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Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is one of the Bible's wisdom books, like Job and Proverbs. But it is different from the others. Job talks about why bad things happen to good people. Proverbs gives wise advice, as from a parent to a child. But Ecclesiastes is more personal. The main speaker is not concerned much with other people. Ecclesiastes asks, "What is the meaning of my life?" And the answer is surprising.

In Hebrew, Ecclesiastes is called "Qoheleth", a kind of nickname for the main speaker in this book. It means something like "the Teacher". This was a person who gathered the people of Israel together and taught them wisdom. In the first part of the book, the Teacher sounds like King Solomon.

The Teacher taught the people of Israel that life does not make sense. In fact, he says life is meaningless. After all, everyone dies—both good people and bad people. Many times, good people fail and bad people succeed. Bad people often go unpunished. They can cheat and gain more from their dishonesty. Then they die just like a good person who never cheated anyone. The Teacher says that this does not make any sense.

Also, being successful and having everything you want is meaningless, says the Teacher. You can work hard and become successful. You can even create something lasting, like a business that outlives you. But when you die, you will leave all

this behind. Someone else will take over what you created and change it or ruin it. So trying hard to be successful is also a waste of time, says the Teacher.

If bad people can be as successful as good people, does it make sense to try to do what is right? Some people think it is foolish. They think that they should just do all the selfish things they want to do. But this is also senseless, says the Teacher. If you always want more, you will never have enough. You will never be satisfied with anything you have if you live only for yourself. So living selfishly is also meaningless.

So what is the meaning of life? The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that all life has value. But the world we live in does not make sense. So, we don't see how our lives have any meaning. The book ends by saying that the best we can do is this: to fear and respect God, the one who will judge every person.

This answer is troubling to most of us. But it does not come from someone who is depressed and hates life. It comes from one who has learned the secret of true wisdom: that all we really have in this life is our relationship with God and the gifts God provides for us. So, the Teacher says, enjoy these gifts before you die. Eat and drink well, and be happy with the work God has given you to do. The book of Ecclesiastes talks about...
 The Teacher's own life (1:1 – 2:26)
 Life in general (3:1 – 5:20)
 Life without meaning (6:1 – 8:17)
 Fearing God (9:1 – 12:14)

1 These are the words from the Teacher,* son of David and king in Jerusalem.

²Everything is so meaningless. The Teacher says that it is all a waste of time![†] ³Do people really gain anything from all the hard work they do in this life?[‡]

Nothing Ever Changes

⁴People die and others are born to take their place, and the earth continues the same as always. ⁵The sun rises and the sun goes down, and then it hurries to rise again in the same place.

⁶The wind blows to the south, and the wind blows to the north. The swirling wind blows around and around and returns to the place it began.

⁷Every river flows into the sea, but the sea never becomes full. The water returns to where the rivers began, and from there they flow again to the sea.

⁸Words cannot fully explain things,[¶] but people continue speaking.[§] Words come again and again to our ears, but our ears don't become full. And our eyes don't become full of what we see.

Nothing Is New

⁹All things continue the way they have been since the beginning. Everything that has been done will be done again. There is nothing new in this life.

¹⁰Is there anything that you can say is new? It has already been done. It was done long ago.

¹¹No one remembers those who lived in the past. And the people who live in the future will not remember those who lived before them.

Does Wisdom Bring Happiness?

¹²I am the Teacher of wisdom. I was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³I decided to study and to use my wisdom to learn about everything that is done here on earth. I learned that what God has given us humans to do is a miserable task! ¹⁴I looked at every single thing done in this life, and I must say that it is all useless—a waste of time. It's like trying to catch the wind. ¹⁵It's like trying to make something straight that is forever crooked. It's like looking for something that isn't there.

¹⁶I thought, I have become wiser than all the kings who ruled Jerusalem before me. I have gained much wisdom and knowledge.

