

# CHAPTER 9

## INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 9

Though the wise man, with all his wisdom, search, and labour, could not find out the causes and reasons of divine Providence, in the branches and methods of it; yet some things he did find out, and observe, in making this inquiry, and which he declares; as that good and wise men, more especially their persons and their affairs, were in the hand of God, under his guidance, government, and direction; and that an interest in his love and hatred was not to be known by the outward estate of men, (<sup>(2008)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:1); That the same events happen to good and bad men, who are variously described; that the hearts of wicked men are full of sin and madness as long as they live, and that they all must and do die, (<sup>(2002)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:2,3); and then the state of such dead is described, as being without hope, knowledge, reward, or memory; and without love, hatred, or envy, or any portion in the things of this life, (<sup>(2004)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:4-6). Wherefore good men are advised to live cheerfully, in a view of acceptance with God, both of persons and services; and eat and drink, and clothe well, according to their circumstances, and enjoy their friends and families; since nothing of this kind can be done in the grave, (<sup>(2007)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:7-10). Then the wise man observes another vanity; that success in undertakings is not always to persons who bid fair, and might hope for it, but looks like the effect of chance, (<sup>(2001)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:11); which want of success is often owing to their ignorance of the proper time of doing things, and to their want of foresight, thought, and care, to prevent evils; for which reason they are compared to fishes and birds, taken in a net or snare, (<sup>(2002)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:12). And concludes with a commendation of wisdom, illustrated by an example of it, in a certain person that delivered a city by it, (<sup>(2013)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:13-15); and though the man's wisdom was despised, yet it is preferable to strength, or weapons of war, or the noise of a foolish ruler, who destroys much good, (<sup>(2006)</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:16-18).

**Ver. 1.** *For all this I considered in mine heart*, etc.] What goes before, in the latter end of the preceding chapter, concerning the various providences of God, the difficulty of finding out the reasons of them, and the

fruitlessness of attempting it; and also what follows, the work of Providence: Solomon gave his mind unto, attended it with great application, and strictly considered and examined it, in order to find it out, but could not; and if he could not, no other man could. And he had a good intention in all; his views were,

*even to declare all this*; for the end of search and inquiry should be, to make known what is found for the good of others, (~~487~~ Job 5:27); and as the wise man had done before, (~~2075~~ Ecclesiastes 7:25-29); or “to purge”, or “purify”, as the word <sup>f211</sup> signifies; to make dark providences clear, and consistent with the perfections and promises of God; to free and vindicate them from all charges of unrighteousness and partiality, and to set them in a clear light to others: now though he failed in his attempt, yet having made some discoveries, he imparted them, as follows: and the observations he made were,

*that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, [are] in the hand of God*; that those who are truly “righteous” in the sight of God; are so, in an evangelical sense, made so by the obedience of Christ; and who believe in him for righteousness, and live soberly, righteously, and godly: and who are “wise”, not for the things of this world but another, who are wise unto salvation; and are concerned for the truth of grace, as well as an outward profession, and walk wisely in the world; these, their persons, are under the special care of divine Providence; they receive from the hand of God what is needful and proper for them, and they are preserved and protected by him, (~~5408~~ 1 Timothy 4:8,10); and their “works”, or affairs; all events relating to them, are all appointed, ordered, and directed by the hand of God, and all for their good. In a more evangelic sense, their persons are in the hands of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; in the hands of the Father of Christ, being engraven there: he looks at them, and upon them; with delight and pleasure, and never forgets them; he has a high and honourable esteem of them, they are a crown of glory, and a royal diadem in his hand; he directs and guides them, holds them, and upholds them with his right hand; and keeps them, by his power, through faith unto salvation, (~~4302~~ John 10:29 ~~3406~~ Isaiah 49:16 62:3 41:10 ~~4723~~ Psalm 73:23,24 ~~4105~~ 1 Peter 1:5). They are in the hands of Christ; put there by his Father, as the effect of his love, care, and wisdom; where they are in his possession, the objects of his delight; and are under his guidance and direction, his care and protection, (~~4838~~ Deuteronomy 33:3 ~~2886~~ Song of Solomon 8:6 ~~4987~~ Psalm 95:7 ~~4101~~ Revelation 2:1 ~~4108~~ John 10:28). And they are in the hands of the Spirit,

who begins and carries on his own work in them; leads them to Christ, and into all truth, and guides them safe to glory, (<sup><4868></sup>John 16:8,13,14 <sup><4830></sup>Psalms 143:10). And so their “works” also are in the hands of God; the work of grace upon the soul is in the hand of the Spirit, to carry it on and finish it; good works done by them are done by the assistance of divine grace, the strength of Christ, and the aid of the blessed Spirit; are received and accepted with God through Christ; and will not be forgotten, but are retained, and will be remembered another day; (see <sup><2107></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:7 <sup><3860></sup>Hebrews 6:10 <sup><6413></sup>Revelation 14:13);

