

# Notes on the Book of Ecclesiastes

## Introduction

Like the other series of **Notes** on this Home Page, this document follows an identical format. That is to say, it contains brief—even terse—notations on the most important words of the Book of Ecclesiastes from the vantage point of lectio divina.<sup>1</sup> Despite the rather sparse presentation, this document is not intended to be “another commentary” but a means to employ the original Hebrew words to carry out this venerable practice of lectio divina or sacred reading. As exposed here, a primary way of effecting this is by a close consideration of the Hebrew verbal root system. Although the Hebrew language is limited in comparison with others, this apparent deficiency allows greater depth and expansion on a vertical plane, if you will. Various threads of meaning are more connected than they appear at first glance but on a level generally inaccessible to anyone not familiar with the language. That is why the bulk of these **Notes** is transliterated. The reader may find all these transliterated words and phrases burdensome, however, they are specifically used to demonstrate the Hebrew verbal root system as perhaps the best way to practice lectio divina.

The English text of the Bible used throughout is the **New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha**. The Introduction to Ecclesiastes of that Revised Standard Edition well sums up the theme of this book: “Ecclesiastes contains the reflections of a philosopher rather than a testimony of belief”...not in a complicated, analytical fashion but one garnered through personal experience.

A **Supplement** to Ecclesiastes will be found at the end which is composed of transliterated Hebrew words used only in this book.

+

## Chapter One

---

<sup>1</sup>Although defined in other **Notes**, I will briefly repeat its meaning: the slow, meditative reading of Scripture with the intent to lead into contemplative prayer. It originated in monasteries and is still widely practiced today. In recent years there has been considerable interest in lectio divina, and a number of good books have been written on it.

Vs. 1: The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

-*Words (davar, singular)*: from the common verbal root “to speak.”

-*Preacher (Qoheleth)*: the name of the author of this book (“Son of David” or King Solomon) which occurs only within Ecclesiastes; it derives from the verbal root *qahal*, *to gather together, to assemble*. Its first use in the Bible is Ex 32.1: “When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down the mountain, the people *gathered* themselves together to Aaron.” Usually *qahal* has a religious connotation, assembling for prayer, etc. A preacher expresses himself through words and well as through an assembly of people, hence the close connection between *davar* and *Qoheleth*.

Vs. 2: Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

-*Vanity (hevel)*: the theme of Ecclesiastes which occurs five times in this verse alone. This noun comes from a verbal root meaning “to breathe,” “to exhale” and commonly suggests anything transitory. For another sense, cf. two references: 1) Job 7.16: “Let me alone, for my days are a *breath*.” 2) Is 30.7: “For Egypt’s help is worthless and *empty*.” Compare the outward breathing of *hevel* with *ruach* (*breath, spirit*) which is close in meaning. However, the latter seems to imply breathing from the nostrils as opposed to the mouth and alternately can mean “to smell.”

-“All:” or everything both in nature and in human affairs which sets the stage for a distinction between these things and that which endures as symbolized in vs. 4 by “the earth remains forever.”

Vs. 3: What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

-*Man* (‘adam): often used as person compared with ‘ysh, *man* opposed to woman.

-*Gain (yitron)*: only occurs in Ecclesiastes: 2.11, 13; 3.9; 5.9, 16; 7.12; 10.10, 11. This noun derives from *yatar* (*to abound, be superior*).

-“Man:” prefixed by the preposition *l-* (*to, towards*), “to a man” and shows the close connection between a person and the negative implications of “gain.”

-*Toil (hamal)*: in the sense of producing weariness. “God has made me forget all my *hardship* and all my father’s house” [Gen 41.51]. “All” is used with respect to this noun and may be compared with “all is vanity.” This word is prefixed by the

preposition *b-* (*in*), literally as “in all his toil.” Compare *b-* with *l-*, “to man *in* all his toil.”

-*Toils*: the verb *hamal* from which the noun is derived.

-“Under the sun.” A phrase frequently used in Ecclesiastes: 1.9, 14; 2.11, 17, 18,19, 20; 3.16; 4.1, 3, 7, 15; 5.13, 18; 6.1, 12; 8.9, 15, 17; 9.3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10.5. It suggests the heat required by such toil. A similar sentiment is found in Ex 18.11, “He (God) delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.” Compare with “under heaven” as in vs. 13, also frequently occurring in Ecclesiastes.

Vs. 4: A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

-*Generation* (*dur*): alternately as “age,” “period” and used here without the definite article which re-enforces the endless cycle of human birth and death. This sense is intensified by “goes” and “comes.” Another use of this term is Gen 5.1, “These are the *generations* of Adam.” The first use of *dur* is in 2.4 with reference to non-human coming into existence, “The *generations* of the heavens and the earth.”

-*Earth* (*‘erts*). Such stability comes to mind with Gen 1.1, “God created the heavens and the *earth*.” Often *‘erts* (as ‘land’) refers to a particular place which has been set aside for a definite reason: “To your descendants I will give this *land*” [Gen 12.7].

-*Remains* (*hamad*): in the sense of standing or abiding. “For now no strength *remains* in me” [Dan 10.17]. Also cf. 2.9, “Also my wisdom *remained* with me.” Such *hamad* is in conjunction with *‘eret*z or *earth* considered to endure permanently.

Vs. 5: The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.

-The previous verse has the earth remaining forever. Contrast this stability with the movability depicted in vss. 5-7: sun, wind and streams.

-*Rises* (*zarach*): suggests scattering as rays and used twice in this verse. The second refers to the dawn of a new day but a day which does not differ from the previous one or others before (as well as after) it. This second use (in the context of ‘hastening’) applies to the period from sunset to dawn. “The sun *rose* upon him (Jacob) as he passed Penuel” [Gen 32.31]. Also cf. Is 60.2, “But the Lord *shall arise* upon you.”

-*Goes down* (*bo’*): the common verb meaning “to enter,” “to come in.”

-*Hastens* (sha'aph): fundamentally “to breathe hard,” “to pant” and the only use of the verb with this meaning. “Now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I *will gasp and pant*” [Is 42.14].

-*Place* (maqom): alternately as “habitation,” “village.” Maqom also applies to a special position set aside from other places and is first used in Gen 1.9: “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one *place*, and let the dry land appear.”

Vs. 6: The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.

-*Wind* (ruach): the same word for “spirit.” This term is frequently mentioned in Ecclesiastes, especially symbolic of vanity. The first use as “wind” is found in Gen 8.1, “God made a *wind* blow over the earth.”

-*Blows* (halak): the common word for “to go.” Here it blows to the *south* or *darom* which is derived from a verbal root meaning “to fly in a circle,” “to wheel in flight.” “You whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the *south wind*” [Job 37.17]. For a different meaning of the same word, “To proclaim *liberty* to the captives” [Is 61.1].

-*North* (tsaphon): from a verbal root meaning “to hide,” possibly inferring darkness. “Awake, O *north wind*, and come, O south wind” [Sg 4.16]!

-*Goes round* (savav): with reference to *tsaphon*. The verb suggests turning as well as surrounding. “The watchmen found me as they *went about* in the city” [Sg 3.3]. In the verse at hand, *savav* is found three times. In the last two instances it is used in conjunction with *halak* (*goes*).

-*Circuits* (savyv, singular): from the verbal root *savav*. For another use, “Let all *around* him bring gifts to him who is to be feared” [Ps 76.11].

Vs. 7: All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

-*Streams* (nachal, singular). This noun can symbolize destruction: “The cords of death encompassed me, the *torrents* of perdition assailed me” [Ps 18.4].

-*Run* (halak): as found in the previous verse, “to blow.” In the verse at hand, “streams” and “run” are similar in sound: hanchalym/holekym.

-*Place* (maqom): as in vs. 5 with reference to the sun.

-Note the similar sounds words of “there” and “flow again:” sham/shavym. “Flow again” is used in conjunction with the verb *halak*.

Vs. 8: All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

-“All *things*” (**davar**, singular): from the common verbal root meaning “to speak.” This noun alternately means “word.”

-*Full of weariness* (**yagah**): alternately as “to be fatigued,” “to labor.” “But you *have been weary* of me, O Israel” [Is 43.22]!

-*Utter* (**davar**): as noted in this same section, the verbal root for “things.”

-“Not *satisfied*” (**savah**); also in 4.8, 5.10 and 6.7. “The trees of the Lord are *watered abundantly*, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted” [Ps 104.16].

-*Filled* (**mala'**). “I am *full* of words” [Job 32.18]. In the verse at hand, **mala'** is used with respect to hearing. This verb is similar in meaning to **savah** yet connotes more a spacial fullness.

Vs. 9: What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.

-References to “being” and “doing.” Cf. 3.15: “That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.” In the verse at hand, the author is not specific and can possibly mean human affairs of both the past and present. Also included may be the almost infinite number of beings which had appeared (and will appear) on the earth.

-“Nothing *new* (**chadash**):” the fundamental notion of this adjective’s verbal root is “to polish,” “to shine:” “...and who was girded with a *new* sword” [2 Sam 21.16]. A noun derived from this root means *new moon*, usually referring to a religious festival: “On the third *new moon* after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt” [Ex 19.1].

-“Under the sun:” first used in 1.3. The sun is the greatest physical witness, as it were, of all human activity and is akin to God’s omni-presence.

Vs. 10: Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new?” It has been already in the ages before us.

-*Thing* (**davar**): as in vs. 8, “All *things* are full of weariness.” As noted there, the noun is derived from the verbal root “to speak.” Compare with **'amar** (*to say*) used in the verse at hand.