¹⁷I was determined to learn everything about wisdom and about foolish thinking and behaviour. But I saw that this also is like trying to catch the wind. ¹⁸With much wisdom comes frustration. And when you gain more knowledge, you have more pain.

Does “Having Fun” Bring Happiness?

2 I said to myself, “I should have fun—I should enjoy everything as much as I can.” But I learned that this is also useless. ²It is foolish to laugh all the time. Having fun does not do any good.

***1:1 Teacher** Literally, “Qoheleth”, which may have been a nickname for Solomon. It seems to mean “teacher” or “wise leader”.

[†]**1:2 meaningless ... a waste of time** The Hebrew word means “vapour” or “breath” or “something that is useless, meaningless, empty, wrong or a waste of time”.

[‡]**1:3 in this life** Literally, “under the sun”. Also in verse 9 and throughout this book.

[¶]**1:8 Words cannot fully explain things** Literally, “All words are weak.”

[§]**1:8 but people continue speaking** The Hebrew could also be translated, “People cannot speak.”

³So I decided to fill my body with wine while I filled my mind with wisdom. I tried this foolishness because I wanted to find a way to be happy. I wanted to see what was good for people to do during their few days of life.

Does Hard Work Bring Happiness?

⁴Then I began doing great things. I built houses, and I planted vineyards for myself. ⁵I planted gardens, and I made parks. I planted all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I made pools of water for myself, and I used them to water my growing trees. ⁷I bought men and women slaves, and there were slaves born in my house. I owned many great things. I had herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. I owned more things than any other person in Jerusalem did.

⁸I also gathered silver and gold for myself. I took treasures from kings and their nations. I had men and women singing for me. I had everything any man could want.

⁹I became very rich and famous. I was greater than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before me. My wisdom was always there to help me. ¹⁰Anything my eyes saw and wanted, I got for myself. My mind was pleased with everything I did. And this happiness was the reward for all my hard work.

¹¹But then I looked at everything I had done and the wealth I had gained. I decided it was all useless! It was like trying to catch the wind. There is nothing to gain from anything we do in this life.

Maybe Wisdom Is the Answer

¹²Then I decided to think about what it means to be wise or to be foolish or to do crazy things. And I thought about the one who will be the next king. The new

king will do the same as the kings before him.** ¹³I saw that wisdom is better than foolishness in the same way that light is better than darkness. ¹⁴Wise people use their minds like eyes to see where they are going. But for fools, it is as if they are walking in the dark.

I also saw that fools and wise people both end the same way. ¹⁵I thought to myself, "The same thing that happens to a fool will also happen to me. So why have I tried so hard to become wise?" I said to myself, "Being wise is also meaningless." ¹⁶Whether people are wise or foolish, they will still die, and no one will remember either one of them forever. In the future people will forget everything both of them did. So the two are really the same.

Is There Real Happiness in Life?

¹⁷This made me hate life. It was depressing to think that everything in this life is useless, like trying to catch the wind.

¹⁸I began to hate all the hard work I had done in this life, because I must leave to someone else all that I have worked for. ¹⁹And I don't know if they will be wise or foolish. But they will control everything I earned in this life with all my hard work and wisdom. This doesn't make any sense.

²⁰So I began to feel sad about all the work I had done. ²¹People can work hard using all their wisdom and knowledge and skill. But then they die and leave everything they earned to someone who has not worked for it. This also is not fair. It is senseless.

²²What do people really have after all their work and struggling in this life? ²³Throughout their life they have pain, frustrations and hard work. Even

**2:12 *And I thought ... before him* The Hebrew text is not clear.

at night, a person's mind does not rest. This is also senseless.

²⁴⁻²⁵ There is no one who has tried to enjoy life more than I have. And this is what I learned: the best thing people can do is eat, drink and enjoy the work they must do. I also saw that this comes from God.^{††} ²⁶ If people do good and please God, he will give them wisdom, knowledge and joy. But those who sin will get only the work of gathering and carrying things. God takes from the bad person and gives to the good person. But all this work is useless. It is like trying to catch the wind.

