



Ecclesiastes lived in the third century B.C. Palestine was dominated by Egypt's rulers whose only interest was to get rich at the expense of their subjects. In Palestine, prominent families were in charge of collecting for the rulers (and for themselves as well) the highest possible amount of taxes, thus burdening the people.

At that time, the Greek language and Hellenism that is to say Greek culture was being imposed everywhere. For a while, Jerusalem was saved from this cultural invasion but then the weight of politics forced the high priests to agree with the families who were in charge of business.

There had been a real invasion of Greek merchants. People who wanted to move up attended schools where Greek authors were taught. Apparently, no one was able to stand up to Hellenism and the faith in the God of Israel was losing more ground each day.

It was at that time that a teacher of the Law accepted the challenge. He was a teacher and a polemist (this is the meaning of the word "Ecclesiastes," *Qoheleth* in Hebrew): someone who summoned, appealed and who questioned the truths of Greek philosophy. He wanted to unveil the secrets of existence, an ambition still found at the heart of our culture.

Qohelet said that human beings were not masters of their destiny: everything is a gift from God. Instead of falling into activism and thinking only about money, young people should learn how to live and to make the most of the joys that God gives us in the course of our lives. Nothing is certain and our reason is always being superseded. Anyone who refuses to look squarely at death, a certainty, only possesses superficial wisdom.

Qohelet may have summarized the essence of his thinking in this sentence: "God made everything fitting in its time but he also set eternity in their hearts although they are not able to embrace the work of God from the beginning to the end" (Qo 3:11; 8:16). Therefore, human beings are going to have to take charge of their destiny, taking it both as a mission and as an enigma and giving thanks for what each one of us has received.

Qohelet liked to repeat the same words but each time, he tried to have them express new meanings. And so the enigmatic "Meaningless... All is meaningless," that we find at the beginning of the book (1:2), revealed all its meaning at the end when the author had shown the limitations of human knowledge and the need to learn to live in the joy of each day (12:8).

The disciples of this unknown person published his work and they attributed it to Solomon, the king who had earned the reputation of being a wise man. They summarized the teachings of their master in this short text that may have been used to teach at the Temple's school. It was probably written around 240–220 B.C.

Today the preferred name for Ecclesiastes is Qoheleth, according to the Hebrew name, to distinguish it from the book of Ben Sirach, traditionally called Ecclesiasticus. This is the reason why we are using the abbreviation **Qo** when quoting from this book.

### Vanity of vanities

**1** • <sup>1</sup>Here are the words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

<sup>2</sup>All is meaningless—says the Teacher—meaningless, meaningless!

<sup>3</sup>What profit is there for a man in all his work for which he toils under the sun?

<sup>4</sup>A generation goes, a generation comes and the earth remains forever. <sup>5</sup>The sun rises, the sun sets, hastening towards the place where it again rises. <sup>6</sup>Blowing to the south, turning to the north, the wind goes round and round and after all its rounds it has to blow again.

<sup>7</sup>All rivers go to the sea but the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers come from, there they return again.

<sup>8</sup>All words become weary and speech comes to an end, but the eye has never seen enough nor the ear heard too much.

<sup>9</sup>What has happened before will happen again; what has been done before will be done again: there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup>If they say to you, “See, it’s

new!” know that it has already been centuries earlier.

<sup>11</sup>There is no remembrance of ancient people, and those to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

### Even wisdom is meaningless

<sup>12</sup>I, the teacher, have been king of Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>I set my heart on studying and examining critically all that is done under heaven.

<sup>14</sup>It is a burdensome task which God has given to the humans! I have seen everything that is done under the sun, but all is meaningless: it is chasing the wind. <sup>15</sup>What is bent cannot be straightened; what is not will not come to be.

<sup>16</sup>I thought to myself, “See, I have increased and promoted wisdom more than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me and I have experienced to the full both wisdom and knowledge.” <sup>17</sup>I set my heart on comparing wisdom with foolishness and stupidity, and I discovered that this also is chasing the wind.