-*New* (**chadash**): as in vs. 9.

-*Ages* (holam, singular): only use of this noun in Ecclesiastes. It essentially means anything which is hidden for a long time. “These were the mighty men that were *of old*, the men of renown” [Gen 6.4]. “Before us” refers to the past, and in the context of Ecclesiastes, such newness most likely will be repeated in the future.

Vs. 11: There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to happen among those who come after.

-*Remembrance* (zikron): from the verbal root *zakar* and from which is derived the noun “male.” *Zikron* connotes the act of birth where remembrance of the former generation is projected into the present and future. For another related use, “Write this as a *memorial* in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua” [Ex 17.14].

-*Former things* (ri’shon, singular): from a noun whose primary meaning is “head,” “beginning,” “foremost.” The noun at hand alternately means “forefathers:” “They have turned back to the iniquities of their *forefathers* who refused to hear my words” [Jer 11.10]. This noun is prefixed with the preposition *l-* (literally, “to”), and has the sense of “remembrance *to* (in the sense of ‘direction towards which’) former things.” It thus has a more poignant meaning, i.e., forgetfulness of what is important for the present.

-*Later things* (‘acharon, singular): related to an adverb meaning “after,” “what is behind.” For another sense, cf. Is 44.6: “I am the *first* (related to ri’shon) and I am the *last*.” Also the preposition *l-* is prefixed to this word. Note that the same preposition is used in the literal translation “not will be *to* them remembrance.” Thus there are four uses of *l-* in this verse, all conveying a lamentable condition with regards to the significance of one’s heritage.

Vs. 13: And I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with.

-*Applied* (natan): literally, “to give.” Ecclesiastes has three other references: 1.17, 8.9 & 16.

-*Mind* (lev): literally, “heart.” “O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my *mind*” [Ps 26.2]. In this verse, “heart” translates as “reins” or “kidneys.” *Lev* is used with two verbs:

1) *Seek* (darash): literally, “to tread, “to beat,” which connotes searching in the sense of trampling down a field. “And Solomon and the assembly *sought* the Lord” [2 Chron 1.5].

2) *Search out* (tur; also cf. 7.25). This verb connotes a traveling about as well as spying; for the latter, cf. Num 13.16: “These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to *spy out* the land.” *Darash* implies a more vigorous, open form of searching whereas *tur* suggests something done in secret and unknown to other persons. Both verbs are prefaced with the preposition *l-* (*to, towards*) and connote a direction towards-which. Also the letter *l* in *lev* may be associated with it.

-*Wisdom* (chakmah): the object of both *darash* and *tur* as already noted.

Compare the preposition *l-* prefixed to both verbs with the preposition *b-* (*in*) prefixed to this noun, suggesting “*in* wisdom.” The noun at hand fundamentally refers to skill or dexterity as Ex 31.6 reveals: “And I have given to all able men *ability*, that they may make all that I commanded you.”

-Another preposition used in the verse at hand is *hal* (*on, upon*): “*on* all which is done.” This common verb (*hasah*) is passive, almost as though the two verbs *darash* and *tur* control it or everything which is done “under heaven.”

-*Business* (hinyn). This noun is found only in Ecclesiastes (2.23, 26; 3.10; 4.8; 5.3, 14; 8.16). It is derived from the verb *hanah* which has multiple means: “to sing,” “to answer,” “to signify,” “to exercise oneself.”

-*Unhappy* (rah): basically as “evil.”

-*Busy* (hanah; also cf. 3.10): as just noted, this verb has multiple meanings and is the root for *hinyan*. It is the only use of this meaning in the Old Testament and connotes “affliction.”

Vs. 14: I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

-“Done under the sun:” compare with the previous verse, “done under heaven.”

-*Behold* (hineh): a demonstrative word which in this context seems to have gotten the attention of Ecclesiastes who uttered it. It is the first occurrence at this early stage in the book. The other four references are 2.1, 11; 4.1; 5.18.

-*Striving* (rehuth; also cf. 2.11, 17, 26; 4.4, 6; 6.9): an alternate meaning of this noun is “friend,” “female companion:” “...that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her *neighbor*” [Ex 11.2].

-*Wind* (ruach): as in vs. 6 and alternately as “spirit.” Note the similar sound between this word and *rehuth*.

Vs. 15: What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.

-*Crooked* (hauat): the only use of this verb in the Bible with this particular sense. **Hauat** can also imply perversion: "...and *deal deceitfully* with false balances" [Am 8.5]. It is used in 12.3 with another meaning, "and the strong men *are bent*."  
 -*Made straight* (taqan): in addition to this verse, **taqan** is used only in 12.9 & 7.13; the Chaldean form is found in Dan 4.26: "My counselors and my lords sought me, and I *was established* in my kingdom."  
 -*What was lacking* (chesron): from the verbal root **chasar**: "Let not oil *be lacking* on your head" [9.8]. For another reference, "But you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his *need*, whatever it may be" [Dt 15.8].  
 -*Be numbered* (manah): has the fundamental meaning of being divided or assigned. For another sense, cf. Jon 2.1: "And the Lord *appointed* a great fish to swallow up Jonah."

Vs. 16: I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."

-*Myself* (lev): cf. vs. 13, "And I applied my *mind* to seek and to search out." As noted there, **lev** alternately translates as "heart."  
 -Two uses of familiar verbs: *said* (**davar**) and "saying" (**amar**), the second being found in the Hebrew text, not in the English **RSV**. Also, **hineh** (*behold*, as in vs. 14) is inserted into the Hebrew text.  
 -*Acquired great* (**gadal**): this verb means "to be great," "to value highly." "What is man that you *make so much* of him" [Job 7.17]?  
 -*Surpassing* (**yasaph**; cf. 2.9): connotes the sense of adding from which the proper name "Joseph" is derived. "But I will hope continually and will praise you yet *more and more*" [Ps 71.14].  
 -"Over Jerusalem:" the preposition **hal**; it is also used in this verse which literally reads, "surpassing all wisdom *on* all who were before me." If we go with the tradition that the Book of Ecclesiastes was attributed to King Solomon, then the only person "before me" is his father, King David.  
 -*Mind* (lev): second use of this term in the same verse; also cf. vs. 13.  
 -*Experience* (ra'ah): the common verb "to see" which here is something the **lev** does and has two objects:  
 1) *Wisdom* (**chakmah**): cf. vs. 13, "to search out by *wisdom* all that is done under heaven."  
 2) *Knowledge* (**dahath**): from the verbal root **yadah** which implies intimate acquaintance as in Gen 4.1, "Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and



bore Cain.” For a use of the noun, “My people are destroyed for lack of *knowledge*” [Hos 4.6].

Vs. 17: And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

-*Mind* (*lev*): as last noted in the previous verse.

-*Applied* (*natan*): the simple verb “to give.”

-*To know* (*yadah*): noted in the previous verse whose object here is:

1) *Wisdom* (*chakmah*): cf. previous verse.

2) *Madness* (*hollelah*): also in vss. 2.12, 7.25, 9.3. The alternate translation is “folly” and derives from a verbal root which fundamentally means “to be bright,” “to shine.” “He shows the diviners *to be fools*” [Is 44.25].

-*Folly* (*sikloth*). The **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** which is used for this document has the Hebrew consonant *shin* whereas most dictionaries have the consonant *samech*. This word is found only here and in 2.3, 12, 13; 10.1, 13. It derives from a verbal root meaning “to be (to act) foolish.” “Behold, I *have played the fool* and have erred exceedingly” [1 Sam 26.21].

-*Perceived* (*yadah*): second use of this verb in the same sentence.

-*Striving* (*rahyon*): alternately as “desire,” “study” and comes from the verbal root *raha* meaning *to pasture, to feed*. It is also found in 2.22 and 4.16, the only instances of its occurrence in the Bible.

-*Wind* (*ruach*): first noted in 1.6. In the verse at hand, “after” is missing from the Hebrew text; no preposition is used.

Vs. 18: For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

-*Wisdom* or *chakmah* is equivalent to *vexation* (*kahas*; cf. 2.23 & 11.10). For an alternate meaning, “The Lord saw it and spurned them because of the *provocation* of his sons and daughters” [Dt 32.19]. I.e., the verbal root suggests being irritated or provoked.

-*Increases* (*yasaph*, used twice). Cf. 1.16, “*surpassing* all who were over Jerusalem before me.”

-*Knowledge* or *dahath* is equivalent to *sorrow* (*mak’ov*). “Look and see if there is any *sorrow* like my sorrow” [Lam 1.12]. This noun derives from the verbal root *ka’av*, *to cause (have) pain*.”

+

## Chapter Two

Vs. 1: I said to myself, “Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity.

-*Myself* (lev): last noted in 1.17 as “mind.”

-*Make a test* (nasah): “After these things God *tested* Abraham” [Gen 22.1]. In the verse at hand, the object of this verb is *pleasure* or *simchah*. This noun does not necessarily have a negative connotation as the following shows: “...Levites whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the Lord, to offer burnt offerings to the Lord...with *rejoicing* and with singing” [2 Chron 23.16].

-“Enjoy yourself:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “see in good.”

Vs. 2: I said of laughter, “Is it mad,” and of pleasure, “what use is it?”

-*Laughter* (sechoq; also 7.3, 6; 10.19): “He will fill your mouth with *laughter* and your lips with shouting” [Job 8.21]. This noun is derived from the verbal root *sachaq* which often connotes derision: “The righteous shall see and fear and *shall laugh* at him” [Ps 52.6].