A Time for Everything

3 There is a right time for everything, and everything on earth will happen at the right time.

² There is a time to be born and a time to die.

There is a time to plant and a time to pull up plants.

³ There is a time to kill and a time to heal.

There is a time to destroy and a time to build.

⁴ There is a time to cry and a time to laugh.

There is a time to be sad and a time to dance with joy.

⁵ There is a time to throw weapons down and a time to pick them up.^{‡‡}

There is a time to hug someone and a time to stop holding so tightly.

⁶ There is a time to look for something and a time to consider it lost.

There is a time to keep things and a time to throw things away.

⁷ There is a time to tear cloth and a time to sew it.

There is a time to be silent and a time to speak.

⁸ There is a time to love and a time to hate.

There is a time for war and a time for peace.

God Controls His World

⁹ Do people really gain anything from their hard work? ¹⁰ I saw all the hard work God gave us to do. ¹¹ God gave us the ability to think about his world,^{¶¶} but we can never completely understand everything he does. And yet, he does everything at just the right time.

¹² I learned that the best thing for people to do is to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live. ¹³ God wants everyone to eat, drink and enjoy their work. These are gifts from God.

¹⁴ I learned that anything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to the work of God, and they cannot take anything away from it. God did this so that people would respect him. ¹⁵ What happens now also happened in the past. What happens in the future has also happened before. God makes things happen again and again.

¹⁶ In this life on earth I also saw these things: I saw that the courts should be filled with goodness and fairness, but there is evil there now. ¹⁷ So I said to myself, "God has planned a time for everything, and he has planned a time to judge everything people do. He will judge good people and bad people."

^{††}2:24-25 Or "24 The best people can do is eat, drink and enjoy their work. I also saw that this comes from God. 25 No one can eat or enjoy life without God."

^{‡‡}3:5 Literally, "There is a time to throw stones away and a time to gather stones."

^{¶¶}3:11 *the ability ... world* Or "a desire to know the future".

Are People Like Animals?

¹⁸I thought about what people do to each other. And I said to myself, “God wants people to see that they are like animals. ¹⁹The same thing happens to animals and to people—they die. People and animals have the same breath.^{§§} Is a dead animal different from a dead person? It is all so senseless! ²⁰The bodies of people and animals end the same way. They came from the earth, and, in the end, they will go back to the earth. ²¹Who knows what happens to a person’s spirit? Who knows if a human’s spirit goes up to God while an animal’s spirit goes down into the ground?”

²²So I saw that the best thing people can do is to enjoy what they do, because that is all they have. Besides, no one can help another person see what will happen in the future.

Is It Better to Be Dead?

4 Again, I saw that many people are mistreated in this life. I saw their tears, and I saw that there was no one to comfort them. I saw that cruel people had all the power, and I saw that there was no one to comfort the people they hurt. ²I decided that it is better for those who have died than for those who are still alive. ³And it is even better for those who were never born, because they never saw the evil that is done in this life.

Why Work So Hard?

⁴Then I thought, “Why do people work so hard?” I saw people try to succeed and be better than other people. They do this because they are jealous. They don’t want other people to have

more than they have. This is senseless. It is like trying to catch the wind.

⁵Some people say, “It is foolish to fold your hands and do nothing. If you don’t work, you will starve to death.” ⁶Maybe that is true. But I say it is better to be satisfied with the few things you have than to always be struggling to get more.

⁷Again, I saw something else in this life that didn’t make sense: ⁸I saw a man who has no family, not a son or even a brother. But he continues to work very hard. He is never satisfied with what he has. And he works so hard that he never stops and asks himself, “Why am I working so hard? Why don’t I let myself enjoy my life?” This is also a very bad and senseless thing.

Friends and Family Give Strength

⁹Two people are better than one. When two people work together, they get more work done.