*no man knoweth either love or hatred [by] all [that is] before them;* no man knows his own love and hatred, his passions are so fickle and inconstant; what he loves now, he presently hates, as may be seen in the instances of Ammon, Ahasuerus, and others: or he knows not that what he loves and hates shall befall him, all depending on divine Providence; or he does not know the love and hatred of others, who are his friends or his foes, there is such deceitfulness in men: or rather, he does not know the love and hatred of God, with respect to himself or others, by the outward conduct of Providence; since the same things happen to one as to another; as health and strength, wealth and riches, honour and fame, wisdom and learning, long life, and the like: good men may know that they are loved of God, by his love being shed abroad in them, by the blessings of grace bestowed on them, and the witnessings of the Spirit to them; and know that sin is abominable to God, and wicked men are hated by him; and living and dying in sin, will be eternally damned; but who is an elect person, and who a reprobate, is not to be known by the outward estate of men, as to the things of life. Some render it, “even love and hatred”<sup>f212</sup>, in connection with the preceding clause; that is, these are in the hands of God also; his love to his people is purely sovereign, according to his own will; not through any motives in them, as their love, loveliness, or good works; and his hatred of others, or the punishment of them for sin, and appointment of them to it; for the same is also as he pleases; see (<sup><4891></sup>Romans 9:11-22); or the love and hatred of men; for God has the hearts and passions of all men in his hand, and at his command, and can raise or restrain them at his pleasure, (<sup><2106></sup>Proverbs 21:1); the love and hatred (of good men; he works in them love to himself and all divine things, and hatred of that which is evil; and also of bad men, he can make them love his people, and he can restrain their wrath when he pleases, (<sup><2107></sup>Proverbs 16:7 <sup><4760></sup>Psalms 76:10); and then the last clause is rendered, “no man knoweth all [that is] before them”<sup>f213</sup>;

either before Elohim, the three divine Persons, to whom all things are manifest, or that were before decreed, as Aben Ezra; the purposes and decrees of God, which are the secret and deep things of God, and cannot be known but by his promises or providences: or man is so short sighted, that he cannot discern the things that are plain and manifest before him; and much less things future, that are yet to come. But the words, according to the accents, may be better rendered, as by Munster, “neither love nor hatred man knows”; whether the love professed to him is sincere, and what secret hatred is bore to him: “but all things are before him”; Elohim, the three divine Persons.

**Ver. 2.** *All [things come] alike to all*, etc.] That is, all outward things in this life, good and bad men share in alike; which proves that neither love nor hatred can be known by them: so the emperor Mark Antonine, in speaking of life and death, of honour and dishonour, of pain and pleasure, riches and poverty, says<sup>f214</sup>, all these things happen alike to good men and bad men;

*[there is] one event to the righteous and to the wicked*; the same prosperous ones happen to one as to another, as riches, honour, health, wisdom and learning, fame and reputation: if Abraham was rich in cattle, gold, and silver, so was Nabal, and the rich fool in the Gospel; if Joseph was advanced to great dignity in Pharaoh’s court, so was Haman in the court of Ahasuerus; if Caleb was as hearty and strong at fourscore and five as ever, it is true of many wicked men, that there are no bands in their death, and their strength is firm to the last; if Moses, Solomon, and Daniel, were wise men, and of great learning, so were the idolatrous Egyptians, and so are many God is not pleased to call by his grace; if Demetrius had a good report of all men, so had the false prophets of old: and the same adverse things happen to one as to another as the instances of Job, Lazarus, and the good figs, the Jews carried into captivity, show; of whom the Midrash, and Jarchi from that, interpret this and the following clauses: “to the righteous and to the wicked”: to Noah the righteous, and to Pharaoh, not Necho, as Jarchi, but he whose daughter Solomon married, who, the Jews say, were both lame;

*to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean*; who are “good”, not naturally, and in and of themselves, but by the grace of God; and who are “clean”, not by nature, nor by their own power, but through the clean water of divine grace being sprinkled on them, and through the blood and

righteousness of Christ applied to them; and who are “unclean”, through the corruption of nature, and the pollution of actual sins, they live in. Some understand this of a ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness. The above Jews apply these characters to Moses, who was good; to Aaron, who was clean; and to the spies, who were unclean; and the same thing happened to them all, exclusion from the land of Canaan;

*to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not*: that serves and worships the Lord, and who does not, one branch of service and worship being put for all; and whether they offer themselves, their contrite hearts and spiritual sacrifices, or not. The Jews exemplify this Josiah, who sacrificed to the Lord; and in Ahab, who made sacrifice to cease; and both were slain with arrows;

*as [is] the good, so [is] the sinner*; alike in their outward condition and circumstances, whether as to prosperity or adversity;

*[and] he that sweareth, as [he] that feareth an oath*; the common swearer, or he that is perjured, and has no reverence of God, nor regard to truth, nor any concern to make good his oath; and he that is cautious about taking one does it with awe and reverence of the divine Being, and is careful of keeping, it, even to his own hurt. The Jews stance in Zedekiah and Samson; the former broke his oath with the king of Babylon, and the latter was a religious observer of an oath; and yet both had their eyes put out; but it does not appear that Samson ever took an oath: the opposition in the text seems to be between one that is ready to take an oath on every occasion, without considering the solemnity of one, and without due care of what he swore to; and one that is cautious about taking an oath, and chooses to be excused from taking one, on any account, could he be excused; preferring such advice as is given, (<sup><41534</sup>Matthew 5:34 <sup><5052</sup>James 5:12), “swear not at all”; the counsel about swearing, which Isocrates<sup>f215</sup> gives, seems worthy of notice;

“take an oath required on two accounts; either to purge thyself from a foul crime charged with, or to save friends in danger, and deliver them out of it; but on account of money (or goods) swear not by any deity, no, not even if thou canst take an oath safely; for by some thou wilt be thought to be perjured, and by others to be covetous.”

The word in Hebrew for swearing is always passive, because a man should not swear, unless obliged; and the same form of language is used by Latin writers<sup>f216</sup>; and the Hebrew word for it comes from a root which signifies “seven”, in allusion, as some think, to seven witnesses required to an oath; the Arabians, when they swore, anointed “seven” stones with blood; and, while anointing them, called on their deities<sup>f217</sup>; (see <sup><02E3></sup>Genesis 21:30). It may be observed, that all men are here divided into good and bad; this has been the distinction from the beginning, and continues, and ever will.