-*Mad* (meholal): from the verbal root *halal* which fundamentally refers to anything bright. “It is a land of images, and they are *mad* over idols” [Jer 50.38].

-*Pleasure* (simchah): cf. previous verse.

-*Use* (hosah): from the verbal root *hasah*, *to do*. “Any vessel that is *used* for any purpose” [Lev 11.32].

Vs. 3: I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

-*Searched* (tur): cf. 1.13 with respect to wisdom.

-*Mind* (lev): last use in 2.1.

-*Cheer* (mashak): literally, “to draw out.” “He seizes the poor when he *draws* him into his net” [Ps 10.9].

-*Body (basar)*: alternately, “flesh.” “I have determined to make an end of all *flesh*” [Gen 6.13].

-*Guiding (nahag)*: alternately, “to drive,” “to pant.” “And you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord *will drive* you” [Dt 4.27]. In the verse at hand, such guiding is done with *wisdom* or *chakmah* last noted in 1.18.

-*Lay hold ('achaz)*: connotes seizing: “*Catch* for us the foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom” [Sg 2.15].

-*Folly (sekloth)*: only found in Ecclesiastes; also in 2.12, 13; 7.25; 10.1, 13. From the verbal root *sakal*, *to be foolish*.

-*Few (mispar)*: alternately, “number.” “Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel...according to the *number* of names” [Num 1.2].

-“Life:” the Hebrew text has the plural, “lives.”

Vs. 4: I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself;

-Vss. 4-8 are reminiscent of Lk 12.13-21, the parable of the rich fool who did not consider where true riches lay. Ecclesiastes engaged in the same enterprises yet realized the need to be “rich toward God” [Lk 12.21].

-*I made great (gadal)*: cf. 1.16, “acquired great.”

-“I built houses.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “I built to me houses.”

Vs. 5: I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

-*Gardens (gan, singular)*: usually a place protected by a fence. “And the Lord God planted a *garden* in Eden, in the east” [Gen 2.8]. Also, “A *garden* enclosed is my sister, my bride” [Sg 4.12].

-*Parks (pardes, singular)*: a Persian word connoting a plantation or cultivated area surrounding a palace. “And a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s *forest*, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple” [Neh 2.8]. Also, “Your shoots are an *orchard* of pomegranates with all choicest fruits” [Sg 4.13].

-*Planted (natah)*: connotes a fixing or setting in order. “*Stretching out* the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth” [Is 51.16]. In the verse at hand, such *natah* by Ecclesiastes is reminiscent of God with respect to Eden: “The Lord God *planted* a garden in Eden, in the east” [Gen 2.8].

-“All kinds of fruit trees.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “trees all fruits.”

Vs. 6: I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

-*Pools* (**berekah**, singular): from the verbal root meaning “to bless” and from which is derived “knee.” Perhaps the idea is that one stooped or bent down to drink water (from a pool). “And they sat down, the one on the one side of the *pool*, and the other on the other side of the *pool*” [1 Sam 3.13]. Also, “Your eyes are *pools* in Heshbon by the gate of Bathrabbim” [Sg 7.4].

-*Forest* (**yahar**): alternately, “honeycomb” as in Sg 5.1: “I eat my *honeycomb* with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk.” Also, Is 31.13 which is more in tune with the verse at hand: “In the *thickets* in Arabia you will lodge, O caravans of Dedanites.”

-*Growing* (**tsomeach**): from the verbal root **tsamach**, *to sprout*.

Vs. 7: I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house; I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

-*Bought* (**qanah**): connotes acquisition. “I *have gotten* a man with the help of the Lord” [Gen 4.1].

-*Female slaves* (**shiphchah**, singular). “Behold, your handmaid is a *servant*” [1 Sam 25.41]. Here **shiphchah** is contrasted with **‘amah** which can also refer to a female slave.

-“Slaves who were born in my house.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “sons house were to me.”

-*Possessions* (**miqneh**; singular used here): wealth in the sense of having cattle. “He had *possessions* of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him” [Gen 26.14].

-“Any who had been before me in Jerusalem.” As noted in 1.16, the only king prior to Solomon is his father, King David.

Vs. 8: I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, man’s delight.

-*Gathered* (**kanas**): in the sense of heaping up. “A time to cast away stones, and a time to *gather* stones together” [3.5]; also 2.26. For another sense, “And the covering too narrow *to wrap oneself* in it” [Is 28.20].

-*Treasure* (*segulah*, singular): from an unused root meaning “to acquire.” “You shall be my own *possession* among all peoples; for all the earth is mine” [Ex 19.5].

-*Provinces* (*midynah*, singular): connotes judgment as detected from the verbal root and usually applies to Persian domains. “In the days of Ahsauerus...who reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven *provinces*” [Est 1.1].

-*Singers* (*shyr*, singular): “...and for the king’s house, lyres also and harps for the *singers*” [1 Kg 10.12].

-*Concubines* (*tahanug*, singular): from the verbal root *hanag*, *to delight*. “How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, *delectable* maiden (literally, ‘maiden in delights’)” [Sg 7.6]! The **RSV** notes that this part of vs. 8 is “uncertain.” The Hebrew text literally reads (it seems), “delights sons of man instrument and instruments.” *Sidah* (*instrument*) is the only instance of this word in the Bible.

Vs. 9: So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me.

-*Surpassed* (*yasaph*): similar to 1.16, “*surpassing* all who were over Jerusalem before me.”

-*Wisdom* or *chakmah* *remained* (*hamad*) with Ecclesiastes in the sense of abiding with him on a permanent basis. “But the earth *remains* forever” [1.4].

Vs. 10: And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

-*Desired* (*sha’al*): more in the sense of asking, demanding. “Just as you *desired* of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly” [Dt 18.16].

-*Keep* (*’atsal*): alternately, “to separate,” “to refuse.” “And I *will take* some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them” [Num 11.17].

-*Kept* (*manah*): in the sense of restraining. “Seeing the Lord has *restrained* you from bloodguilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand” [1 Sam 25.26]. In the verse at hand, the object of *manah* is *lev* or *heart*.

-*Pleasure* (*simchah*): cf. vss. 1 & 2.

-*Found pleasure* (*samach*): the verbal root for “pleasure” just noted. This verb connotes rejoicing and cheerfulness. “The light of the righteous *rejoices*, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out” [Prov 13.9].

-*Toil* (*hamal*): first noted in 1.3.

-*Reward (cheleq)*: from a verbal root which originally meant “to be smooth.”  
“Not like these is he who is the *portion* of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things” [Jer 10.16].

Vs. 11: Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

-*Considered (panah, with the preposition b-, literally in)*: the only use of *panah* in this context which usually translates as “to turn.” This is found in the next verse, “So I *turned* to consider...”

-*Striving (rahyon)*: cf. 1.17, used with “wind.”

-*To be gained (yitron)*: a noun as in 1.3. Not the similar sound of this noun with *rahyon* just mentioned.

Vs. 12: So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what he has already done.

-*Turned (panah)*: cf. previous verse as “considered.” In this verse *panah* is used with *ra’ah* (*consider*; the common verb ‘to see’) and has three objects:

1) *Wisdom (chakmah)*: last noted in 2.9.

2) *Madness (hollelah)*: last noted in 1.17, object of “applied.”

3) *Folly (sekloth)*: last noted in 2.3, object of “lay hold on.”

-“Do:” missing in the Hebrew text.

Vs. 13: Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

-*Saw (ra’ah)*: cf. its use as “consider” in the previous verse.

-*Excels (yitron)*: cf. its used as “striving” in vs. 11.

Vs. 14: The wise man has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness; and yet I perceived that one fate comes to all of them.

-*Wise man (chakam)*: the adjective is used here; related to *chakmah* as often noted. This is the first use of the term and frequently is found in Ecclesiastes: 2.16, 19; 6.8; 7.7, 19; 8.1, 5, 17; 10.2, 12. “A *wise* son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother” [Prov 10.1].

-*Fool (kesyl)*: from a verbal root meaning “to be foolish” and suggests a sense of languor. “For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of *fools* destroys them” [Prov 1.32].

-*Perceived (yadah)*: more basically, “to know,” as noted in 1.17.

-“*One fate (miqrah)*”: also in 3.19; 9.2, 3. The Hebrew text literally reads, “fate one” which is a more vivid way of saying this as in “Day one” (etc.) of Genesis. This noun derives from the verbal root meaning “to meet,” “to happen.” “Then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, it happened to us by *chance*” [1 Sam 6.9].

-*Comes (qarah)*: the verbal root from which *miqrah* is derived as just noted.

Vs. 15: Then I said to myself, “What befalls the fool will befall me also; why then have I been so very wise?” And I said to myself that this also is vanity.

-*Said (‘amar)*: compare with *davar* used in this same verse, second sentence.

-*Myself (lev)*: as last noted in 2.1.

-*Befalls (qarah)*: as noted in the previous verse, basically meaning “to call.”

-“*Very (‘az)* wise:” an adverb alternately meaning “then,” “at that time.”

Vs. 16: For of the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise man dies just like the fool!

-*Enduring (halom)*: more specifically, “eternity,” future time.” In the verse at hand this noun is prefixed by the preposition *l-*, literally, “to.” “Remember the days of *old*, consider the years of many generations” [Dt 32.7].