¹⁰If one person falls, the other person can reach out to help. But those who are alone when they fall have no one to help them.

¹¹If two people sleep together, they will be warm. But a person sleeping alone will not be warm.

¹²An enemy might be able to defeat one person, but two people can stand back-to-back to defend each other. And three people are even stronger. They are like a rope that has three parts wrapped together—it is very hard to break.

People, Politics and Popularity

¹³A young leader who is poor but wise is better than a king who is old but foolish. That old king does not listen to warnings. ¹⁴Maybe the young ruler was born a poor man in the kingdom. And maybe he came from prison to rule

§§3:19 *breath* Or “spirit”.

the country. ¹⁵But I have watched people in this life, and I know this: people will follow that young man. He will become the new king. ¹⁶Many people will follow this young man. But later, those same people will not like him. This is also senseless. It is like trying to catch the wind.

Be Careful About Making Promises

5 Be very careful when you go to worship God. It is better to listen to God than to give sacrifices like fools. Fools often do bad things, and they don't even know it. ²Be careful when you make promises to God. Be careful about what you say to him. Don't let your feelings cause you to speak too soon. God is in heaven, and you are on the earth. So you need to say only a few things to him. This saying is true:

³Bad dreams come from too many worries,
and too many words come from the mouth of a fool.

⁴If you make a vow to God, keep your vow. Don't be slow to do what you promised. God is not happy with fools. Give God what you promised to give him. ⁵It is better to promise nothing than to promise something and not be able to do it. ⁶So don't let your words cause you to sin. Don't say to the priest,^{*} "I didn't mean what I said." If you do this, God might become angry at your words and destroy everything you have worked for. ⁷You should not let your useless dreams and boasting bring you trouble. You should respect God.

The Poor and the Rich

⁸You may be in a place where the poor people are made to suffer by those in power. You may see their rights taken away unfairly. But don't be surprised! The official who is making life hard for them is under orders from another official in a higher position. And they are both under even higher officials. ⁹It is best for a country to have a king in charge who will make sure the fields are prepared to produce good crops.[†]

¹⁰Those who love money will never be satisfied with the money they have. Those who love wealth will not be satisfied when they get more and more. This is also senseless.

¹¹The more wealth people have, the more "friends" they have to help spend it. So the rich really gain nothing. They can only look at their wealth.

¹²Those who work hard all day come home and sleep in peace. It is not important if they have little or much to eat. But the rich worry about their wealth and are not able to sleep.

¹³There is a very sad thing that I have seen happen in this life. People save their money for the future.[‡] ¹⁴Then something bad happens, and they lose everything. So they have nothing to give to their children.

¹⁵People come into the world with nothing. And when they die, they leave with nothing. They might work hard to get things, but they cannot take anything with them when they die. ¹⁶It is very sad that people leave the world just as they came. So what does a person gain from "trying to catch the wind"? ¹⁷They

^{*}5:6 *priest* Or "angel" or "messenger". This might be an angel, a priest or a prophet.

[†]5:9 *It is best ... crops* Or "Even the king gets his share of the profit. The wealth of the country is divided among them."

[‡]5:13 *for the future* Or "to their harm".

only get days that are filled with sadness and sorrow. In the end, they are troubled, sick and angry.

Enjoy Your Life's Work

¹⁸I have seen what is best for people to do. They should eat, drink and enjoy the work they have during their short time here on this earth. God has given them these few days, and that is all they have.

¹⁹If God gives some people wealth, property and the power to enjoy those things, they should enjoy them. They should accept the things they have and enjoy their work—that is a gift from God. ²⁰People don't have many years to live, so they must remember these things all their life. God will keep them busy with the work they love to do.[¶]

Wealth Does Not Bring Happiness

6 I have seen another thing in this life that is not fair and is very hard to understand. ²God gives some people great wealth, riches and honour. They have everything they need and everything they could ever want. But then God does not let them enjoy those things. Some stranger comes and takes everything. This is a very bad and senseless thing.