<sup>18</sup>For the wiser you are, the more worries you have, and the more you learn, the more you suffer.

Ps 62:10;  
Rom  
8:20

1K 3:12;  
5:9-10;  
10:1-13;  
Sir 47:  
14-18

• **1.1** *All is meaningless! meaningless!*  
We are used to the ancient translation of this verse: “Vanity of vanities. All is vanity!” Actually, the first word of the book designates in Hebrew a wisp of straw. It is without weight and flies away at the slightest breeze, like vanity, a nothing. It is also what escapes our grasp: it is a future that is uncertain and illusory, or something which does not satisfy our spirit, on which we can build nothing; it is “disconcerting,” it “has no sense.”

This expression is repeated in the book like a refrain, but with different meanings according to the context: that is why we have recourse to different translations.

*There is nothing new under the sun.* The prophets had seen the world led by God toward a happy future. Other cultures, however, had the notion that the world only keeps on repeating the same events, with kingdoms,

wars, success and failure. For them, nothing was happening which could give people the fulfillment of their desires.

With such convictions, a person might try to forget what is taking place in a world where all is illusion, but that is not the case of Ecclesiastes. Like every good Jew, he is firmly rooted in reality; he lives at a time that is without conflict and also without prophets or great hope. In such conditions, it is wisdom to ignore the illusions of activism.

*Under the sun:* these words will come back as a refrain: humans toil and pass as a shadow while the sun remains. The sun is like an image of God who endures and who alone does things “with a view to eternity” (3:14).

*The wiser you are...* (v. 18). The pioneers of science were sure that progress would free us from all evils. Our century has lost this assurance: development is not a road to easy life,

## Empty pleasures

**2**• I said in my heart, “I will try pleasure! taste happiness!” But I found that was useless. <sup>2</sup>Laughter is foolishness! As for pleasure, what good is it? <sup>3</sup>I thought of cheering my body with wine while my heart searched for wisdom. So I gave myself to folly in order to find out what would be good for man to do under the sun throughout his life.

<sup>4</sup>I did great things: I built houses and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup>I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees. <sup>6</sup>I constructed reservoirs to irrigate the orchards. <sup>7</sup>I bought slaves and servants and had slaves born in my household. I had flocks and herds in abundance more than anyone before me in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup>I acquired silver and gold—the wealth of kings and nations. I had choirmaster and singers and besides that, what most delights men. <sup>9</sup>I became great, surpassing all my predecessors in Jerusalem without losing wisdom. <sup>10</sup>I refused myself nothing that my eyes desired nor did I deprive my heart of any pleasure. I enjoyed all I undertook and that was my reward for my work.

<sup>11</sup>Then I considered all I had achieved by my work and all the toil it had entailed and found that it was

all meaningless and chasing wind. There is no profit under the sun.

<sup>12</sup>I then decided to compare wisdom with folly and madness and I thought, “What will my successor as king do?” (We know what he did!)

<sup>13</sup>I understood that wisdom is more profitable than folly, just as light is better than darkness:

<sup>14</sup>The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness.

But it dawned on me that the same fate overtakes them both. <sup>15</sup>And I thought, “If the fate of the fool will be mine as well, what did my wisdom profit me?” I thought to myself that, too, is meaningless. <sup>16</sup>There is no more remembrance of the wise man than of the fool: both will be forgotten in the days to come. Why is a wise man’s death like that of a fool?

<sup>17</sup>So I hated life seeing the wrong in everything that is done under the sun: all is meaningless and chasing wind. <sup>18</sup>I hated all I had labored for under the sun and which I must leave to my successor. <sup>19</sup>Who knows whether he will be foolish or wise? Yet he will be master of all <sup>20</sup>I have achieved by my own efforts and wisdom: that too is meaningless.

And I began to despair in my heart over all my labor under the sun. <sup>21</sup>For here was a man who toiled

1K 12:13

Jn 8:12

Sir 44:9

one is slave to one’s own brain and one’s own knowledge, obliged to assume the consequences that become more formidable each day; although one does not know the way, one cannot stop.