-*Remembrance (zikron)*: last use of this noun is found in 1.11, “There is no *remembrance* of former things.” In the verse at hand, the lack of such remembrance pertains to both wise man and fool; the same pertains with regards to their deaths.

-“As of:” the Hebrew text has the preposition *him*, *with*.

-“Just like:” the Hebrew text has “with the fool.”

Vs. 17: So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

-*Hated (sane’)*: “And let not those wink the eye who *hate* me without cause” [Ps 35.19].

-*Grievous* (rah): more specifically, “evil.” For an earlier reference, “It is an *unhappy* business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with” 1.13].

-“To me:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “upon me.”

-*Striving* (rehuth): first used in 1.14. Compare with rahyon in 2.11. The preposition “after” is absent in the Hebrew text.

Vs. 18: I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me;

-Second use of *hate* (sane’), here with respect to *toil* or hamal, first mentioned in 1.3, “What does man gain by all the *toil* at which he *toils* under the sun?”

-*Leave* (nuach): fundamentally, “to rest,” “to set down.” For a different use of this verb, cf. 7.9: “Anger *rests* in the bosom of fools.”

-The man “who will come after me.” If The Book of Ecclesiastes is viewed as attributed to King Solomon, his successor is his son, Rehoboam: “And now, whereas my father laid upon you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions” [1 Kg 12.11].

Vs. 19: and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

-A continuation of the previous verse and words well suited for Rehoboam as noted there.

-*Master* (shalat): the verb is used and implies a certain vehemency. “...on the very day when the Jews *should get the mastery* over their foes” [Est 9.1].

Vs. 20: So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun,

-*Turned about* (savav): connotes a going around, encompassing. “So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah *turned about* and came back” [Jer 41.14]. The verse at hand is reminiscent of King Hezekiah in his despair: “Then Hezekiah *turned* his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord” [2 Kg 20.2].

-*Heart* (lev): also as “mind” as in 1.13, “And I applied my *mind*.”

-*Despair* (ya’ash): “You were wearied with the length of your way but you did not say, ‘*It is hopeless*’” [Is 57.10].



Vs. 21: because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

-Continuation and conclusion of the sentence begun in the previous verse.

-*Skill* (kishron): only found in Ecclesiastes; as well as 4.4 & 5.11 (as ‘goods’). This word derives from a verbal root meaning “to be right.”

-“*For* it.” The Hebrew text has the preposition *b-*, literally, *in*.

-“*Great evil* (rahaḥ):” cf. vs. 17 for the adjective (rah): “because what is done under the sun was *grievous* to me.” “But I cannot flee to the hills lest the *disaster* overtake me and I die” [Gen 19.19].

Vs. 22: What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun?

-“What has a man.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “What is to a man.”

-*Strain* (rahyon): cf. vs. 11, “all was vanity and a *striving* after wind.”

Vs. 23: For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity.

-“Full of *pain* (makovym):” the Hebrew text lacks “full of.” “Man is also chastened with *pain* upon his bed and with continual strife in his bones” [Job 33.19].

-*Work* (hinyn): first found in 1.13, “It is an unhappy *business* that God has given to the sons of men;” also cf. vs. 26.

-*Vexation* (kahas): cf. 1.18, “For in much wisdom is much *vexation*.”

-*Rest* (shakav): alternately, “to lie down.” “But before they *lay down*, the men of the city” [Gen 19.4].

-*Mind* (lev): as often noted, “heart.”

-This verse is reminiscent of Job 7.4, “When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until the dawn.”

Vs. 24: There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God;

-“Find enjoyment.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “see his soul good.”

-“Find enjoyment:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “see his soul good.” *Soul* (*nephesh*): literally, “breath.” “For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your *soul*” [Prov 2.10].

-“Hand of God.” Compare with human hands, “Then I considered all that my hands had done” [2.11].

Vs. 25: for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

-Continuation and conclusion of the previous verse.

-“Apart from him.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “apart from me.” The Hebrew preposition here is *chuts* and is similar in sound to *chush* just below.

-*Have enjoyment* (*chush*): more specifically, “to make haste.” “If I have walked with falsehood and my foot *has hastened* to deceit” [Job 31.5].

Vs. 26: For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

-*Pleases* (*tov*): the adjective meaning “good.”

-“God” is lacking in the Hebrew text; instead it reads, “good before him.”

-*Joy* (*simchah*): cf. 2.1, “I will make a test of *pleasure*.”

-*Sinner* (*chata'*): first use of this term in Ecclesiastes; also in 7.26, 8.12, 9.2 & 18.

-*Work* (*hinyan*): cf. 1.13, “It is an unhappy *business* that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with.”

-*Gathering* (*asyph*): from the verbal root meaning “to collect,” “to gather” and refers to the harvest. “You shall keep the feast of *harvest*, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field” [Ex 23.16].

-*Heaping* (*kenos*): from the verbal root *kanas* as in 2.8, “I also *gathered* for myself silver and gold.”

-“Pleases.” The Hebrew text has the adjective *tov* as noted earlier in this same verse. The preposition “in front of,” “before,” is also used with respect to “God.”

-*Striving* (*rehuth*): cf. 1.14, “all is vanity and a *striving* after wind.”

+

## Chapter Three

Vs. 1: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

-*Season (zeman)*: from a verbal root meaning “to appoint” with this noun found only in three other references, Neh 2.6 (‘I set him a *time*’) and Est 9.27, 31.

-*Time (heth)*: in the sense of an opportunity and akin to *kairos*, the LXX translation of this term. “I am the Lord; in its *time* I will hasten it” [Is 60.22]. Such “times” will be listed in vss. 2 through 9 below.

-*Matter (chephets)*: also cf. vs. 17; 5.4, 7; 8.6; 12.1, 10. This noun is from a verbal root meaning “to delight” and is the common use as these other references indicate. “But his *delight* is in the law of the Lord” [Ps 1.2].

-Vss. 2-9: a list of “times” (*heth*) which may be listed as follows, some of which will be commented upon:

-Born, die.

-Plant, *pluck* (*haqar*): “and Ekron *shall be uprooted*” [Zeph 2.4].

-Kill (*harag*): “Cain rose up against his brother Abel and *killed* him” [Gen 4.8]. *Heal* (*rapha*): originally, “to sew together.” “And the Lord heard Hezekiah and *healed* the people” [2 Chron 30.20].

-*Break down* (*parats*): “O God, you have rejected us, *broken* our defenses” [Ps 60.1]. Build up.

-Weep, *laugh* (*sachaq*): “There go the ships and Leviathan which you formed *to sport with*” [Ps 104.26].

-*Mourn* (*saphad*): literally, “to beat the breast.” *Dance* (*raqad*): literally, “to leap,” “to skip.” “He makes Lebanon *to skip* like a calf and Sirion like a young wild ox” [Ps 29.6]. Note the similar sounding verbs, *saphad/raqad*.

-Cast away stones, gather stones.

-*Embrace* (*chavaq*): for an alternate meaning, “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little *folding* of the hands to rest” [Prov 6.10]. “*Refrain* (*rachaq*) from embracing:” literally, “to be far away.”

-Seek, *lose* (*avad*): alternately, “to perish.” “But the wicked *perish*” [Ps 37.20].

-Keep, cast away.

-*Rend* (*raqah*): literally, “to beat,” “spread out.” “And gold leaf was *hammered out* and cut into threads” [Ex 39.3]. *Sew* (*taphar*): “And they *sewed* fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” [Gen 3.7].

-Keep silence, speak.

-*Love* ('ahav): in the sense of desiring. "May those who *love* your salvation say continually, 'Great is the Lord" [Ps 40.17]!

-War, *peace* (shalom).

Vs. 11: He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

-*Beautiful* (yapheh): from a verbal root meaning "to shine." "Behold, you are *beautiful*, my love" [Sg 1.15]. Compare the sense of the verse at hand with God seeing everything he created as "good," for instance, Gen 1.4 (etc.). Also, compare *time* (heth) as noted in the above verses with the seven days of creation.

-*Eternity* (holam): "It has been already, in the *ages* before us" [1.10].

-*Mind* (lev): as frequently noted, "heart." "Man's" is lacking in the Hebrew text.

-*Find out* (matsa'): alternately, "to attain," "befall." "Though I sought him, he could not *be found*" [Ps 37.36].

-*Beginning* (ro'sh): alternately, "head." "In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth" [Gen 1.1]...a slightly alternate noun, same root.

-*End* (soph): from a verbal root meaning "to take away," "to destroy" and also found in 7.2, 12.13. "You will find them at the *end* of the valley" [2 Chron 20.16].

Vs. 12: I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;

-*Know* (yadah): as in 1.17, "And I applied my mind to *know* wisdom and to *know* madness and folly."

-*To be happy* (samach): as in 2.10, "For my heart *found pleasure* in all my toil."

-*"Enjoy themselves."* The Hebrew text literally reads, "to do good."

Vs. 13: also it is God's gift to man that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.

-The conclusion of the sentence begin in the previous verse.

-*Gift* (matath): from the verbal root meaning "to give." "Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a *gift* he does not give" [Prov 25.14].

-*"Take pleasure."* The Hebrew text literally reads, "see good."

Vs. 14: I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him.

-*Know* (yadah): last noted in vs. 12.

-*Forever* (holam): as in vs. 11 above, “eternity.” In the verse at hand, holam is prefaced with the preposition l-, literally, “to.”

-*Added* (yasaph): as in 1.16, “*Surpassing* all who were over Jerusalem before me.”