³A man might live a long time and have 100 children. But if he is not satisfied with those good things, and if no one remembers him after his death, I say that a baby who dies at birth is better off than that man. ⁴It is senseless when a baby is born dead. The baby is quickly buried in a dark grave, without even a

name. ⁵The baby never saw the sun and never knew anything. But the baby finds more rest than the man who never enjoyed what God gave him. ⁶He might live 2000 years. But if he does not enjoy life, then the baby who was born dead has found the easiest way to the same end.[§]

⁷People work and work to feed themselves, but they are never satisfied. ⁸In the same way, a wise person is no better than a fool is. It is better to be a poor person who knows how to accept life as it is. ⁹It is better to be happy with what you have than to always want more and more. Always wanting more and more is useless. It is like trying to catch the wind.^{**}

¹⁰⁻¹¹You are only what you were created to be, a human, and it is useless to argue about it. People cannot argue with God about this because he is more powerful than they are, and a long argument will not change that fact.

¹²Who knows what is best for people during their short life on earth? Their life passes like a shadow. No one can tell them what will happen later.

A Collection of Wise Teachings

7 A good reputation is better than expensive pleasures.^{††}

The day someone dies is better than the day they were born.

²It is better to go to a funeral than to a party.

Yes, because everyone must die, and the living need to remember this.

[¶]5:20 *God ... to do* Or "God will do whatever he wants to them."

[§]6:6 *then the baby ... the same end* Or "Isn't it true that all go to the same place?"

^{**}6:9 Or "Having what you can see is better than chasing after the things you want. This is also like trying to catch the wind."

^{††}7:1 *A good reputation ... pleasures* Literally, "better a name than good perfume". This is a wordplay in Hebrew. The word for "name" and the word for "perfume" sound alike.

³ But sorrow[‡] is even better than laughter,

because what makes you sad can improve the way you think.

⁴ A wise person thinks about death, but a fool thinks only about having a good time.

⁵ It is better to be criticized by the wise than praised by the foolish.

⁶ The laughter of fools is such a waste. It is like thorns burning under a pot.

The thorns burn so quickly that the pot does not get hot.[¶]

⁷ A wise person who cheats people is really a fool,

and a good person who accepts a bribe is no longer good.

⁸ Finishing something is better than starting it.

Being patient is better than being proud.

⁹ Don't become angry quickly, because getting angry is foolish.

¹⁰ Don't ask, "Why was life so much better in the 'good old days'?"

That is not a wise question to ask.

¹¹ Wisdom is better if you also have property. Wise people^{§§} will get more than enough wealth. ¹² Wisdom and money can protect you. But knowledge gained through wisdom is even better—it can save your life.

¹³ Look at what God has made. You cannot change a thing, even if you think it is wrong. ¹⁴ When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember that God gives us good times and hard times. And no one knows what will happen in the future.

People Cannot Really Be Good

¹⁵ In my senseless life, I have seen everything. I have seen good people die young, and I have seen evil people live long lives. ^{16–17} So why ruin your life? Don't be too good or too bad, and don't be too wise or too foolish. Why should you die before your time?

¹⁸ Try to be a little of this and a little of that.* Even those who respect God do some good things and some bad things. ^{19–20} Surely there is no one on earth who always does good and never sins. But wisdom can make one person stronger than ten leaders in a city.

²¹ Don't listen to everything people say. You might hear your own servant saying bad things about you. ²² And you know that many times you too have said bad things about other people.

²³ I used my wisdom and thought about all these things. I wanted to be wise, but I couldn't do it. ²⁴ I cannot understand why things are as they are. It is too hard for anyone to understand. ²⁵ I studied and I tried very hard to find true wisdom. I tried to find a reason for everything.

I learned that it is foolish to be evil, and it is crazy to act like a fool. ²⁶ I also found that some women are as dangerous as traps. Their hearts are like nets, and their arms are like chains. It is worse than death to be caught by these women. The man who pleases God will escape such a woman. But a sinner will be caught in her trap.