**Ver. 3.** *This [is] an evil among all [things] that are done under the sun, that [there is] one event unto all,* etc.] A very great evil, a very sore one, the worst of evils. Not an evil, as the providence of God is concerned with it, who does no evil; nor is there any unrighteousness in him; he is righteous in all his ways: but this is an evil, and distressing thing, to the minds of good men; (see <sup><07D></sup>Psalms 73:2,12-14) (<sup><24E3></sup>Jeremiah 12:1); and is what bad men make an ill use of, to harden themselves in sin, and to despise religion as an unprofitable thing, (<sup><8214></sup>Job 21:14,15);

*yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil:* they are naturally full of evil, of all unrighteousness and wickedness, what comes out of them show it; and because the same things happen to good and bad men, and the wicked pass with impunity, and are outwardly happy as others, or more so, their hearts are fully set in them to do evil, (<sup><2081></sup>Ecclesiastes 8:11);

*and madness is in their heart while they live;* or “madnesses”<sup>f218</sup>: every sin is madness; for who but a madman would stretch out his hand against God, and strengthen himself against the Almighty, and run upon him? who but a madman would rush into sin in the manner he does, and expose himself to dangers and death, even eternal death? Wicked men are mad upon their lusts, and mad against the saints, and all that is good; this insanity is in their hearts, and shows itself in their lives, and continues with them as long as they live, unless called by grace;

*and after that [they go] to the dead;* after all the madness of their lives, they die and go into the state of the dead, and are among which refers not so much to the interment of bodies in the grave, as the company with which their separate spirits are; they go not to the righteous dead, but to the wicked; (see <sup><01E3></sup>Proverbs 2:18 9:18); so Alshech; they go to the dead; not to the righteous, who, in their death, or when dead are called living, but, as Jarchi observes, at their end they go down to hell. The Targum is,

“after the end of a man, it is reserved for him that he be corrected with the dead, according to the judgment (or desert) of sins.”

**Ver. 4.** *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope*, etc.] That is, who is among the living, is one of them, and, as long as he is, there is hope, if his circumstances are mean, and he is poor and afflicted, that it may be better with him in time; (see <sup><18147></sup>Job 14:7); or of his being a good man, though now wicked; of his being called and converted, as some are at the eleventh hour, even on a death bed; and especially there is a hope of men, if they are under the means of grace, seeing persons have been made partakers of the grace of God after long waiting. There is here a “Keri” and a “Cetib”, a marginal reading and a textual writing; the former reads, “that is joined”, the latter, “that is chosen”; our version follows the marginal reading, as do the Targum, Jarchi, Aben Ezra, the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions: some, following the latter, render the words, “who is to be chosen”<sup>f219</sup>, or preferred, a living, or a dead man? not a dead but a living man: “to all the living there is hope”; of their being better; and, as Jarchi observes, there is hope, while alive, even though he is a wicked man joined to the wicked; yea, there is hope of the wicked, that he may be good before he dies;

*for a living dog is better than a dead lion*; a proverbial speech, showing that life is to be preferred to death; and that a mean, abject, and contemptible person, living, who for his despicable condition may be compared to a dog, is to be preferred to the most generous man, or to the greatest potentate, dead; since the one may possibly be useful in some respects or another, the other cannot: though a living sinner, who is like to a dog for his uncleanness and vileness, is not better than a dead saint or righteous man, comparable to a lion, who has hope in his death, and dies in the Lord.

**Ver. 5.** *For the living know that they shall die*, etc.] Death is certain, it is the demerit of sin, the appointment of God and the time of it is fixed; it may be known that it will be, from the word of God that assures it, from all experience which confirms it, and from the decline of nature, and the seeds of death in men. This “the living” know that live corporeally, even the wicked themselves, though they put the evil day far from them; and so good men, that live spiritually, being quickened by the Spirit and grace of God, and live a life of faith and holiness; they know they shall die, though Christ died for them, and has abolished death, as a punishment and a curse,



and took away its sting, and made it a blessing; wherefore it is desirable to them, as being for their good: but there are some things about death they ordinarily know not; they do not know the time of their death; nor the place where they shall die; nor of what death they shall die; nor in what circumstances, both outward and inward: of these the Targum understands the passage;

“for the righteous know that if they sin, they shall be reckoned as dead men in the world to come, therefore they keep their ways, and sin not; but if they sin, they return by repentance;”

*but the dead know not anything*; this is not to be understood of their separate spirits, and of the things of the other world; for the righteous dead know much, their knowledge is greatly increased; they know, as they are known; they know much of God in Christ, of his perfections, purposes, covenant, grace, and love; they know much of Christ, of his person, offices, and glory, and see him as he is; they know much of the Gospel, and the mysteries of it; and of angels, and the spirits of just men, they now converse with; and of the glories and happiness of the heavenly state; even they know abundantly more than they did in this life: and the wicked dead, in their separate spirits, know there is a God that judgeth; that their souls are immortal; that there is a future state; indeed they know and feel the torments of hell, the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched: but this is to be interpreted of their bodily senses now extinct, and of worldly things they have now nothing to do with; they know not any thing that is done in this world, nor how it fares with their children and friends they have left behind them; (see <sup><1812></sup>Job 14:21 <sup><2316></sup>Isaiah 63:16); nor therefore are they to be prayed unto, and used as mediators with God. The Targum is,