-“To it:” the Hebrew text has the preposition hal, literally, “on.”

-*Taken away* (garah): fundamentally “to scrape.” “You shall by no means *lessen* it; for they are idle” [Ex 5.8].

-*Fear* (yare’): “You know that your servant *feared* the Lord” [2 Kg 4.1]. In the verse at hand, this verb is used with the preposition “before.” Usually such fear is expressed directly as the cited verse indicates, whereas in vs. 14 fear implies a continuous or uninterrupted sense.

Vs. 15: That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

-*Seeks* (baqash): alternately as “to strive after,” “to require” and found in 3.6; 7.28, 29. “To *seek* the word of the Lord” [Am 8.12].

-*Driven away* (radaph): alternately, “to put to flight,” “to follow after.” “He who *pursues* righteousness and kindness will find life and honor” [Prov 21.21].

Vs. 16: Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.

-*Place* (maqom; cf. 11.3), used twice in the verse at hand. It usually refers to a special or sacred area set aside. “The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the *place* which you appointed for them” [Ps 104.8].

-*Justice* (mishpat): alternately, “judgment.” “You shall do no injustice in *judgment*” [Lev 19.15].

-*Righteousness* (tsedeq): implies a sense of piety and also found in 5.8 & 7.15. “With *righteousness* shall he judge” [Is 11.4].

-*Wickedness* (reshah; used twice in this verse): or “unrighteousness” as in Is 9.17, “For you are not a God who delights in *wickedness*” [Ps 5.4]. This noun derives from a verbal root meaning “to make noise.”

Vs. 17: I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter and for every work.

-*Righteous* (tsadyq): related to “righteousness” as found in the last verse.

-*Wicked* (rashah): basically, “to make a tumult.” “The Lord has broken the staff of the *wicked*, the scepter of rulers” [Is 14.5].

-“Appointed” is not in the Hebrew text.

-*Time* (heth): last noted in 3.11, “He has made everything beautiful in its *time*.”

-*Matter* (chephets): last noted in 3.1, “For everything there is a season and a time for every *matter* under heaven.”

Vs. 18: I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts.

-*Testing* (barar): connotes a sense of choosing, separating as well as purity. For the last, cf. Ps 18.26, “With the *pure* you show yourself *pure*.”

-*To show* (ra’ah): the common verb “to see.”

-*Beasts* (behemah, singular): used with respect to quadrupeds and opposed to birds and fish. “They shall of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the *beasts* of the earth” [Is 18.6].

Vs. 19: For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity.

-*Fate* (miqrah): as in 2.14 and used twice in the verse at hand, “One *fate* comes to all of them” (wise man and fool).”

-*Breath* (ruach): as in 1.6, “and on its circuits the *wind* returns.”

-*Advantage* (motar): more specifically as “abundance,” “excellence.” “The plans of the diligent lead surely to *abundance*, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want” [Prov 21.5].

Vs. 20: All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.

-*Place* (maqom): first used in 1.5, “and hastens to the *place* where it rises.” In the verse at hand, the literal translation reads “place one” as in Genesis “day one,” etc.  
-*Dust* (haphar; used twice): “The Lord God formed man of *dust* from the ground” [Gen 2.7].

Vs. 21: Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?

-*Spirit* (ruach; used twice): as “breath” in vs. 19.

-*Goes upward* (halah/lemahelah): the adverb being derived from the verb at hand.

-*Down* (lematah): an adverb derived from a verbal root meaning “to stretch out,” “to extend.”

Vs. 22: So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, for that is his lot; who can bring him to see what will be after him?

-*Enjoy* (samach): as in 2.10, “for my heart *found pleasure* in all my toil.”

-*Lot* (cheleq): also in 2.10 (‘reward’); 5.18, 19. This noun derives from a verbal root meaning “to be smooth,” “to divide.”

-“What will be after him.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “in what will be after him.”

+

## Chapter Four

Vs. 1: Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. and behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

-“Again” is missing in the Hebrew text. Instead it has the verb *shuv*, *to turn* which is another way of expression the essence of “again.”

-*Oppressions* (hashuqym): the dictionary gives the plural form and is derived from the verbal root *hashaq* which refers to defrauding. The only other use of the

noun in this plural form is Am 3.9, “See the great tumults within her and the *oppressions* in her midst.”

-*Practiced* (hasah): the simple verb “to do,” “to make.”

-*Behold* (hineh): first found in 1.14, “And *behold*, all is vanity.”

-*Tears* (dimhah, singular): “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with *tears*” [Ps 6.6].

-*Oppressed* (hahsaq): the verbal root for “oppressions” as noted above.

-*Comfort* (nacham): alternately, “to lament,” “to take vengeance” and used twice in the verse at hand. Implied here is that taking vengeance can be a source of comfort. “O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not *comforted*” [Is 54.11].

-“Oppressors:” from the verbal root hahsaq; three uses of this term in the verse at hand.

Vs. 2: And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive;

-This verse continues through the succeeding one.

-*Thought* (shavach): more fundamentally, “to praise” and connotes a sense of considering a person to be happy. The other reference is found in 8.15, “And I *commend* enjoyment.” For another meaning of this verb, cf. Ps 89.9: “You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you *still* them.”

-“More fortunate” is lacking in the Hebrew text.

-“Than:” the Hebrew preposition min (*from*) is used.

Vs. 3: but better than both is he who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

-This verse is reminiscent of Job 3.3 and the verses which follow it: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’”

Vs. 4: Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

-*Skill* (kishron): cf. 2.21.

-*Envy* (qin’ah): used in the plural; this verse suggests the vile nature of such an attitude; it is also found in 9.6, “Their love and their hate and their *envy* have already perished.” This noun derives from qana’ which can have a positive sense as in Num 25.11: “Phinehas...*was jealous* with my *jealousy* among them.”



-*Neighbor* (rehah): from the verbal root rahah which fundamentally means “to feed.” This noun can also mean “companion” as in Sg. 5.16, “This is my beloved and this is my *companion*, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

-*Striving* (rehuth): cf. 1.14, etc.

-*Wind* (ruach): as first noted in 1.6. Note the similar sound of rehuth/ruach.

Vs. 5: The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

-*Fool* (kesyl): first noted in 2.14.

-*Fold* (chavaq): used in 3.5 in the sense of “to embrace:” “A time to *embrace*, and a time to refrain from *embracing*.”

Vs. 6: Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

-*Handful* (kaph): more specifically, the hollow of one’s hand or the palm. For an alternate though similar meaning, cf. Dt 2.5: “Not so much as for the *sole* of the foot to tread on.” Compare kaph with “hands” of the previous verse.

-*Quietness* (nachath): from a verbal root meaning “to descend,” “to press down.” “In returning and rest you shall be save; in *quietness* and in trust shall be your strength” [Is 35.15].

-*Two hands* (chophen): alternately, “fists” and derived from a verbal root meaning “to cover,” “to protect.” “Take *handfuls* of ashes from the kiln” [Ex 9.8].

Vs. 7: Again, I saw vanity under the sun:

-*Again* (shuv): the verb is used as in 4.1. It serves to introduce the next verse.

Vs. 8: a person who has no one, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

-This verse is a result of “again” or shuv from the previous verse.

-The first words literally read, “There is one and there is not two.”

-*End* (qets): in the sense of reaching an extremity. “For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the *end*—it will not lie” [Hab 2.3].

-*Satisfied* (savah): as in 1.8, “The eye is not *satisfied* with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”

-*Riches* (hoshar): the object of *savah* and derived from the verbal root meaning “to enrich.” “The king will *enrich* him with great *riches*” [1 Sam 17.25].

-*Depriving* (chasar): the same verbal root as used in 1.15, “And what is *lacking* cannot be numbered.”

-*Pleasure* (tov): literally, “good” which is the object of *chasar*.

-*Myself* (nephesh): literally, “soul.” A similar phrasing is found in 2.24 which literally reads, “see his soul good.”

-*Unhappy* (rah): as in 1.13 and cited just below; fundamentally, “evil.”

-*Business* (hinyan): “It is an unhappy *business* that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with” [1.13].

Vs. 9: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

-*Reward* (sakar): from a verbal root meaning “to hire.” “Your *reward* shall be very great” [Gen 15.1].

Vs. 10: For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up.

-*Fall* (naphal; used twice): “Therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a break in a high wall, bulging out, and about to *collapse*” [Is 30.13].

-*Lift up* (qum; used twice): alternately, “to arise.” “The Lord *lifts up* those who are bowed down” [Ps 146.8].

-“*Woe to him*” (‘oy): here joined with the preposition l- (*to, towards*).

-*Alone* (‘echad): alternately, “one” but here in a negative sense.

Vs. 11: Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone?

-*Lie* (shakav): in the sense of sleeping. “But before they *lay down*, the men of the city...surrounded the house” [Gen 19.4].

-“They are warm.” The Hebrew has two similar sounding words, *cham lahem* or literally “warm to them.” For another use of this verb used twice in the verse at hand, cf. Jos 9.12: “Here is our bread; it was still *warm* when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey.”

Vs. 12: And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

-*Prevail* (taqaph): implies obstinacy. For another use, cf. Dan 6.8: “Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document so that it cannot be changed.” In the verse at hand, the preposition “against” is lacking.

-*Withstand* (hamad): literally, “to stand,” “to remain” as in 2.9. The verb at hand is used with the preposition *neged*, *before* (here in the sense of ‘against’).

-“Threefold *cord* (chut):” “Behold, when we come into the land, you shall bind this scarlet *cord* in the window through which you let us down” [Jos 2.18].