^{27–28} The Teacher says, "I added all this together to see what answer I could

[‡]7:3 *sorrow* Or "frustration".

[¶]7:6 Or "The cackling of fools, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, is senseless."

^{§§}7:11 *Wise people* Literally, "People who see the sun". This means wise people can see and plan what they should do.

*7:18 *Try ... of that* Or "Hold onto this, but don't let go of that."

find. I am still looking for answers, but I did find this: I found one good man in a thousand. But I did not find even one good woman.

²⁹“There is one other thing I have learned. God made people good, but they have found many ways to be bad.”

Wisdom and Power

8 No one can understand and explain things the way wise people can. Their wisdom makes them happy. It changes a sad face into a happy one.

²I say you should always obey the king’s command. Do this because you made a promise to God. ³Don’t be afraid to give suggestions to the king, and don’t support something that is wrong. But remember, the king can do whatever he wants. ⁴He has the authority to give commands, and no one can tell him what to do. ⁵People will be safe if they obey his command. But wise people know the right time to do this, and they also know when to do the right thing.

⁶There is a right time and a right way to do everything. You must decide what you should do, even when it might cause problems ⁷and you are not sure what will happen. No one can tell you what will happen in the future.

⁸No one can control the wind or stop their death. During war, no soldier has the freedom to go wherever he wants. In the same way, evil does not allow anyone who does wrong to go free.

⁹I saw all this. I thought very hard about the things that happen in this life. I saw that people always struggle for the power to rule others, and this is bad for them.

¹⁰I also saw great and beautiful funerals for evil people. While the people were going home after the funerals, they said good things about the evil people

who had died. This happened even in the same towns where the evil people had done many bad things. This is senseless.

Justice, Rewards and Punishment

¹¹Sometimes people are not immediately punished for the bad things they do. Their punishment is slow to come, and that makes all people want to do bad things too.

¹²A sinner might do a hundred evil things and still live a long time. But I know that it is still better to obey and respect God. ¹³Evil people don’t respect God, so they will not get good things or live long lives. Their lives will not be like the shadows that become longer and longer as the sun goes down.

¹⁴There is something else that happens on earth that seems senseless. Bad things should happen to bad people, and good things should happen to good people. But sometimes bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. This is senseless! ¹⁵So I decided it was more important to enjoy life because the best thing people can do in this life is to eat, drink and enjoy life. At least that will help people enjoy the hard work God gave them to do during their life on earth.

We Cannot Understand All God Does

¹⁶I carefully studied the things people do in this life. I saw how busy people are. They work day and night, and they almost never sleep. ¹⁷I also saw that no one can understand all that God does. People can try and try to understand the things that happen in this life, but they cannot. There may be wise people who claim to understand the meaning of these things, but they are wrong. No one can understand it all.

Is Death Fair?

9 I thought about all this very carefully. I saw that God controls what happens to the good and wise people and what they do. People don't know if they will be loved or hated, and they don't know what will happen in the future.

²But, there is one thing that happens to everyone—we all die! Death comes to good people and bad people. Death comes to those who are pure and to those who are not pure. Death comes to those who give sacrifices and to those who don't give sacrifices. It comes to good people as well as sinners. People who make promises to God and those who are afraid to make such promises will all die.

³Of all the things that happen in this life, the worst thing is that all people end life the same way. But it is also very bad that people always think evil and foolish thoughts. And those thoughts lead to death. ⁴There is hope for those who are still alive—it does not matter who they are. But this saying is true:

A living dog is better than a dead lion.

⁵The living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. They have no more reward. People will soon forget them. ⁶After people are dead, their love, hate and jealousy are all gone. And they will never again share in what happens in this life.