“and sinners know not any good, so that they do not make their works good while they live; and they know not any good in the world to come;”

*neither have they any more a reward*; not but that there will be rewards in a future state, in which everyone shall have his own reward; there will be a reward for the righteous; they will receive the reward of the inheritance, though it will be, not of debt, but of grace; and particularly in the millennium state, (<sup><1881></sup>Psalm 58:11 <sup><5124></sup>Colossians 3:24) (<sup><6212></sup>Revelation 22:12 11:18); and every transgression of the wicked will receive a just recompence of reward; to whom the reward of their hands will be given



them, (<sup>800D</sup>Hebrews 2:2 <sup>231B</sup>Isaiah 3:11); but the sense is, that after death there will be no enjoyment of a man's labours; he will not have the use, profit, and advantage of them, but his heirs that succeed him, (<sup>200D</sup>Ecclesiastes 4:9 2:18,19,21,22);

*for the memory of them is forgotten*; not the memory of the righteous with God, for whom a book of remembrance is written, and whose names are written in heaven; these are had in everlasting remembrance, and their memory blessed: but the memory of wicked men; who, though they take pains to perpetuate their names, which they give to their lands, yet the Lord causes their memory to cease, and they are forgotten in the place where they lived; not only among the righteous, as the Targum, but among others, (<sup>2334</sup>Isaiah 26:14 <sup>2080</sup>Ecclesiastes 8:10); even among those that enjoy the fruit of their labour; they will scarce think of them any more, or, however, in a little time they will be quite forgotten by them.

**Ver. 6.** *Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished*, etc.] Not that the separate spirits of the dead are without their affections, or these unexercised; the spirits of just men made perfect will love God and Christ, and angels, and good men, and all that is good, more intensely; love will continue after this life, and be in its height, and therefore said to be the greatest grace, (<sup>463B</sup>1 Corinthians 13:13); they will hate sin, Satan, and all the enemies of Christ, and be filled with zeal for his glory; so the word <sup>f220</sup>for envy may be rendered; (see <sup>600D</sup>Revelation 6:9,10); and the spirits of the wicked dead will still continue to love sin, and hate the Lord, and envy the happiness of the saints; and will rise again with the same spite and malice against them; (see <sup>627</sup>Ezekiel 32:27 <sup>618</sup>Revelation 20:8,9); but this respects persons and things in this world; they no more love persons and things here, nor are loved by any; death parts the best friends, and the most endearing and loving relations, and puts an end to all their mutual friendship and affection; they hate their enemies no more, nor are hated by them; they no more envy the prosperity of others, nor are envied by others; all such kind of love and hatred, enmity and envy, active or passive, cease at death; out of the world, as the Targum adds;

*neither have they any more a portion for ever in any [thing] that is under the sun*: the worldly man's portion is only in this life, and when he dies, he carries nothing of it with him; whose ever his possessions will be at death, they are no more his, nor will he ever return to enjoy them any more; his houses, his lands, his estates, his gold and silver, and whatever of worth

and value he had, he has no more lot and part in them: but the good man has a portion above the sun; God is his portion, heaven is his inheritance for ever and ever. The Targum understands it of the wicked;

“and they have no good part with the righteous in the world to come; and they have no profit of all that is done in this world under the sun.”

**Ver. 7.** *Go thy way*, etc.] Thou righteous man, as Jarchi paraphrases it; and indeed epicures and voluptuous persons have no need of the following exhortation, and the reason annexed is not suitable to them; but the whole agrees better with religious persons, who under distressing views of Providence, and from gloomy and melancholy apprehensions of things, and mistaken notions of mortification, deny themselves the free and lawful use of the good things of life; and seeing there is no enjoyment of them in the grave, and after death, therefore let the following advice be taken, than which of worldly things nothing is better for a man to do;

*eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart*; which includes all things necessary and convenient, and which should be used and enjoyed freely and cheerfully; not barely for refreshment, but recreation; not for necessity only, but for pleasure; yet with moderation, not to excess; and with thankfulness to God; and the rather joy and mirth should mix with these things, since to a good man they are in love. It may be observed that it is said “thy bread [and] thy wine”, thine own and not another’s; what is got by labour, and in an honest way, and not by rapine and oppression, as Alshech observes; what God in his providence gives, our daily food, what is convenient for us, or is our portion and allotment. The Targum interprets it figuratively of the joys of heaven;

“Solomon said, by a spirit of prophecy from the Lord, the Lord of the world will say to all the righteous, in the face of everyone, eat thy bread with joy, which is laid up for thee, for thy bread which thou hast given to the poor and needy that were hungry; and drink thy wine with a good heart, which is laid up for thee in paradise, for the wine which thou hast mingled for the poor and needy that were thirsty;”

(see <sup>4254</sup>Matthew 25:34, 35);

*for God now accepteth thy works*; both the persons of righteous and good men are accepted of God in Christ, and their works done in faith and love,

and with a view to his glory; and since they are acceptable in his sight, as appears by his blessing on their labours, and bestowing the good things of life upon them, so it is well pleasing in his sight to make a free and cheerful use of them.