• **2.1** *I hated all I had labored for* (v. 18). Others would waste what he had slaved to gain. He also understands that *he has gained nothing under the sun*, nothing that is beyond what dies.

We worry about the future. We shall easily find there a continual evasion of our life: we are always rushing to prepare for a new phase of our life, more stable, more satisfying, and maybe retirement; we are not even able to

avoid boredom. How many people die right after retiring because they no longer have a reason to struggle and live!

*If the fate of the fool will be mine as well...* (v. 15). Here we have the central point of the critique of human existence. Not only the Israelites but people from all countries have counted on a divine justice, and they have always seen the signs of this in events both great and small. That satisfies only for a time. The conscience of the Jewish people was affected by the word of God, but the fruit of this had not yet appeared: the Book of Ecclesiastes, like that of Job, and that of Sirach, is of an age which did not dare and could not yet believe in the resurrection.

in all wisdom, knowledge and skill and he must leave all to someone who has not worked for it. This is meaningless and a great misfortune.

<sup>22</sup>For what profit is there for a man in all his work and heart-searching under the sun? <sup>23</sup>All his days bring sorrow, his work grief; he hasn't, moreover, peaceful rest at night: that too is meaningless.

<sup>24</sup>There is nothing better for man to do than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. I understood that this too comes from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup>For without him who can eat or find enjoyment?

<sup>26</sup>To the one who pleases him, he gives wisdom, knowledge and joy, while to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up what will be given to another who pleases God: this too is meaningless and chasing wind.

### A time for everything

**3** • <sup>1</sup>There is a given time for everything and a time for every happening under heaven:

<sup>2</sup>A time for giving birth, a time for dying; a time for planting, a time for uprooting.

<sup>3</sup>A time for killing, a time for healing; a time for knocking down, a time for building.

<sup>4</sup>A time for tears, a time for laughter; a time for mourning, a time for dancing.

<sup>5</sup>A time for throwing stones, a time for gathering stones; a time for embracing, a time to refrain from embracing.

<sup>6</sup>A time for searching, a time for losing; a time for keeping, a time for throwing away.

<sup>7</sup>A time for tearing, a time for sewing; a time to be silent and a time to speak.

<sup>8</sup>A time for loving, a time for hating; a time for war, a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup>What profit is there for a man from all his toils?

<sup>10</sup>Finally I considered the task God gave to the humans. <sup>11</sup>He made everything fitting in its time, but he also set eternity in their hearts, although they are not able to embrace the work of God from the beginning to the end.

<sup>12</sup>I know that there is nothing better for him to do than to seek pleasure and well-being during his life.

<sup>13</sup>To eat, drink and find satisfaction in his work is a gift from God.

<sup>14</sup>I know that everything God does remains forever; there is nothing to add, nothing to take from it. Yet God has ordained that humans fear him.

<sup>15</sup>What has happened comes again; what is now has already been; God recovers what has gone. <sup>16</sup>I have also seen under the sun, instead of justice, wickedness, and in the place of the just, the wicked.

<sup>17</sup>And I said to myself, "God will judge the just and the wicked for there is a time for everything, and a judgment for every deed."

• <sup>18</sup>I also thought about them, how God wants to test them and let them see that they themselves are animals.

• **3.1** Note verses 11-14 whose commentary is found in the introduction.

In the following chapters, Ecclesiastes looks at all aspects of the human condition, one after the other, beginning with the surest: death.

*What is now has already been.* See what was said with regard to 1:10. So, if all that hu-

mans build must be destroyed, what is left to them? That each of us must die, this we can accept, and it is not absurd if the world continues to be. Instead it is impossible to think that one day all must stop and forever die.

Yet this is the only perspective left to us from a materialist view of the universe. There will not even be someone to remember that

Sir 40:5

Sir 14:14

Ps 49:11;  
Job  
27:16Rom  
11:335:6;  
7:18

Ps 49:13;  
49:20Gen 2:7;  
Ps  
104:29;  
Job  
34:15

Sir 16:29

<sup>19</sup>For the destiny of man and animal is identical: death for one as for the other. <sup>20</sup>Both have the same spirit; man has no superiority over animals for all pass away like wind. Both go to the same place, both come from dust and return to dust.