Enjoy Life While You Can

⁷So go and eat your food now and enjoy it. Drink your wine and be happy. It is all right with God if you do these things. ⁸Wear nice clothes and make yourself look good. ⁹Enjoy yourself with the wife you love every day of this senseless life that God has given you here on earth. That is your reward for all the work you have to do in this life. ¹⁰Every

time you find work to do, do it the best you can. In the grave there is no work. There is no thinking, no knowledge and there is no wisdom. And we are all going to the place of death.

Life Is Not Fair

¹¹Here are some other things I have learned in this life: the fastest runner does not always win the race; the strongest soldier does not always win the battle; wise people don't always get the food; smart people don't always get the wealth; educated people don't always get the praise they deserve. When the time comes, bad things can happen to anyone!

¹²You never know when hard times will come. Like fish in a net or birds in a snare, people are often trapped by some disaster that suddenly falls on them.

Wisdom Is Still Better Than Foolishness

¹³I also saw a person doing a wise thing in this life, and it seemed very important to me. ¹⁴There was a small town with a few people in it. A great king fought against that town and put his armies all around it. ¹⁵But there was a wise man in that town. He was poor, but he used his wisdom to save his town. After everything was finished, the people forgot about the poor man. ¹⁶But I still say that wisdom is better than strength. They forgot about the poor man's wisdom, and the people stopped listening to what he said. But I still believe that wisdom is better.

¹⁷Words spoken by the wise are heard more clearly than those shouted by a leader among fools.

¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war,

but one fool[†] can destroy much good.

10 A few dead flies will make even the best perfume stink. In the same way, a little foolishness makes wisdom and honour go unnoticed.

²The thoughts of the wise lead them the right way, but the thoughts of the foolish lead them the wrong way.

³Fools show how foolish they are, just walking down the road. Their minds are empty, and everyone knows it.

⁴Don't leave your job simply because the boss is angry with you.

Remaining calm can solve big problems.

⁵Here is something else that I have seen in this life that isn't fair. It is the kind of mistake that rulers make. ⁶Fools are given important positions, while the rich get jobs that are not important.

⁷I have seen servants riding on horses, while rulers were walking beside them like slaves.

⁸If you dig a hole, you might fall into it.

If you break down a wall, you might be bitten by a snake.

⁹If you have the job of moving large stones,

you might be hurt by them.

If you are splitting logs, they are a danger to you.

¹⁰Wisdom will make any job easier.

It is hard to cut with a dull knife.

But if you sharpen the knife, the job is easier.

¹¹Some people might know how to handle snakes,

but if they are bitten before they have control, that skill is useless.

¹²Words from the wise bring praise, but words from a fool bring destruction.

¹³Fools begin with one foolish thought, and they end up speaking complete nonsense.

¹⁴Fools are always talking about what they will do,

but no one knows what will happen. People cannot tell what the future will bring.

¹⁵Work is very tiring for fools because they don't know how to do anything right.

¹⁶It is very bad for a country if the king acts like a child.

And it is very bad for a country if its rulers start the day with feasting.

¹⁷Blessings belong to a country whose king comes from a good family.[‡]

Blessings belong to a country whose rulers control their eating and drinking.

They eat and drink to become strong, not to become drunk.

¹⁸If someone is too lazy to work, their house will begin to leak, and the roof will fall in.

¹⁹A party will bring you laughter, wine will add some cheer, and money buys whatever you want.

²⁰Don't say bad things about the king. Don't even think bad things about him. And don't say bad things about rich people,

even if you are alone in your home.

A little bird might fly away and tell them everything you said.

[†]9:18 *fool* Literally, "sinner".

[‡]10:17 *comes from a good family* Literally, "is a son of freedmen". This is a person who was never a slave and whose parents were not slaves.

Boldly Face the Future

11 Do good wherever you go.[¶]
After a while, the good you do
will come back to you.

²Invest what you have in several differ-
ent things.[§]

You don't know what bad things might
happen on earth.

³There are some things you can be sure
of.

If clouds are full of rain,
they will pour water on the earth.

