might know all the works of God in creation, the nature, use, and excellency of them; in providence, his different dispensations towards the sons of men, and the causes of them; and in grace, the redemption and salvation of men, and the mysteries thereof; but the more he knew, the more he was convinced of his own ignorance, and seemed further off from the summit of knowledge than he was before; and plainly saw, that perfection in wisdom is not attainable in this life. The Targum restrains this to the wisdom of the law; but it is better to understand it in a more general sense.

Ver. 24. *That which is far off*, etc.] Or, “far off [is] that which has been”^{f178}. That which has been done by God already, in creation and providence, is out of the reach of men, is far from their understandings wholly to comprehend or account for; and likewise that which is past with men, what has been done in former ages, the history of past times, is very difficult to come at: or rather, according to Schmidt, and Rambachius after him, what was of old is now afar off or absent; the image of God in man which consisted of perfect wisdom, and was created at the same time with him, is now lost, and that is the reason why wisdom is far from him;

and exceeding deep, who can find it out? the primitive perfect wisdom is sunk so deep and gone, that no man can find it to the perfection it was once enjoyed; (see ^{<8382>}Job 28:12-23). This may respect the knowledge of God, and the perfections of his nature; which are as high as heaven, and deeper than hell, (^{<810>}Job 11:7,8); and of his thoughts, counsels, purposes, and decrees, which are the deep things of God; as well as the doctrines of the Gospel, and the mysteries of grace, (^{<410>}1 Corinthians 2:10,11); and even his providential dispensations towards the sons of men, (^{<613>}Romans 11:33). The Targum of the whole is,

“Lo, now it is far off from the children of men to know all that has been from the days of old; and the secret of the day of death, and the secret of the day in which the King Messiah shall come, who is he that shall find it out by his wisdom?”

Ver. 25. *I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom*, etc.] Or, “I and my heart turned about”^{f179}; took a circuit, a tour throughout the whole compass of things; looked into every corner, and went through the circle of knowledge, in order to search and find out what true wisdom is; which is no other than Christ, and a spiritual knowledge of him; a variety of words is used to express his eager desire after wisdom,

and the diligent search he made, from which he was not discouraged by the difficulties he met with; (see ^{<2013>}Ecclesiastes 1:13);

and the reason [of things]; either in nature or providence: or the estimation ^{f180} of them; the excellency of them, how much they are to be accounted of, esteemed, and valued; as Christ, the Wisdom of God, and all things relating to him, should;

and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness [and] madness; the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the folly and madness that are in it; sin is the effect of folly, and the excess of it, and a spiritual madness; it is true of all sin in general, but especially of the sin of uncleanness, which Solomon seems to have in view by what follows; (see ^{<2017>}Ecclesiastes 1:17 2:12); and may chiefly intend the wickedness of his own folly, and the foolishness of his own madness.

Ver. 26. *And I find more bitter than death the woman*, etc.] This was the issue of his diligent studies and researches, and the observations he had made; this was what he found by sad and woeful experience, and which he chose to take particular notice of; that he might not only expose this vanity among others, and caution men against it, even the love of women, which at best is a bitter sweet, as the poet ^{f181} calls it, though here adulterous love is meant; but having this opportunity, might express his sincere repentance for this folly of his life, than which nothing had been more bitter to him, in the reflection of his mind upon it: death is a bitter thing, and terrible to nature, (^{<0652>}1 Samuel 15:32); but to be ensnared by an adulterous woman is worse than that; it brings not only such diseases of body as are both painful and scandalous, but such horrors into the conscience, when awakened, as are intolerable, and exposes to eternal death; (see ^{<2018>}Proverbs 5:3,4). By “the woman” is not meant the sex in general, which was far from Solomon’s intention to reflect upon and reproach; nor any woman in particular, not Eve, the first woman, through whom came sin and death into the world; but an adulterous woman: (see ^{<2014>}Proverbs 5:4). Some interpret this of original sin, or the corruption of nature, evil concupiscence, which draws men into sin, and holds them in it, the consequence of which is death eternal; but such who find favour in the eyes of God are delivered from the power and dominion of it; but obstinate and impenitent sinners are held under it, and perish eternally. Jarchi, by the woman, understands heresy; and so Jerom and others interpret it of heretics and idolaters: it may very well be applied to that Jezebel, the

whore of Rome, the mother of harlots, that deceives men, and leads them into perdition with herself, (^{<66704>}Revelation 17:4,5,8 18:23); and who is intended by the harlot, and foolish and strange woman, in the book of Proverbs, as has been observed;