-*Broken* (nataq): in the sense of being torn away. “Yet I would *tear* you *off* and give you into the hand of those who seek your life” [Jer 22.25-5].

Vs. 13: Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will no longer take advice,

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Youth* (yeled): from the verbal root “to be born.” “But the midwives feared God...let the male *children* live” [Ex 1.17].

-The youth has two characteristics:

1) *Poor* (seken): from a verbal root with the fundamental meaning of dwelling, associating. “He who is *impoverished* chooses for an offering wood that will not rot” [Is 40.20].

2) *Wise* (chakam): from a verbal root which can also imply being skillful; also found in 7.4, 5, 23; 9.1, 11, 15, 17; 12.9, 11.

-Two characteristics of a king:

1) *Old* (zeqen): from a verbal root fundamentally referring to the beard or chin of a man; an alternate noun can mean “elder.”

2) *Foolish* (kesyl): first noted in 2.4.

-*Take* (yadah): the Hebrew verb for “to know” is used.

-*Advice* (zahar): the verb is used here and fundamentally means “to shine;” also found in 12.12. “Moreover by them is your servant *warned*; in keeping them there is great reward” [Ps 19.11].

Vs. 14: even though he had gone from prison to the throne or in his own kingdom had been born poor.

-*Prison* (beyth hasurym): literally, “house of bonds.” The verbal root of the second word is ‘asar. “Send one of you, and let him bring your brother while you *remain in prison* that your words may be tested” [Gen 42.16].

-*Throne* (malak): here the verb “to reign” is used from which is derived the noun “king.”

-*Kingdom* (mekukah): same verbal root as “throne.”

-*Poor* (rush): the verb is used here (‘become poor’). “A slack hand causes *poverty*, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” [Prov 10.4].

Vs. 15: I saw all the living who move about under the sun as well as that youth who was to stand in his place;

-*Move about* (halak): the common verb “to go.”

-*Youth* (yeled): as in vs. 13 above.

-“In his place.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “who stands under him.” Note that the preposition tachat (*under*) is used with respect to the sun.

Vs. 16: there was no end of all the people; he was over all of them. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

-A continuation from the previous verse.

-*End* (qets): cf. vs. 8 with respect to “toil.”

-“He was over all of them.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “To all which was before them.”

-*Come later* (‘achar): alternately as “to stay behind,” “to tarry.” “My salvation shall not tarry” [Is 46.13].

-*Rejoice* (samach): as in 2.10.

+

## **Chapter Five** (4.17 in the Hebrew text)

Vs. 1: Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil.

-*Guard* (shamar): connotes a sense of keeping, of honoring and often applied to the Torah. “My soul *keeps* your testimonies; I love them exceedingly” [Ps 119.167].

-*Steps* (*regel*, singular): the object of *shamar*. “They followed in your *steps*, receiving direction” [Dt 33.3].

-“House of God:” most likely the temple to both worship and to pray. “O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells” [Ps 26.8].

-*To draw near* (*qarav*): “Let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel *draw near*, and let it come that we may know it” [Is 5.19]. From this verbal root is derived the preposition *qerev*, the *interior* or *midst* of a thing.

-*Sacrifice* (*zavach*): connotes slaying. “And an ox and a ram for peace offerings to *sacrifice* before the Lord” [Lev 9.4].

-*Fools* (*kesyl*, singular): as noted in 4.5.

Vs. 2: Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few. (5.1 in the Hebrew text)

-*Be rash* (*bahal*): basically as “to be terrified, “hasten.” “Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin *were dismayed*, for they saw that disaster was close upon them” [Judg 20.41].

-“With your mouth.” The Hebrew text has the preposition *hal* (*on, upon*).

-*Be hasty* (*mahar*): for another sense, cf. 1 Sam 17.48: “David *ran quickly* toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.”

-*To utter* (*yatsa'*): the common verb meaning “to go out.”

-*Word* (*davar*): first noted in 1.1.

-“God is in heaven.” The Hebrew text has the preposition *b-* for *in*. Compare with “you *upon* (*hal*) earth.”

-*Words* or *davar* (singular) are to *be few* or *mahat*. Compare the similar sound of this verb with *mahar* with respect to “heart.”

Vs. 3: For a dream comes with much business and a fool’s voice with many words.

-*Dream* (*chalom*): from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to be flesh,” “to be fat” because it was said that fatness contributes to sleep and dreams. “But God came to Abimelech in a *dream* by night” [Gen 20.3].

-“Much *business* (*hinyan*):” first noted in 1.13.

-“Many words:” contrast with “let your words be few” in the previous verse.

Vs. 4: When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.

-*Vow* (*nadar*): used twice in this verse as well as the noun “vow” from which it is derived. The verb fundamentally means “to drop,” “to fall out.” “Then Jacob *made a vow*” [Gen 28.20].

-*Delay* (*‘achar*): as in 4.16, “come later.”

-*Paying* (*shalom*): also used in the next verse; the verb from which *shalom* is derived. “Go, sell the oil and *pay* your debts” [2 Kg 4.7].

Vs. 6: Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

-“Lead:” the Hebrew text has the verb “to give;” i.e., “to give your mouth into sin.”

-*Messenger* (*mal’ak*): can apply to an angel as in Ex 23.20, “Behold, I send an *angel* before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared.”

-*Mistake* (*shegagah*): from a verbal root meaning “to err,” “to commit a fault.” “If one person sins *unwittingly*, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering” [Num 15.27].

-*Be angry* (*qatsaph*): fundamentally “to break out.” “For I will not contend forever, nor will I always *be angry*” [Is 57.16].

-*Destroy* (*chaval*): alternately “to twist,” “to act corruptly.” “The knaveries of the knave are evil; he devises wicked devices to *ruin* the poor with lying words” [Is 32.7].

Vs. 7: For when dreams increase, empty words grow many; but do you fear God.

-The Hebrew text literally reads, “When in a multitude of dreams and empty words.”

-*Dreams* (*chalom*, singular). Compare with vs. 3 where dreams are associated with “much business;” in the verse at hand, they “increase.”

-*Empty words* (*hevel*, singular): the word for “vanity” frequently used in Ecclesiastes.

-*Fear* (*yare’*): as in 3.14 where such fear is “before him” or God.

Vs. 8: If you see in a province the poor oppressed and justice and right violently taken away, do not be amazed at the matter; for

the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

-*Province* (*medynah*): from a verbal root meaning “to judge.” In the Book of Ester, this term is associated with the satraps of Persia, for example, 1.1: “Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven *provinces*.”

-*Poor* (*rash*): a participle from the verb *rush*. “The *poor* is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends” [Prov 14.20].

-*Oppressed* (*hashaq*): as noted in 4.1 concerning the noun “oppression.”

-*Violently taken away* (*gazel*): fundamentally as “to pluck off,” “to despoil.” “For he has crushed and abandoned the poor, he *has seized* a house which he did not build” [Job 20.19].

-*Justice* (*mishpat*) and *right* (*tsedeq*): objects of *gazel* just noted; cf. 3.16 for the uses of both terms.

-*Be amazed* (*tamah*): “They will look *aghast* at one another; their faces will be aflame” [Is 18.8].

-*Matter* (*chephets*): cf. 3.1; from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to desire.”

-*High official* (*gavoah*): the Hebrew text lacks the noun “official.” From a verbal root meaning “to be exalted” usually in a negative sense. “Everyone who is *arrogant* is an abomination to the Lord” [Prov 16.5].

Vs. 9: But in all, a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields.

-This verse literally reads in Hebrew, “The profit of the land is among all of them; a cultivated field has a king.”

-*Profit* (*yitron*): cf. 1.3 as “gain.”

-“Cultivated *field* (*sadeh*):” alternately, “plain,” “country.” “So the *field* of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the *field* with the cave which was in it” [Gen 23.17].

-“Cultivated:” the common verbal root “to do” is used.

Vs. 10: He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity.

-*Loves* (*‘ahav*): as noted in 3.8, “A time to *love*, and a time to hate.”

-*Money* (*keseph*): literally, “silver.” “I will give the *price* of the field” [Gen 23.13].

-*Satisfied* (savah): cf. 1.8 and 4.8.

-*Wealth* (hamon): literally, “multitude” and implies riches. “Better is a little that the righteous has than the *abundance* of many wicked” [Ps 37.16].

-*Gain* (tevu’ah): alternately, “produce” as of the earth. “The wage of the righteous leads to life, the *gain* of the wicked to sin” [Prov 10.16].

-“Vanity:” last time it was used is in 4.16.

Vs. 11: When goods increase, they increase who eat them; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

-*Gain* (kishron): cf. 2.21 as “skill.”

-*Owner* (bahal): alternately, “lord,” “master” and in vs. 13 below. “The ox knows its *owner* and the ass its master’s crib; but Israel does not know” [Is 1.3].

Vs. 12: Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep.

-*Sweet* (mataq): from a verbal root implying sucking with pleasure. “*Sweeter* also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” [Ps 19.10].

-*Laborer* (hoved): from the verbal root havad and implying servitude or slavery. “If I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your *servant*” [Gen 18.3].

-*Surfeit* (savah): from the verbal root “to be satisfied” as noted in vs. 10 above.

-“*Let* (nuach) him sleep:” the same sense as in 2.18, “Seeing that I must *leave* it to the man who will come after me.”