If a tree falls—to the south or to the
north—

then it will stay where it falls.

⁴But there are some things that you can-
not be sure of.

You must take a chance.

If you wait for perfect weather,
you will never plant your seeds.

If you are afraid that every cloud will
bring rain,

you will never harvest your crops.

⁵You don't know where the wind comes
from

or how a baby grows in its mother's
womb.

So how can you understand what God
does?

He is the one who makes everything
happen.

⁶So begin planting early in the morning,
and don't stop working until evening.

You don't know what might make you
rich.

Maybe everything you do will be
successful.

⁷It is good to be alive.

It is nice to see the light from the sun.

⁸You should enjoy every day of your life,

no matter how long you live.
But don't forget that you will die,
and you will be dead much longer than
you were alive.

And after you are dead,
you cannot do anything.

Serve God While You Are Young

⁹So young people, enjoy yourselves
while you are young.

Be happy.

Do whatever your heart leads you to do.

Do whatever you want,

but don't forget that God will judge you
for everything you do.

¹⁰Don't let your anger control you,
and don't let your body lead you to sin.**
People do foolish things in the dawn of
life

while they are young.

The Problems of Old Age

12 Remember your Creator while
you are young, before the bad
times come—before the years come
when you say, "I take no pleasure in life
any more."

²That's when the sun and the moon
and the stars will grow dim. It will seem
like every day is dark with rain clouds.

³At that time your arms will lose their
strength. Your legs will become weak
and bent. Your teeth will fall out, and
you will not be able to chew your food.
Your eyes will not see clearly. ⁴Your
ears will not be able to hear the noise in
the streets. Even the stone grinding your
grain will seem quiet to you. You will
not be able to hear the women singing.
But even the chirping of a bird will be
enough to wake you.

[¶]11:1 *Do good ... go* Or "Throw your bread on the water."

[§]11:2 *Invest ... different things* Or "Give a part to seven, or even eight."

**11:10 *Don't let ... sin* Or "Don't worry about things. Protect yourself from troubles."

⁵You will be afraid of high places. You will be afraid of tripping over anything in your path. Your hair will become white like the flowers on an almond tree. You will drag yourself along like a grasshopper when you walk. You will lose your desire,^{††} and then you will go to your eternal home. The mourners will gather in the streets as they carry your body to the grave.

Death

⁶Remember your Creator while you are young, before the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl is crushed like a jar broken at the well, or a stone cover on a well that breaks and falls in.

⁷Your body came from the earth, and when you die, it will return to the earth.

But your spirit came from God, and when you die, it will return to him.

⁸Everything is so meaningless. The Teacher says that it is all a waste of time!^{‡‡}

Final Words of Advice

⁹The Teacher was very wise. He used his wisdom to teach the people. He very carefully studied and arranged^{¶¶} many wise teachings. ¹⁰The Teacher tried very hard to find the right words, and he wrote the teachings that are true and dependable.

¹¹Words from the wise are like sharp goads. When these sayings are written down and saved, they can be used to guide people, just as a shepherd uses a sharp stick to make his sheep go the right way. ¹²So, son, study these sayings, but be careful about other teachings. People are always writing books, and too much study will make you very tired.

¹³⁻¹⁴Now, the main point of all that you have heard is this:^{§§} the most important thing a person can do is to respect God and obey his commands, because God knows everything that people do—even the secret things. He knows about all the good and all the bad, and he will judge people for everything they do.

^{††}12:5 *desire* Or “appetite” or “sexual desire”. The Hebrew text is not clear.

^{‡‡}12:8 *meaningless ... a waste of time* The Hebrew word means “vapour”, “breath” or “something that is useless, meaningless, empty, wrong or a waste of time”.

^{¶¶}12:9 *arranged* This Hebrew word means “to make straight”, “arrange”, “correct” or “edit”.

^{§§}12:13-14 *Now ... is this* Literally, “The sum of the matter, when all is heard, is ...”.