whose heart [is] snares and nets, [and] her hands [as] bands; all the schemes and contrivances of a harlot are to ensnare men by her wanton looks and lascivious gestures; which are like snares laid for the beasts, and likeness spread for fishes, to take them in; and when she has got them, she holds them fast; it is a very difficult thing and a very rare one, ever to get out of her hands; so Plautus^{f182} makes mention of the nets of harlots: the same holds true of error and heresy, and of idolatry, which is spiritual adultery; the words used being in the plural number, shows the many ways the adulterous woman has to ensnare men, and the multitudes that are taken by her; see (^{<66338>}Revelation 13:3,10,14);

whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her: or, “who is good before God”, or “in his sight”^{f183}; (see Gill on “^{<2026>}Ecclesiastes 2:26”); to whom he gives his grace and is acceptable to him; such an one as Joseph was shall escape the snares and nets, the hands and bands, of such a woman; or if fallen into them, as Solomon fell, shall be delivered out of them, as it is observed by various interpreters: nothing but the grace of God, the true fear of God, the power of godliness and undefiled religion, can preserve a person from being ensnared and held by an impure woman; not a liberal nor religious education, not learning and good sense, nor any thing else; if a man is kept out of the hands of such creatures, he ought to esteem it a mercy, and ascribe it to the grace and goodness of God;

but the sinner shall be taken by her; a hardened and impenitent sinner, that is destitute of the grace and fear of God; who is habitually a sinner, and gives up himself to commit iniquity; whose life is a continued series of sinning; who has no guard upon himself, but rushes into sin, as the horse into the battle; he becomes an easy prey to a harlot; he falls into her snares, and is caught and held by her; see (^{<2024>}Proverbs 22:14).

Ver. 27. *Behold, this have I found*, etc.] That a harlot is more bitter than death; and which he found by his own experience, and therefore would have it observed by others for their caution: or one man among a thousand, (^{<2028>}Ecclesiastes 7:28);

(saith the preacher); of which title and character (see ^{<2006>}Ecclesiastes 1:1); it is here mentioned to confirm the truth of what he said; he said it as a preacher, and, upon the word of a preacher, it was true; as also to signify his repentance for his sin, who was now the “gathered soul”, as some render it; gathered into the church of God by repentance;

[counting] one by one, to find out the account; not his own sins, which he endeavoured to reckon up, and find out the general account of them, which yet he could not do; nor the good works of the righteous, and the sins of the wicked, which are numbered before the Lord one by one, till they are added to the great account; as Jarchi, from the Rabbins, interprets it, and so the Midrash: but rather the sense is, examining women, one by one, all within the verge of his acquaintance; particularly the thousand women that were either his wives or concubines; in order to take and give a just estimate of their character and actions. What follows is the result.

Ver. 28. *Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not*, etc.] He was very earnest and diligent in his inquiry; he took a great deal of pains, and was exceedingly solicitous; he sought with great intenseness of mind, and with an eager desire, to find out a chaste and virtuous woman among them all, but could not;

one man among a thousand have I found; it is a great rarity to find a good man ^{f184}, truly wise and gracious; there are many that walk in the broad way, and but few that find the strait gate and narrow way, and are saved; they are but as one to a thousand; (see ^{<2181>}Jeremiah 5:1 ^{<2173>}Matthew 7:13,14). Or rather, by this one of a thousand, is meant the, Messiah, the Wisdom of God, he sought for, (^{<2075>}Ecclesiastes 7:25); and now says he found; to whom he looked for peace, pardon, and atonement, under a sense of his sins; who is the messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand; yea, who is the chiefest among ten thousands, (^{<1833>}Job 33:23 ^{<2150>}Song of Solomon 5:10); who is superior to angels and men, in the dignity of his person; in the perfection, purity, and holiness of his nature; in the excellency of his names; in his offices and relations; and in his concern in the affairs of grace and salvation; and who is to be found by every truly wise and gracious soul that seeks him early and earnestly, in the word and ordinances, under the illumination and direction of the blessed Spirit. If it is to be understood of a mere man, I should think the sense was this; of all the men that have been ensnared and taken by an adulterous woman, but

one of a thousand have I observed, and perhaps Solomon has respect to himself, that was ever recovered out of her hands;

but a woman among all those have I not found; that is, among all the harlots and adulterous women I ever knew or heard of, I never knew nor heard of one that was ever reclaimed from her evil ways, and reformed or became a chaste and virtuous woman: he may have respect to the thousand women that were either his wives and concubines, and, among all these, he found not one that deserved the above character; for this is not to be understood of women in general, for Solomon must have known that there have been good women in all ages, and perhaps more than men; and that there were many in his days, though those with whom his more intimate acquaintance was were not such, which was his unhappiness; and his criminal conversation with them is what he lamented and repented of. It may be interpreted thus, One man, the Messiah, among all the sons of men, have I found, free from original sin; but one woman, among all the daughters of Eve, I have not found clear of it. The Targum is,

“there is another thing which yet my soul seeketh, and I have not found; a man perfect and innocent, without corruption, from the days of Adam, till Abraham the righteous was born; who was found faithful and just among the thousand kings who were gathered together to build the tower of Babel; and a woman among all the wives of those kings, as Sarah, I found not.”