**Ver. 8.** *Let thy garments be always white*, etc.] That is, neat and clean, not vile and sordid; what is comely and decent, and suitable to a man's circumstances; this colour is particularly mentioned because much used in the eastern countries, and in Judea; hence we so often read of washing garments, and of fullers that whitened them; and especially on festival days and days of rejoicing, to which Horace<sup>f221</sup> refers; and here it signifies that every day should be like a festival or day of rejoicing to a good man, to whom God has given the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, (<sup><260B></sup>Isaiah 61:3); and though there may be times for mourning, and so of putting on other apparel, yet, in common and ordinarily, this should be the habit, decent and comely apparel. The ancient Jews in Aben Ezra, and so Jarchi, interpret it of an unblemished conversation; and Kimchi<sup>f222</sup> of repentance and good works; and so the Targum,

“let thy garments be white (or washed) from all filth of sin;”

or be without any spot of sin, as Alshech; the conversation garments of the saints are made white in the blood of Christ, and his righteousness is fine linen, and white; and even eternal glory and happiness is signified by walking with him in white, (<sup><4674></sup>Revelation 7:14 19:8 3:4,18);

*and let thy head lack no ointment*: which used to be poured plentifully on the heads of guests at feasts<sup>f223</sup>, for the refreshment of them, which gave pleasure, and a sweet odour and fragrancy, and was much in use in those hot countries; (see <sup><19216></sup>Psalm 23:5 <sup><11746></sup>Luke 7:46); and is opposed to a gloomy and melancholy carriage and deportment, (<sup><4167></sup>Matthew 6:17); hence we read of the oil of joy and gladness, (<sup><19417></sup>Psalm 45:7 <sup><2601></sup>Isaiah 63:1). The Jews before mentioned interpreted this of a good name better than ointment, (<sup><2100B></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:1). So the Targum,

“and a good name, which is like to anointing oil, get; that blessings may come upon thy head, and thy goodness fail not.”

**Ver. 9.** *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*, etc.] Or “see”, or “enjoy life”<sup>f224</sup>: this is one of the ways of enjoying life comfortably, and one of the principal ones; that if a man has a wife whom he ought to love as himself as his own flesh, to take delight in her company, be pleasant with

her, and rejoice in her, (<sup><216B></sup>Proverbs 5:18,19); and this here may be put for all that pleasure and satisfaction which may be lawfully had in the enjoyment of all other relations and friends; which adds no small part to the comfort of a man's life;

*all the days of the life of thy vanity*; a wife is for life, and not after a while to be divorced; and to be lived joyfully with, not for a short time only, but all the days of life;

*which he hath given thee under the sun*; that is, either which wife God has given thee; for a wife is the gift of God, (<sup><008B2></sup>Genesis 3:12); and which is a gift under the sun; for above it, or in heaven, and in a future state, there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, (<sup><221B></sup>Luke 20:35); or which days he hath given thee, so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions. It is added,

*all the days of thy vanity*; which is repeated, that it might be observed that the life of man is but a vain life, a vapour that soon vanishes away, and man in it, at his best estate, is vanity; and that notwithstanding all the enjoyments of life in the most comfortable manner here directed to, yet still the doctrine he set out with must be remembered, that all is vanity, (<sup><200B></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:2);

*for that [is] thy portion in [this] life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun*; this is all the outward happiness of a man in this life, and all the use, profit, and advantage of his labours, to eat and drink cheerfully, to clothe decently, to debar himself of nothing of lawful pleasure, particularly to live joyfully with his wife, and enjoy his friends; this is the utmost of outward felicity he can partake of, and this he should not deny himself. Ben Melech restrains this portion to a wife, and joyful living with her; but it is best to include all that goes before.

**Ver. 10.** *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do*, etc.] Not anything that is evil, which is near at hand, and easy to be found, and is in the power of men's hands to do, (<sup><8021></sup>Romans 7:21 <sup><300B></sup>Micah 2:1); for this is forbidden of God, abominable to him, and hurtful to men; but whatsoever is good; so the Targum,

“to do good and alms to the poor;”

even all good works in general, which God requires of men, and it is their duty to do; though they are not meritorious of anything at his hands, nor is

there justification or salvation by them; yet should be done in obedience to the will of God, in gratitude to him for mercies received, and for his glory; as also for the profit of men, and for our own good; for the evidence of grace, and to preserve our characters from the insults and reproaches of men. Whatever is found written in the book of God should be done; not what is of a ceremonial kind, and now abolished, but everything of a moral nature, and of positive institution, under Gospel times; as all Gospel ordinances, and whatever falls within a man's calling: for every man has a work to do; in every station, as magistrates and subjects; in every relation, as husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; in every business of life men are called to; which they should attend, for the good of themselves and families, the relief of the poor, and the support of the interest of religion: and in religious things everyone has his work to do; the minister, in preaching and administering ordinances; the deacon, in taking care of the poor; private Christians, in praying in their closets and families, in hearing the word, making a profession of religion, and attending on ordinances; and, as opportunity serves, should do good to all men, especially to the saints, (<sup><8160></sup>Galatians 6:10); and whatsoever is in the power of their hands, as this phrase signifies, (<sup><8128></sup>Leviticus 12:8 <sup><8278></sup>1 Samuel 25:8). Aben Ezra refers it to the delights and pleasures of life, such as before mentioned; which may be allowed, when used in a lawful and moderate manner;

*do [it] with thy might*; or “strength”; for though men have no might or strength of their own to do good, which is lost by sin; yea, even good men, of themselves, and without Christ, his spirit and grace, can do nothing spiritually good; yet there is strength in him, and to be had from him; and who should be applied to for it, and who gives it, (<sup><249></sup>Isaiah 40:29-31 45:24 <sup><1043></sup>Philippians 4:13); the phrase denotes intenseness of spirit, vigour of mind, activity and fervency; doing that which is good, cheerfully and diligently, and not in a negligent careless manner; see (<sup><816></sup>Deuteronomy 6:5 <sup><2480></sup>Jeremiah 48:10);

*for [there is] no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*; this, and not then, is our working time; good men at death cease from their labours in the grave, as the night in which no man can “work”, (<sup><6443></sup>Revelation 14:13 <sup><800></sup>John 9:4); then the liberal man can no more “devise” liberal ways and means of doing good; his purposes of doing good are broken off; and no more plans can be laid, or designs formed, for the glory of God and the good of fellow creatures: and no

more “knowledge” of objects to do good unto; nor any improvement in any kind of knowledge, natural or spiritual: nor “wisdom” and prudence in the management of affairs, to answer some good ends and purposes; nor opportunity of attaining that wisdom by the Scriptures, and by the ministry of the word, which make men wise unto salvation: and now, since every man is going to the grave, his long home, the place appointed for all living, and this, is the way of all flesh; and every step he has taken, and does take, is a step to the grave; therefore it is incumbent on him to do all the good he can in life.