<sup>21</sup>Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the beast descends earthward? <sup>22</sup>I understood that the best man can do is to be happy in what he does, for that is his lot. For who will take him to see the beyond?

**4** <sup>1</sup>I considered also how much oppression there is under the sun: the tears of the oppressed and no one to console them, the violence of the oppressors and no one to hold them back.

<sup>2</sup>More fortunate are the dead for being dead, than the living who have to live, <sup>3</sup>and even more fortunate than both is the one not yet born who has not seen the abuses under the sun.

Jer 20:18;  
Job 3:16

<sup>4</sup>I saw that all that is done, all that succeeds, results from rivalry with the neighbor: all is meaningless and chasing the wind.

<sup>5</sup>The fool folds his arms and eats his meat. <sup>6</sup>Yet better half a fistful of rest than fistfuls of toil and chasing the wind.

<sup>7</sup>I saw another senseless thing under the sun: <sup>8</sup>a man alone, without son or brother, working endlessly, his greed never satisfied with wealth: "For whom do I work and deprive myself of pleasure?" This, too, is nonsense and mistaken investment.

<sup>9</sup>Happier two than one alone, for their work brings a higher salary, <sup>10</sup>and when one falls the other lifts up his companion. Unfortunate he who is alone and has no one to lift him up. <sup>11</sup>Moreover it's warmer with two in bed; how can one alone be

warm? <sup>12</sup>One person may be overcome by an aggressor, but two can easily oppose him; triple-stranded thread is not easily broken.

<sup>13</sup>Better a youth who is poor and wise than a fool of an old king who shuns advice. <sup>14</sup>He may even pass from prison to the throne, though born poor in his kingdom. <sup>15</sup>I saw all who live under the sun follow the youth who replaced the latter and there was no end to the people who sided with him. <sup>16</sup>And yet those who will come after will not be satisfied. This too makes no sense; it's nothing but chasing wind.

### Wise sayings

<sup>17</sup>Watch your step when you go to God's house; it's a better offering to listen, than to present sacrifices as do the fools; for they do not know the evil they do.

1S 15:22;  
Pro 21:3

**5** <sup>1</sup>Don't be impulsive and hasty with words in the presence of God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. For that reason let your words be few.

Dt 4:39

<sup>2</sup>For dreams come from over-anxiety and foolish talk from too many words.

Jas 3:8;  
Pro 10:19

<sup>3</sup>When you make a vow to God, waste no time in fulfilling it, for he takes no pleasure in fools. Do what you vowed.

Lev 27:2;  
Dt 23:22

<sup>4</sup>Better not to make a vow than to fail to fulfill it.

<sup>5</sup>Don't let your speech cause you to sin, and then tell God's minister it was a mistake. Why anger God by what you say and destroy the work of your hands? From much dreaming and many words comes emptiness. <sup>6</sup>So fear God.

<sup>7</sup>If you see the poor oppressed, right and justice denied in the province, do not be surprised, for over a high-placed official a higher one watches, and over both of these a still higher one watches. <sup>8</sup>The produce of the land benefits everyone and the king serves the land.

humans did exist, suffer and love: no one can face such an eventuality.

• 18. *Both have the same spirit...* (v. 19). See Biblical Index 83. Let us not forget that God had not yet revealed what human destiny after death would be; when we read this text, we must not conclude that the spirit (since it is

the same word as *breath*) dies with the body. With the New Testament, *soul* will signify that which does not die (Mt 10:28).

*Who knows?* Even for believers of our time, faith cannot destroy the natural fear of death. At certain moments at least, the death of our dear ones leaves us disoriented, just as does the certitude of our own death.

<sup>9</sup>Whoever loves money will not be satisfied with money. Whoever loves wealth hasn't sufficient income. This is senseless.

<sup>10</sup>When there is abundance of good things there is abundance of consumers. What profit is there for the owner except to look on?