Vs. 13: There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Grievous* (chalah): also in vs. 16; from a verbal root meaning “to be pained,” “to be sick,” “to smooth.” For another use of this root, “I *am sick* with love” [Sg 2.5].

-*Evil* (raha): as in 2.21.

-*Owner* (bahal): as in vs. 11 above.

-In this verse, note the “sh” and “h” sounds: hoshar (*riches*), shamur (*were kept*), bahal (*owner*), raha (as *evil*, in this verse).

Vs. 14: and those riches were lost in a bad venture; and he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.



-*Were lost* ('avad): as in 3.6, “a time to seek, and a time *to lose*.” This verb fundamentally means “to perish.”

-*Venture* (hinyan): last noted in vs. 3 above as “business.”

-*Father* (yalad): the verb is used here, “to be born” or in this context, “the one giving birth.”

Vs. 15: As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil, which he may carry away in his hand.

-*Naked* (harom): alternately as “ragged” in the sense of being badly clothed. “And stripped the *naked* of their clothing” [Job 22.6]. The verse at hand is reminiscent of Job 1.21, “*Naked* I came from my mother’s womb, and *naked* shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Vs. 17: and spent all his days in darkness and grief, in much vexation and sickness and resentment?

-A continuation from the previous verse. The first half literally reads in the Hebrew text as “all his days also he eats in darkness.”

-*Darkness* (choshek): as in 2.13 but not noted there.

-*Vexation* (kahas): as in 1.18.

-*Sickness* (choly): from the same verbal root *chalah* as noted in vs. 13 above and in 6.2 below. “And the Lord will take away from you all *sickness*; and none of the evil diseases of Egypt” [Dt 7.16].

-*Resentment* (qetseph): from the verbal root *qatsaph* noted in vs. 6 above, “to be angry.”

Vs. 18: Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot.

-*Fitting* (yapheh): cf. 3.11 as “beautiful.”

-“To find enjoyment.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “to see good.”

-*Lot* (cheleq): as in 3.22.

Vs. 19: Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and to find enjoyment in his toil—this is the gift of God.

-*Possessions* (*nekes*, singular): also cf. 6.2; from an unused verbal root meaning “to heap up.” “Go back to your homes with much *wealth*” [Josh 22.8].

-*Power* (*shalat*): as in 2.19, 7.19 & 10.5. In the verse at hand, the verb is used; the Hebrew text literally translates as “and has given him power to eat.”

-*Enjoy* (*samach*): cf. 2.10, “found pleasure.”

-*Accept* (*nasa'*): fundamentally, “to lift up,” “to raise.” “It is not good *to be partial* to a wicked man or to deprive a righteous man of justice” [Prov 18.5].

-*Gift* (*matath*): as in 3.13.

Vs. 20: For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

-*Remember* (*zakar*): cf. vs. 1.11 with respect to “former things.”

-*Keeps occupied* (*hanah*): cf. 1.13 as “to be busy with.”

-*Joy* (*simchah*): cf. 2.1 as “pleasure;” from the verbal root *samach* as in the previous verse.

+

## Chapter Six

Vs. 1: There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon men:

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Evil* (*rahah*): cf. 5.13, also “under the sun.”

-“Lies heavy.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “is great upon man (singular).”

Vs. 2: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions and honor so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them; this is vanity; it is a sore affliction.

-*Wealth* (*hoshar*): as in 4.8, “riches.”

-*Possessions* (*nekes*, singular): cf. 5.19.

-*Honor* (*kavod*): also in 10.1; from the verbal root meaning “to be heavy” from which is derived the noun “glory;” it is usually applied to God. “Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and *honor*” [Prov 3.19].

-*Lacks* (*chasar*): cf. 4.18 as “depriving.”

-“He:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “there is nothing lacking to his *soul* or *nephesh* as in 2.24.

-*Desires* (*‘awah*): connotes the idea of bending, turning aside. “My soul *yearns* for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you” [Is 26.9].

-*Give power* (*shalat*): as in 5.19.

-“To enjoy:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “to eat;” also with respect to “a stranger enjoys (eats) them.”

-*Stranger* (*nakry*): from a verbal root meaning “to estrange,” “to alienate” as well as “to contemplate,” “to acknowledge.” “He shall have no right to sell her to a *foreign* people, since he has dealt faithlessly with her” [Ex 21.8].

-*Sore* (*rah*): cf. 4.8 as “unhappy” and fundamentally as “evil.”

-*Affliction* (*choly*): cf. 5.17 as “sickness.”

Vs. 3: If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but he does not enjoy life’s good things and also has no burial, I say that an untimely birth is better off than he.

-*Begets* (*yalad*): cf. 5.15 as “father.”

-“He:” the Hebrew text has *nephesh* or *soul* as noted in the previous verse.

-*Enjoy* (*savah*): as in 5.10 above.

-“Good things.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “and his soul does not enjoy from good.”

-*Burial* (*qevorah*): from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to approach,” “to draw near.” “With the *burial* of an ass he shall be buried” [Jer 22.19].

-*Untimely birth* (*naphel*): from a verbal root meaning “to fall.” Only two other uses of this noun in the Old Testament: 1) Job 3.16, “Or why was I not as a hidden *untimely birth*?” 2) “Let them be like the snail which dissolves into slime, like the *untimely birth* that never sees the sun” [Ps 58.8].

Vs. 4: For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered;

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Darkness* (choshek): cf. 5.17 above.

-*Covered* (kasah): in the sense of concealing. “The mountains *were covered* with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches” [Ps 80.10].

Vs. 5: moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.

-“Or *known* (yalad) anything.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “not known.”

-*Finds rest* (nuach): cf. 2.18 as “leave.”

-“Rather than he.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “to this from this.”

-Vs. 6: Even though he should live a thousand years twice told, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

-“Twice told.” The Hebrew text literally reads, *steps* (paham, singular).

-“Enjoy no good.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “good does not see.”

-*Place* (maqom): cf. 1.5.

Vs. 7: All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.

-*Appetite* (nephesh): as noted frequently in this document, “soul.”

-*Satisfied* (mala’): alternately, “to be filled” as in 1.8.

Vs. 8: For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?

-*Advantage* (yoter; also cf. 7.11): alternately as an adverb, “more,” “farther.”

“Why *then* have I been so very wise” [2.15]?

-*Wise man* (chakam): as in 2.14.

-*Poor man* (hany): from a verbal root with multiple meanings such as “to sing,” “to lift up the voice,” “to be afflicted.” “In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the *poor*” [Ps 10.2].

-*To conduct* (halak): the simple verb “to go.”

Vs. 9: Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

-*Wandering* (halak): the simple verb “to go” as noted in the pervious verse.  
-*Desire* (nephesh): “soul” as frequently noted.

Vs. 10: Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

-*Named* (qara’): alternately, “to call.” “And God called the firmament Heaven” [Gen 1.8]. Note the interaction between “making” and “calling” in the Genesis account.

-*Dispute* (dyn): alternately, “to judge.” “And all the people *were at strife* throughout all the tribes of Israel” [2 Sam 19.9].

-*Stronger* (taqaph): cf. 4.12 as “to prevail.”

Vs. 11: The more words, the more vanity, and what is man the better?

-*The better* (yoter): an adverb from the same verbal root as “advantage” in vs. 8 above.

Vs. 12: For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

-*Passes* (hasah): the common verb “to do,” “to make” as noted in 1.13; the only meaning in the Old Testament attributed to this verb.

-*Shadow* (tsel; also cf. 8.13): can connote the idea of protection as found in Ps 17.8, “Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the *shadow* of your wings.”

+

## Chapter Seven

Vs. 1: A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of birth.

*Good* (tov): also used here as “precious.”

-*Name (shem)*: note the similar sound to the noun *ointment (shemen)*. This verse is reminiscent of Sg 1.3, “Your anointing *oils* are fragrant, your *name* is oil poured out.”

-The tone of this verse, as well as several afterwards, is reminiscent of Job when he begins to lament his birth: “After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth...Let the day perish wherein I was born and the night which said, ‘A man-child is conceived’” [Job 3.1-2].

Vs. 2: It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart.

-“House of *mourning* (‘evel):” another sense of this verb is “to be wet with the moisture of the grass;” the noun “pasture” or “meadow” is derived from it. “When the people heard these evil tidings, they *mourned*” [Ex 33.4].

-“House of *feasting* (mishteh):” from a verbal root meaning “to drink” and implies a sense of drunkenness. “In the third year of his reign he gave a *banquet* for all his princes and servants” [Est 1.3].

-*End (soph)*: as in 3.11 applied to God’s activity.

-“Lay:” the Hebrew text has the common verb “to give.”

Vs. 3: Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.

-*Sorrow (kahas)*: cf. 1.18 as “vexation.”

-*Laughter (sechoq)*: as in 2.2.

-*Sadness (roah)*: alternately as “an evil condition” and related to *rah* as often noted, for example, 2.17 as “grievous.”

-“Made glad:” the verbal root for *toV*, *good*.

Vs. 4: The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

-Here “heart” and “house” are interchangeable, that is, as dwellings.

-*Mirth (simchah)*: cf. 2.26 as “joy.”

Vs. 5: It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

-*Rebuke* (gaharah): from a verbal root with the same meaning. “A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to *rebuke*” [Prov 13.1].  
-*Song* (shyr): “The *Song of Songs* which is of Solomon” [Sg 1.1].

Vs. 6: For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.

-*Crackling* (qol): the common noun for “voice.”  
-*Thorns* (syr, singular): alternately as “pot” which is used in this same verse. “*Thorns* shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses” [Is 34.13].