**Ver. 11.** *I returned, and saw under the sun*, etc.] The wise man returned to his former subject, concerning the same events happening to all sorts of persons, righteous and wicked, wise and unwise, (<sup><2100></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:1,2); and enlarged upon it in his mind; and took notice of various things done under the sun, and made the following remarks: and whereas he had exhorted men to use all their might in doing the duties of their calling while they lived here; he suggests, that they should not depend upon, and promise themselves, anything from their own strength and wisdom; but have a regard to the providence of God, that superintends all affairs, and gives or withholds success as he pleases; since it may be observed,

*that the race [is] not to the swift*; swiftness oftentimes is of no service to a man to escape dangers, as may be seen in the case of Asahel and others, (<sup><1018></sup>2 Samuel 2:18,23 <sup><1024></sup>Amos 2:14,15); so the Targum,

“men who are swift as eagles are not helped by running to escape from death in battle.”

Or the sense may be, that the swift are not always made use of in running a race; or, if they are, they do not always win the prize, something or other happens to hinder them; they fall, or become lame, when one more slow gets the advantage of them, (<sup><1021></sup>1 Corinthians 9:24); and so in spiritual things, one that is ready to halt, as David says of himself, gets to heaven, and is saved, (<sup><1087></sup>Psalm 38:17 <sup><1029></sup>Zephaniah 3:19); when others, at first starting or setting out in a profession, run well for a while, as the Galatians did, (<sup><1017></sup>Galatians 5:7); but afterwards drop and fall short; for “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God, that sheweth mercy”, (<sup><1016></sup>Romans 9:16);

*nor the battle to the strong*: as not to the Midianites, nor to Goliath, nor to Abner, in whom Jarchi instances; victory is not always on the side of the

mighty and the many, but oftentimes on the side of the weak and few; (see <sup><444></sup>2 Chronicles 14:9-15 <sup><436></sup>Psalm 33:16,17); so in spirituals, such who go forth in their own strength against an enemy, trusting in it, fall; while weak believers, depending on the grace and strength of Christ, wrestle with principalities and powers, and come off victorious;

*neither yet bread to the wise*: the Targum adds, in a time of famine, when their wisdom cannot help them; but the sense rather is, that skilful artificers, in any trade or business, do not always get the best livelihood, yea, sometimes want the necessaries of life, or eat the bread of sorrow, when persons of meaner capacities shall thrive and flourish; and even the wisest of men sometimes have been obliged to others for bread, as was the case of David, (<sup><426></sup>1 Samuel 21:3 25:8); and even of a wiser than he, our Lord himself, (<sup><432></sup>Luke 8:2); and as for the wise men of this world, the bread of life, Christ Jesus, is neither enjoyed nor sought after by them;

*nor yet riches to men of understanding*; mention is afterwards made of a wise man that was poor, Jarchi instances in Job; and, on the other hand, sometimes fools are rich, as Nabal and others; and as for the riches of grace, and treasures of spiritual knowledge, they are not usually given to the wise and prudent (<sup><412></sup>Matthew 11:25); Nor yet favour to men of skill; to men of knowledge and learning, whose genius and abilities might be thought sufficient to recommend them to the favour, affection, and applause of men, and yet oftentimes fall herein; such who have the art of address and persuasion are not always able to ingratiate themselves, and gain the esteem of men: Jarchi interprets it of the favour of God, and instances in Moses; than whom there was not a more knowing and understanding man in Israel, yet could not by his prayer find grace and favour to enter into the land: but the Targum is better;

“neither they that know understanding are helped by their knowledge to find favour in the eyes of a king;”

*but time and chance happeneth to them all*; to the swift and strong, the wise, understanding, and skilful; or to the swift and slow, to the strong and weak, to the wise and unwise; everything befalls them just as it is ordered by divine Providence; for there is a certain “time” fixed by the Lord for every event; and whatever seems casual and contingent to man, and which he is ready to call “chance”, is noticing but “decree” with God, firm and unalterable; Plato<sup>f225</sup> has the same expression. The word signifies “occurrence”,<sup>f226</sup> or event, which is under the wise direction and order of



the providence of God, with respect to whom nothing comes by chance; and it is rendered “occurrent”, (<sup><1181></sup>1 Kings 5:4); and so it is here, by the Septuagint version, “occurrence” or “event”; and in the Targum, event by their star, which is fate: and Aben Ezra interprets it *hnwyl* [ *hkr* [ *mh*, the “superior ordination”; it is something we meet, or meets us, by divine appointment. Aben Ezra and Kimchi, who are followed by others, think that, from (<sup><2101></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:4); to this, Solomon is speaking in the person of epicures and atheists; which is not likely, since it is not in character for such persons to talk of God’s acceptance of men’s works; of living joyfully with a wife; of this life being a life of vanity; and of death and the grave; and of diligence in working while the present life lasts.