<sup>11</sup>Sweet the sleep of the laborer, whether he eats little or much. But the rich man who has had his fill cannot sleep.

<sup>12</sup>There is a great evil that I found under the sun, the rich man who kept his wealth to his own harm. <sup>13</sup>A mistaken investment and these riches are lost; a son is born but there is nothing to leave him.

Ps 49:18 <sup>14</sup>Naked he came from his mother's womb, he returns as he came—naked. Nothing of the fruit of his toil is he able to take with him.

Job 14:1 <sup>15</sup>That, too, is a grievous evil: As he came, so he goes. So what did he gain from chasing the wind? <sup>16</sup>Why did he eat in darkness all through his life, amidst great sorrow, suffering and vexation?

<sup>17</sup>This is what I saw as most fitting for man: to eat, drink and be happy in all the work he does under the sun during the days God grants him; this is his reward.

<sup>18</sup>And when God gives a man riches and property with the possibility of enjoying them and being happy in his work, this is a gift from God. <sup>19</sup>As long as God keeps him occupied in the gladness of his heart, he is not concerned about how long he will live.

Sir 14: 3-19; Lk 12:20 **6** <sup>1</sup>There is another very evil thing which I saw under the sun: a man has riches, property, honor, and lacks nothing he could desire, <sup>2</sup>yet God does not permit him to benefit from them; a stranger has the enjoyment. That is nonsense and a grievous hurt.

Job 3:11 <sup>3</sup>What if a man had a hundred sons and lived many years but without tasting happiness and even without a tomb! More fortunate, I would say, the one untimely-born. <sup>4</sup>For he came in vain and goes to darkness and in darkness will his name be hidden. <sup>5</sup>He has not seen the sun and has not known it. Finally he has had more rest than that man. <sup>6</sup>Even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but without tasting happiness; do not both go to the same place?

<sup>7</sup>Man works to fill his stomach, yet he himself is not satisfied.

<sup>8</sup>Has the wise man more than the fool? What is the benefit of wisdom to one overwhelmed by poverty?

<sup>9</sup>What the eye sees seems better than what the heart desires. That, too, is senseless and chasing wind.

<sup>10</sup>Everything has already been evaluated. One knows what man is and that he cannot dispute with the one stronger than himself.

<sup>11</sup>Many words, much emptiness; what does it profit? <sup>12</sup>Who knows what is the good way of life for man, during the days of his meaningless life which pass like a shadow? Who will let him know what will happen after he has gone?

Ps  
102:12;  
Job 14:2;  
Wis 2:5

**7** <sup>1</sup>An honorable name is better than perfumed oil. Better the day of death than the day of birth.

<sup>2</sup>Better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for to this end all come, and let the living take this to heart: <sup>3</sup>Sorrow is better than laughter, for a sad face brings healing to the soul. <sup>4</sup>The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the heart of the fool is in the house of feasting.

Pro 14:7

<sup>5</sup>Better to heed the rebuke of a wise than to listen to a fool's song. <sup>6</sup>Like the crackling of thorns under a pot is the fool's laugh.

<sup>7</sup>Corruption makes a wise man mad, bribe blinds his heart.

Ps 15:5

<sup>8</sup>Better to reach the end than to begin. Better patience than a haughty spirit.

<sup>9</sup>Don't be easily dejected, for dejection resides in the womb of fools.

Jas 1:19

<sup>10</sup>Do not ask why former times were better than the present. It is not wisdom that prompts such a question.

<sup>11</sup>Wisdom is as precious as an inheritance; it is a blessing for those on whom the sun shines. <sup>12</sup>If wisdom protects you, money will do the same. This is the benefit of acquiring wisdom: it makes its owner live.

<sup>13</sup>See the work of God. Who can straighten what he has bent? <sup>14</sup>Be happy in the day of prosperity and in the day of sorrow reflect: <sup>15</sup>God has given both one and the other and many may discover what comes later.

<sup>16</sup>Do not be over-righteous or excessively wise, lest you harm yourself. <sup>17</sup>Do

not be too wicked or too stupid, lest you die before your time.