Vs. 7: Surely oppression makes the wise foolish, and a bribe corrupts the mind.

-*Oppression* (hosheq): a word closely related to one found in 4.1.  
-*Makes foolish* (halal): as in 2.2, “mad.”  
-*Bribe* (matanah): from the verbal root “to give” and alternately as “gift,” “present.” “But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave *gifts*” [Gen 25.6].  
-*Corrupts* (‘avad): alternately as “to perish;” cf. 5.14 as “were lost.”  
-*Mind* (lev): as frequently noted, “heart.”

Vs. 8: Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

-*End* (‘acharyth): alternately as “extreme part,” “latter part;” the preposition “after” is derived from the same verbal root. “But in the *end* she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” [Prov 5.4].  
-*Thing* (davar): a noun derived from the common verb “to speak.”  
-*Beginning* (re’shyth): same verbal root as ro’sh (*beginning*) as found in 3.11. “In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth” [Gen 1.1].  
-*Patient* (‘erek): from a verbal root meaning “to make long;” another use of the adjective is “slow.” “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is *slow* to anger quiets contention” [Prov 15.18].  
-*Spirit* (ruach): mentioned twice in the verse at hand and first noted in 1.6 as “wind.”  
-*Proud* (gavah): usually in the negative sense; cf. 5.8 as “high.”

Vs. 9: Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

-The first part of this verse literally reads in the Hebrew text, “Be not quick in *spirit* (*ruach*) to anger.”

-*Be quick* (*bahal*): cf. 5.2 as “rash.”

-*Anger* (*kahas*, used twice): used above in vs. 3 as “sorrow.”

-*Lodges* (*nuach*): first noted in 2.18 as “to leave.”

-*Bosom* (*cheych*): “The lot is cast into the *lap*, but the decision is wholly from the Lord” [Prov 16.33].

Vs. 11: Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

-*Wisdom* (*chakmah*): first noted in 1.13.

-*Inheritance* (*nachalah*): alternately as “possession.” “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an *inheritance*” [Num 18.21].

-*Advantage* (*yoter*): as in 6.8.

Vs. 12: For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money; and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

-*Protection* (*tsele*): basically as “shadow;” cf. 6.11. The Hebrew text literally reads, “in the *shadow* of wisdom.”

-*Money* (*kesepeh*): literally “silver” as in 5.10.

-*Advantage* (*yitron*): cf. 5.9 as “profit.”

-*Preserves* (*chayah*): literally, “to give life.”

Vs. 13: Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?

-*Consider* (*ra'ah*): the common verb “to see;” cf. 1.16 as the verb “to experience.”

-*Straight* (*taqan*): as in 1.15.

-*Crooked* (*hawah*): alternately as “to bend,” “to pervert.” Cf. 12.3: “and the strong men *are bent*.”

Vs. 14: In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.



-*Prosperity* (tovah): the adjective *tov* (*good*) is related to this noun, i.e., “goodness.” “Misfortune pursues sinners, but *prosperity* rewards the righteous” [Prov 13.21].

-“Be joyful.” The Hebrew text literally reads, be in *good* (tov).”

-*Adversity* (raha): alternately, “evil,” as in 2.21.

-*Consider* (ra’ah): the common verb “to see” and as in 2.12. Note the similar sound of both words, ra’ah/raha. Also this verse has three instances in the preposition *b-* (*in*) prefaced to “day” (used twice) and “joyful (‘good’).”

Vs. 15: In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing.

-First instance of “vain life,” here applied to the Preacher.

-*Righteous man/righteousness*: tsadyq/tsedeq.

-*Wicked man* (rasha): as in 3.17.

-*Prolongs* (‘arak): as in 4.16, “come later” and 5.3, “delay.”

-*Evil-doing* (raha): as in the previous verse, “adversity.”

Vs. 16: Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself otherwise; why should you destroy yourself?

-*Overmuch* (rava): also in the next verse; from the verbal root “to become great,” “to multiply.” Compare with *everything* (kol) in the previous verse.

-“Do not make yourself otherwise.” The Hebrew text has the verb *chakam* (*to be wise*) along with *yoter*, last noted in vs. 11 as “advantage.”

-*Destroy* (shama): alternately as “to be astonished.” “Because they *made* you *desolate* and crushed you from all sides” [Ezk 36.3].

Vs. 18: It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.

-*Take hold of* (‘achaz): as in 2.3, “lay hold of.” In the verse at hand, note “of this” which in Hebrew literally reads, “in this.”

-*Withhold* (nuach): as in 11.6.

-*Fears* (yare’): as in 3.14 where it has “before him (God).”

Vs. 19: Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.

-*Wisdom* (chakmah): first noted in 1.13.

-*Gives strength* (hazaz): “And his (Othniel) hand *prevailed over* Chusan-rishathaim” [Judg 3.10].

-*Rulers* (shalyt, singular): from a verbal root meaning “to obtain power,” “to get mastery.” As a substantive, cf. Dan 2.15: “He said to Arioch, the king’s *captain*, ‘Why is the decree of the king so severe?’”

-Vs. 20: Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

-The notion of a man who is *righteous* or tsadyq (cf. 3.17) is not present literally “in earth” where the preposition *in* or b- is used. Chata’ is the verb meaning to *sin* (cf. 2.26 for the noun, similar spelling) and implies missing the mark as with regard to shooting a bow and arrow in target practice.

-Vs. 21: Do not give heed to all the things that men say, lest you hear your servant cursing you;

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Things* (davar, singular): from the verbal root meaning “to speak” and last noted in vs. 8 above. In the verse at hand, the verb *davar* is used as *say*.

-“Do not give heed.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “Do not give to your heart.”

-*Cursing* (halal): as in vs. 7 above, “make foolish.” This is the same verbal root meaning “to praise,” “to glorify.”

Vs. 23: All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, “I will be wise;” but it was far from me.

-*Tested* (nasah): as in 2.1, “make a test.”

-“By wisdom:” literally, “*in* (b-) wisdom.”

-*Far from* (rechoq): derived from the same verb used in 3.5, “to refrain from.”

Vs. 24: That which is, is far off and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

-*Far off* (rechoq): as noted in the previous verse, “far from.”

-*Deep* (hamoq): in the sense of being unsearchable. “For the inward mind and heart of a man are *deep*” [Ps 64.6]. In the verse at hand, this adjective is repeated twice implying excessiveness as in “very.”

-*Find out* (matsa’): the same sense as in 3.11; compare with its use in vs. 14 above.

Vs. 25: I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness which is madness.

-*Turned* (savav): as in 1.6 pertaining to the wind, “goes round.”

-*Mind* (lev): the Hebrew text literally reads, “I turned and my heart to know.”

Mind/heart has the following as its objects:

1) *to know* (yadah).

2) *to search out* (tur): as in 1.13. This verse is similar in structure to the one at hand.

3) *to seek* (baqash): as in 3.15.

4) *wisdom* (chakmah).

5) *sum of things* (cheshbon): from the verbal root, “to think,” “to meditate.”

This noun is found in vs. 29 below as “devices.” It alternately means “engines” as in 2 Chron 26.15, “In Jerusalem he (Uzziah) made *engines*, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners to shoot arrows and great stones.”

6) *wickedness* (reshah): as in 3.16. In the verse at hand, it is the object of *yadah* or *to know*. Reshah is subdivided into *folly* (kesel), *foolishness* (sikloth; cf. 2.3) and *madness* (holeloth). This last noun is also found in 1.17 and 2.12.

Vs. 26: And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

-*Bitter* (mar): from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to flow,” “to drop.” “And I went in *bitterness* in the heart of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me” [Ezk 3.14].

-“Woman:” this verse is reminiscent of sentiments expressed in Proverbs 5.

-*Snares* (matsod, singular): as in 9.12. A closely related term is *matsodah* (*fortress*) as in Is 29.7: The Lord is my rock and my *fortress* and my deliver” [Ps 18.2].

-*Nets* (cherem, singular): from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to shut in,” “to prohibit.” For another use of this noun, “And it shall be inhabited, for there

shall be no more *ban of utter destruction*; Jerusalem shall dwell in security” [Zech 14.11].

-*Fetters* (‘esur, singular): from a verbal root fundamentally meaning “to bind,” “to captivate.” “And the princes were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a *prison*”

[Jer 37.15].

-“He who pleases God.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “Good before God.”

-*Taken* (lakad): alternately, “to choose by lot.” For another sense of this verb, “The waters *become hard* like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen” [Job 38.30].

Vs. 27: Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum,

-This verse continues into the next one.

-*Behold* (ra’ah): the verb “to see.” Compare with the more common use of hineh as in 1.14.

-“Adding” is missing in the Hebrew text which literally reads, “one to one.”

-*Sum* (cheshbon): as in vs. 25 above, “sum of things.”

Vs. 28: which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

-*Mind* (nephesh): fundamentally as “soul” as often noted.

-*Sought* (baqash): as in 3.15.

-*Repeatedly* (hod): alternately as “again.”

-Reference to not having found a woman hearkens back to vs. 26 and perhaps the sentiments referred there to Proverbs 5.

Vs. 29: Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.

-“Behold” is missing in the Hebrew text.

-*Upright* (yashar): fundamentally as “straight.” “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and *upright*, one who feared God and turned away from evil” [Job 1.1].

-*Sought out* (baqash): as in the previous verse.

-*Devices* (cheshbon): cf. vs. 27 above, “sum.”

+