**Ver. 12.** *For man also knoweth not his time*, etc.] Though it is fixed and settled by the Lord, yet times and seasons are kept in his own power, and not known by men; not the time of his death, nor of any calamity and distress coming upon him, nor the proper season and opportunity of doing himself good, and avoiding evil;

*as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare*; as fishes are suddenly taken in a net, unhappy for them, which is at once east over them, while they are sporting and playing in the water, and catching at the bait; and as birds, being decoyed, are unawares taken in a snare; that is, both of them know not the time of their being caught;

*so [are] the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them*; they are no more able to guard against a time of adversity and calamity, and the evil of it, which comes at once upon them, than the poor fishes or silly birds are to avoid the net and snare; and are, like them, at such a time, in the utmost security, indulging themselves in ease and pleasure: so the day of death, and of judgment, will come like a thief in the night; or like a snare upon men, when they think nothing of it, but are giving up themselves to their lusts and pleasures; (see <sup><5181></sup>1 Thessalonians 5:2,3 <sup><4213></sup>Luke 21:34,35 17:26,30); for pleasure, as Plato says, is the bait of evils, with which men are caught, as fishes with the hook<sup>f227</sup>.

**Ver. 13.** *This wisdom have I seen also under the sun*, etc.] Or, “this also I have seen under the sun, even wisdom”<sup>f228</sup>: besides those things he had, just now observed, he took notice that there was such a thing as wisdom among men; though success did not always attend the wise, the understanding, and skilful; and though there was so much ignorance in

men, of their own time, and were so easily and suddenly ensnared in an evil time;

*and it [seemed] great unto me*; Solomon had a high value for wisdom, and he still retained the same sentiments of it he had before, in (<sup>2013</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:13 7:11,12,19), of which he gives the following instance.

**Ver. 14.** [*There was] a little city, and few men within it*, etc.] Which some take to be a piece of history, a real matter of fact; that as the city of Abel, when besieged by Joab, was delivered by the counsel of a wise woman, (<sup>1015</sup>2 Samuel 20:15-22); so there was a city, which Solomon had knowledge of, which was delivered from the siege of a powerful king, by the wise counsel of a poor wise man: though others think it is only a fiction, fable, or parable; the moral of which is, that political wisdom, even in a poor mean person, is sometimes very useful and serviceable, though it does not meet with its proper merit. Many of the Jewish writers understand the whole allegorically and figuratively; so the Targum, by “the little city”, understands the body of man; by “few men in it”, the little righteousness there is in the heart of man; though, according to the Midrash, Jarchi, and Alshech, they are the members of the body; by “the great king”, the evil imagination, or corruption of nature, which is great to oppress, and besieges the heart to cause it to err; and by “the poor wise man”, the good imagination or affection, which prevails over the other, and subdues it, and delivers the body from hell, and yet not remembered; and so the Midrash, and the ancient Jews in Aben Ezra, though he himself understands it according to its literal sense. Some Christian interpreters explain it to better purpose, concerning the church attacked by Satan, and delivered by Christ, who, notwithstanding, is unkindly and ungratefully used: the church is often compared to a city, it is the city of God, and of which saints are fellow citizens; it is but a “little” one in comparison of the world, and, in some periods and ages of the world, lesser than in others; it is little and contemptible in the eyes of the world, and the inhabitants of it are mean and low in their own eyes; they are a little flock, (<sup>1123</sup>Luke 12:32); and “few” in number that are “within it”: some are only of it, but not in it, or are external members only, which sometimes are many; or outward, not inward, court worshippers; they are few, comparatively, that belong to the invisible church, that are chosen, redeemed, called, and saved, (<sup>1016</sup>Matthew 20:16 7:13,14 <sup>1104</sup>Revelation 3:4) (<sup>1123</sup>Luke 13:23); there are but few able men, especially such as are capable of defending the church against its enemies.

*and there came a great king against it*; Satan, the prince of devils and of the posse of them in the air, the god and prince of the world of the ungodly, who works in their hearts, and leads them captive at his will who may be said to be “great” with respect to the numbers under him, legions of devils, and the whole world that lies in wickedness, or “in” or “under” the wicked one: and on account of the power he exercises, by divine permission, over the bodies and minds of men; and in comparison of the little city, and few men in it, being stronger than they, (<sup><402></sup>Matthew 12:24 <sup><312></sup>John 12:31 <sup><2811></sup>Jeremiah 31:11); he comes from the region of the air, where his posse are; or from going to and fro in the earth; or from hell, into which he is cast down: he comes by divine permission; in the manner evil spirits do, by temptation; in a hostile way, against the church and people of God, to destroy and devour them, if possible;

*and besieged it*; surrounded it on all sides, as the Gog and Magog army trader him will encompass the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, (<sup><610></sup>Revelation 20:9);

*and built great bulwarks against it*; such as are called strong holds, (<sup><470></sup>2 Corinthians 10:4). Satan’s first attack was upon the elect of God, in Adam; when he brought them, through sin, under a sentence of condemnation and death, though then they were preserved in Christ; and ever since he has been attacking the church by persecution, in order to take it by storm; and by spreading errors and heresies, such as tend to raze the foundation, and to pull down the superstructure of grace; and by promoting schisms, and laying such large principles of church communion, as tend to take away ordinances and discipline, the fence of the city; and by throwing in hand grenades of strife and contention, to raise a civil war among the citizens themselves; and, by various temptations to sin, to gain deserters: these are some of his bulwarks, batteries, and engines.