<sup>18</sup>It is well to hold to one and not to loosen your grasp on the other. The God-fearing man copes with both.

<sup>19</sup>Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers in the city. <sup>20</sup>There is no righteous man on earth who always does good and never sins.

<sup>21</sup>Don't take seriously all that you hear, lest you hear your servant speak ill of you. <sup>22</sup>You know well how many times you have spoken ill of others!

<sup>23</sup>After having examined all this critically I said, "I will be wise!" <sup>24</sup>But how far it is from me! more remote than anything, and deep, very deep. Who could discover it?

<sup>25</sup>I set myself in all earnestness to know, study and pursue wisdom and reason, so I saw that wickedness is folly, and foolishness, stupidity.

• <sup>26</sup>I find woman more bitter than death. She is a pitfall; her heart is a snare and her arms, chains. He who pleases God will escape from her, but the sinner will be caught.

<sup>27</sup>See what I discovered—says the Teacher—after considering them one after another, anxious to understand. <sup>28</sup>I have been searching but have not yet found; for a man among a thousand I may find, but not a woman among all of them.

<sup>29</sup>See what I discovered: God made man simple, but they get lost in their many thoughts.

**8** <sup>1</sup>Who is like the wise man? Who else can solve a problem? A man's wis-

dom lights up his expression—his stern look is changed.

<sup>2</sup>Obey the command of the king because of the oath before God and <sup>3</sup>don't be eager to ignore it. Do not stubbornly support a bad cause, for he will do what he pleases. <sup>4</sup>The king's word holds. Who will say to him, "What are you doing?"

<sup>5</sup>Whoever obeys a royal precept avoids trouble. The wise man knows the time and the judgment—<sup>6</sup>the time to act and the value of everything.

This misfortune weighs heavily on man: <sup>7</sup>he has no knowledge of what will happen. Who can tell him what will happen? <sup>8</sup>No one controls the wind or holds back the day of death. Struggle is useless and not even wickedness saves its author. <sup>9</sup>I have observed this and set myself to consider everything that is done under the sun, when man is given the power of harming another.

• <sup>10</sup>And so I have seen the wicked buried and people come from the holy place to honor them, forgetting how they acted. This, too, is futile.

<sup>11</sup>It is because sentence against wrongdoing is not passed at once that evil designs fill the human heart. <sup>12</sup>The sinner may do wrong a hundred times and yet survive.

(I know well that there will be happiness for the God-fearing man because he fears God, <sup>13</sup>but there will be no happiness for the wicked; and because he doesn't fear God, he will pass like a shadow and his days will not last.)

<sup>14</sup>Another kind of nonsense is found in what humans do on earth: the right-

Rom  
13:1

Job  
21:32

• **7.26-29** cannot fail to shock us. It is time to remember that the Bible is both word of God and human word, word of a certain time and a certain culture. Almost all the texts of the Bible are born of an experience lived by men, in a world which, in most cases, did not know "woman."

• **8.10-12** points out the great weakness of all moral preaching in a world where saints are not legion: only the fear of the police is effective. If God does not want to play the role of the policeman, who will be honest (see Is 26:9-11)? In Old Testament times, God accepted to be presented as such, and even, that the religious authorities should punish in his

name. Ecclesiastes would say: "There is a time for everything." In Christian times the Churches wanted to continue this way, which resulted in the Inquisition and the wars of religion. This is almost unacceptable to us but in our disorientated world certain people look with sympathy towards those religions where the whole community takes charge of punishing and eliminating those who violate the moral and religious code.

We can be almost sure that the phrase we put in parenthesis in verse 12 was added later, since many of the faithful of that time would be shocked by such doubts concerning divine reward and punishment.

eous are treated as the wicked deserve, and the wicked, as the righteous deserve. This, too, is meaningless.

<sup>15</sup>So I praise joy, since for man there is no happiness under the sun other than eating, drinking and taking pleasure in his work throughout the life God gives him under the sun. <sup>16</sup>When I set out to get wisdom and considered the human condition on earth, by day or by night when people sleep and are not conscious, <sup>17</sup>I saw that with regard to God's work, as a whole, no man is able to discover what the work is that goes on under the sun; though he tire himself searching, he will not find out. And if the wise man claims to know, he does not.