Ver. 29. *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright*, etc.] The first man Adam, as the Targum and Jarchi interpret it; and not Adam only, but Eve also with him; for these were both made by the Lord, and on the same day, and in the same image, and had the same common name of Adam given them, (^{<0017>}Genesis 1:27 5:2); And they were both made “upright”; which is to be understood, not of the erectness of their bodies, but of the disposition of their minds; they were

“right and innocent before him,”

or in the sight of God, as the Targum; which is best explained by their being made in the image and likeness of God, (^{<0025>}Genesis 1:26,27); and which, according to the apostle, lay in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, (^{<0024>}Ephesians 4:24 ^{<0023>}Colossians 2:3); agreeably to which Plato^{f185} make likeness to God to be righteous and holy, with prudence: for this likeness of Adam and Eve to God; lay not in the shape of their bodies,

for God is a spirit, and not a corporeal being, as the Anthropomorphites imagined, and so fancied men to be made like unto him in this respect; but in their souls, and it consisted of knowledge; of the knowledge of the creatures, their nature, use, and ends for which they were made, and put under their government; and of God, and his perfections, as made known in the creatures; and of his mind and will, and manner of worshipping him, he revealed unto them; and they might know the trinity of Persons in the Godhead, who were concerned in the making of them, though they seem not to have known Christ, as Mediator and Saviour, which was not necessary previous to their fall; nor evangelical truths suited to a fallen state: also this image lay in righteousness and true holiness, which was original, natural, and created with them; it was with them as soon as they were; not acquired, but infused; not a habit obtained, but a quality given; and this not supernatural, but natural; it was perfect in its kind, and entirely agreeable to the holy, just, and good law of God; it had no defects in it, yet was but the righteousness of a creature, and loseable, as the event showed; and so very different from the righteousness of Christ, man is justified by. Likewise, this uprightness is no other than the rectitude of human nature, of all the powers and faculties of the soul of man, as they were when he was created; his understanding clear of all errors and mistakes, either about divine or human things; his affections regular and ordinate, no unruly passion in him, no sinful affection, lust, and desire; he loved God with all his heart and soul, and delighted in him, and communion with him; the bias of his will was to that which is good; the law of God was written on his heart, and he had both power and will to keep it; and, during his state of integrity, was pure and sinless; yet he was not impeccable, as the confirmed angels and glorified saints are; nor immutable, as God only is; but being a creature, and changeable, he was liable to temptation, and subject to fall, as he did. Now Solomon, with all his diligent search and scrutiny, could not find out the infinity of sin, the boundless extent of it among mankind, the exceeding sinfulness of it, which he sought after, (²⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:25); yet this he “found” out, and this “only”, the fountain of all sin, the origin of moral evil; namely, the corruption of human nature through the fall of Adam: this he found by reading the Scriptures, the three first chapters of Genesis; and by consulting human nature he found some remains of the image of God, and of the law that was in man’s heart; whereby he perceived that man was once another man than he is now; and that this corruption is not owing to God, who is not the author of any thing sinful, he made man upright; but to himself, his own sin and folly: and this he

found confirmed by sad experience; in himself and others, and by observing the history of all ages, from the times of the first man; and as this was notorious, it was worth knowing and observing, and therefore he calls upon others to take notice of it; lo, behold, consider it, as well as what follows;

but they have sought out many inventions; that is, Adam and Eve, not content with their present knowledge and happiness, they sought out new ways and means of being wiser and happier than God made them, or it was his will they should be. “They sought out the inventions of the many”, or “great things”, or “of the mighty and great ones”^{f186}, as it may be rendered, the eternal Three in One; they sought to be as wise as God himself; or, however, as the great and mighty ones, the angels, who excelled them, as in strength, so in knowledge; (see ~~ORR~~ Genesis 3:5); or they sought out thoughts of sin, as Jarchi says it is interpreted in the Midrash. Sins are the inventions of men, and these are many and numerous; they sought to gratify their senses, on which followed innumerable evils; and then they sought for shifts and evasions to excuse themselves; the man shifting it from himself, and throwing the blame upon the woman, and the woman upon the serpent: and so sinning, they lost the knowledge they had; their righteousness and holiness, the rectitude of their nature; the moral freedom of their will to that which is good, and their power to perform it; and they lost the presence of God, and communion with him: and so their posterity are not only inventors of evil things, of sins, but of new ways of happiness; some placing it in riches; others in honours; others in pleasures; and some in natural wisdom and knowledge; and some in their own works of righteousness; the vanity of all which Solomon has before exposed.