**Ver. 15.** *Now there was found in it a poor wise man*, etc.] Christ, who is man, though not a mere man, but God as well as man; who was so in purpose, covenant, and promise, before his incarnation, since truly and really so; and “poor”, as it was foretold he should be, and who became so for the sake of his church and people, (<sup><300></sup>Zechariah 9:9 <sup><470></sup>2 Corinthians 8:9); yet “wise”, even as man, being filled with wisdom, in which he increased, and gave such evident proofs of; on whom the spirit of wisdom rested, and in whom the treasures of it were hid, (<sup><410></sup>Luke 2:40,46,47,52 <sup><310></sup>Isaiah 11:2) (<sup><510></sup>Colossians 2:3); he was found here by God his Father,

who exalted one chosen out of the people, and made him Head over the church, who is the firstborn among many brethren, (~~3889~~ Psalm 89:19,20); Or “and”, or “but he found in it”<sup>f229</sup>; that is, Satan, the great king, found him here, contrary to his expectation, and to his great regret;

*and he by his wisdom delivered the city*; the church, from all enemies; from Satan and all his principalities and powers; from the world, the men and things of it; from sin, and all its sad consequences; from the law, its curse and condemnation; and from the second death, ruin and destruction: and though this deliverance was both by power and by price, yet also by wisdom; for the deliverance and redemption of the church by Christ is the fruit of infinite wisdom; it is a wise scheme to glorify all the divine perfections; to mortify Satan, and save sinners, and yet condemn sin; (see ~~4007~~ Ephesians 1:7,8);

*yet no man remembered that same poor man*: before the deliverance wrought, as Aben Ezra and others; it never once entered into their thoughts that he could ever be their deliverer; they never imagined he had a capacity to advise, direct, or assist, in such service, or bring about such an affair: so Christ, when he appeared in the world, the Jews saw nothing that was promising in him; they could not believe that he was sent to be the Saviour and deliverer of them, and therefore rejected him, (~~2302~~ Isaiah 3:2, ~~6010~~ 3 John 1:10,11); Or, “after it”, so the Vulgate Latin version, “no man hereafter remembered”, etc. took no notice of him after he had wrought this deliverances; bestowed no honour upon him, nor returned him thanks for what he had done; but he continued to live and die in obscurity and meanness: thus Christ, though he ought to be remembered and spoken well of, and the glory of salvation should be ascribed unto him, and thanks should be given him for it; yet there are none comparatively, or; but a few, who, like the Samaritan, glorify him on account of it. But if any choose to understand these words of political wisdom, and the use of it, by which sometimes a mean and obscure person does more good than others can by their power and strength, though he meets with no reward for it, I am not averse to it; and which agrees with what follows.

**Ver. 16.** *Then said I, wisdom [is] better than strength*, etc.] Wisdom of mind, even in a poor man, is better than strength of body, even of the, most potent prince and powerful army, as may be concluded from the above instance; since the poor wise man could do more by his wisdom than the great king with his mighty army; who was obliged to break up the siege, in

consequence of the counsel given, or the methods directed to, or taken, by the poor man;

*nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom [is] despised, and his words are not heard*; notwithstanding such a flagrant instance and example as this just mentioned; yet men still retain their prejudices against a poor man, and despise his wise counsels and advice, for no other reason but because he is poor, and will not attend to what he says: or, "though the poor man's wisdom", etc.<sup>f230</sup>, as Aben Ezra; Solomon drew the above conclusion from that instance; though this is usually the case, that men despise the wisdom of a poor man, and will not listen to his advice, this did not lessen the wise man's opinion of it. The words may be rendered, "even the poor man's wisdom despised, and his words not heard"<sup>f231</sup>; these are better than outward force and strength, and more serviceable and useful; which the Septuagint version favours: the Vulgate Latin version renders it, "how is the poor man's wisdom despised!" etc. as wondering at it that so it should be, when so much profit and advantage arose to the city from it.

**Ver. 17.** *The words of wise [men are] heard in quiet*, etc.] That is, by some persons and at some times, though not by all persons and always; or they are to be heard, or should be heard, though they seldom be, even the words of wise men that are poor: these are to be heard quietly and patiently, without any tumult and contradiction; or should be heard, being delivered with a low and submissive voice, without any noise, or blustering pride, or passion, sedately and with great humility, submitting them to the judgment of others; which sense the comparison seems to require;

*more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools*; more than the noisy words of a foolish governor; or than the dictates of an imperious man, delivered in a clamorous and blustering way; by which he obtains authority among such fools as himself, who are influenced more by the pomp and noise of words than by the force of true wisdom and reason; but all right judges will give the preference to the former. The Targum interprets it of the silent prayer of the wise being received by the Lord, more than the clamour of the wicked.

**Ver. 18.** *Wisdom [is] better than weapons of war*, etc.] And does what they cannot do; of which the wisdom of the poor wise man is a full proof, which delivered the city from a potent prince, when weapons of war could not: (see <sup><2170></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:10);

*but one sinner destroyeth much good*: his own soul by his sins, and the souls of others by his counsels, example, and conversation, which corrupt good manners; so does one sinner in a family, neighbourhood, and town; as one poor wise man does much good, one sinner mars much; one Achan in a camp or army, one bad counsel for in a cabinet, one false teacher in the church, will do a great deal of mischief, as well as one debauchee in a town or city. The Vulgate Latin version is, “who sins in one”; offends or sins in one, as in (~~5120~~ James 2:10); so the Syriac version, “one sin destroys much good”, or many good things; and to the same purpose the Arabic version, “he that committeth one sin”.