Dt 33:3;  
Wis 7:16

**9** <sup>1</sup>I have pondered on all this and now I understand that the just, the wise and all they do are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether hate or love is in store for him. <sup>2</sup>What is most senseless is that the same destiny awaits all, the virtuous and the wicked, the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who doesn't. It is then the same for the good man and the sinner, for the one who swears and the one who refrains from swearing.

<sup>3</sup>The same fate comes to all: this is the evil which corrupts all that is done under the sun. This is why man's heart is full of evil and foolishness during his life and his end is with the dead. <sup>4</sup>As long as he shares with the living there is hope, a live dog being better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup>The living at least know they will die but the dead know nothing; neither do they await anything; the memory of them has vanished. <sup>6</sup>Their love, hate and jealousy have already perished and they no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

<sup>7</sup>Go, eat your bread with gladness and drink your wine joyfully; this is God's approval of your work. <sup>8</sup>Dress in white and perfume your head.

Pro 5:18

<sup>9</sup>Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of the meaningless life given you by God under the sun, for this is your lot in life and in the work you do under the sun.

Sir 14:16

<sup>10</sup>Fulfill your projects while you are able, for among the dead where you are going there is no work, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom.

<sup>11</sup>I saw something else under the sun: the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread go to the wise nor riches to the intelligent; favor is not for the learned, for fortune and misfortune overtake them all.

<sup>12</sup>For man is not aware of his time: just as fish are caught in the treacherous net and sparrows trapped in the snare, man, like them, is caught by misfortune suddenly befalling him.

Lk 12:20;  
21:35

### More proverbs

<sup>13</sup>I have considered something else very grave under the sun. <sup>14</sup>There was a small town with few inhabitants. A king set out to attack it, laid siege to it and built great siege-works around it. <sup>15</sup>But a poverty-stricken wise man was found, who by his wisdom saved the town. No one, however, remembered the poor man. <sup>16</sup>So I said, "Better wisdom than heroism," but the wisdom of the poor is despised and his words are not heeded.

Pro 21:22

<sup>17</sup>The words of the wise spoken calmly are heard above the shouts of a ruler of fools.

<sup>18</sup>Wisdom is better than weapons; one sinner spoils much happiness.

**10** <sup>1</sup>As dead flies spoil a jar of perfumed oil, a little folly weighs heavier than wisdom and honor.

Gal 5:9

<sup>2</sup>The heart of the wise man leads him to the right, the heart of the fool leads him to the left.

<sup>3</sup>When the fool is on the road, he goes the wrong way and to all he meets he says, "There goes another fool."

<sup>4</sup>If the ruler gets angry with you, do not stir, for composure prevents many grave mistakes.

Pro 16:14

<sup>5</sup>An evil I discovered under the sun, an error of rulers: <sup>6</sup>folly is exalted to the heights while rich men take the lowest places. <sup>7</sup>I have seen slaves riding on horses, princes going on foot like slaves.

<sup>8</sup>He who digs a pit may fall into it and he who pierces a wall may be bitten by a serpent;

<sup>9</sup>he who quarries stones may be hurt by them and he who splits logs may be wounded;

<sup>10</sup>if the axe is blunt and the edge not sharpened, you must strike stronger blows, in all this gain with wisdom. <sup>11</sup>But if the serpent doesn't allow itself to be



charmed and bites, what did the charmer gain?

<sup>12</sup>The words from the lips of a wise man are gracious but the lips of a fool bring about his own ruin. <sup>13</sup>Folly marks the beginning of his speech and pure madness, the end. <sup>14</sup>Let him multiply his words! (Man does not know what will happen and who will let him know what comes after him?) <sup>15</sup>Any work wears the fool; he doesn't even know the way to go to town.

<sup>16</sup>Alas for you, O land! if your ruler is a young man whose princes feast in the morning. <sup>17</sup>Happy the land where the king is nobly born and where the princes eat at appropriate times, as fitting to people, rather than being drunk.

<sup>18</sup>Laziness in man causes a ceiling to sag and because of a man's slackness a house leaks.

<sup>19</sup>Man prepares a meal for pleasure; wine gives cheer to life while money is the answer to everything.

<sup>20</sup>Even in your mind do not curse the king and in your bedroom do not curse the rich, for the birds of the air may tell what you say and winged carriers will make it known.

**11** <sup>1</sup>Cast your bread on the water for after a given time you will find it again.

<sup>2</sup>Share with seven or even with eight for you never know what misfortune may strike the earth.

<sup>3</sup>When clouds are heavy, rain falls on the earth and when a tree falls facing south or north there in that place it will lie.

<sup>4</sup>He who watches the wind will not sow and he who watches the clouds will not reap.

<sup>5</sup>Just as you do not know how the spirit pervades the members in the mother's womb, neither will you understand the work of God, creator of all things.

<sup>6</sup>Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle until the evening for you don't know whether one or the other will succeed. What if both prove to be good?

### So man goes forward to his eternal home

• <sup>7</sup>Light is pleasant and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. <sup>8</sup>If a man lives for many years, let him rejoice in them all, thinking that dark days will be many and all that comes after will be meaningless.

<sup>9</sup>Rejoice, young man, in your youth and direct well your heart when you are young; follow your desires and achieve your ambitions but recall that God will take account of all you do.

<sup>10</sup>Drive sorrow from your heart and pain from your flesh, for youth and dark hair will not last.

**12** <sup>1</sup>Be mindful of your Creator when you are young, before the time of sorrow comes when you have to say, "This gives me no pleasure,"

<sup>2</sup>and before the sun, moon and stars withdraw their light, before the clouds gather again after the rain.

<sup>3</sup>On the day when the guardians of the house tremble, when sturdy men are bowed and those at the mill

• **11.7** *Light is pleasant.* Here begin marvelous words in praise of life. Ecclesiastes does not see how to justify the action of God but he discovers him in the order of the world. An order to be respected, without a doubt, but he says that the beauty of nature invites a human to be creative and fulfill his desires. We may be astonished that many preachers have had Ecclesiastes say: "Think of death and flee the happiness of the world!" Here we have thanksgiving and a call to freedom.

*Be mindful of your Creator when you are*

*young (12:1).* It will not be the time to turn to God when our strength and pleasures are over: "the beautiful woman has no more lovers, she has entered a convent." Why remember our Creator? Because this remembering, which little by little will become a presence for us, is one of the conditions of our joy. The bitterness of old age does not affect those who have chosen God in their youth; at the end of their life they can repeat the words of the psalm: *I shall go towards God, the joy of my youth.*

stop working because they are too few, when it grows dim for those looking through the windows, <sup>4</sup>and the doors are shut and the noise of the mill grows faint, the sparrow stops chirping and the bird-song is silenced, <sup>5</sup>when one fears the slopes and to walk is frightening; yet the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is fat and the caperberry bears fruit that serves no purpose,

because man goes forward to his eternal home and mourners gather in the street,

<sup>6</sup>even before the silver chain is snapped or the golden globe is shattered,

before the pitcher is broken at the fountain or the wheel at the mill,

<sup>7</sup>before the dust returns to the

earth from which it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

<sup>8</sup>Meaningless! meaningless! the Teacher says; all is meaningless!

<sup>9</sup>Besides being a wise man Qoheleth taught the people; he listened, studied and classified a great number of proverbs.

<sup>10</sup>Qoheleth tried to write in a pleasant style and express frankly words of truth.

<sup>11</sup>The words of the wise are spurs, their collected sayings are like a fence whose many pegs have been assembled by one shepherd.

<sup>12</sup>Beware, my son, of searching beyond. Writing many books would be useless, and intense study wearies the body.

<sup>13</sup>Conclusion: fear God and obey his precepts; for man depends entirely on this. <sup>14</sup>God brings every deed to judgment, all that is hidden, be it good or bad.