

Ecclesiastes

BEREAN STANDARD BIBLE

Chapter 1

EVERYTHING IS FUTILE

¹These are the words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: ²“Futility of futilities,” says the Teacher, “futility of futilities! Everything is futile!” ³What does a man gain from all his labor, at which he toils under the sun? ⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun rises and the sun sets; it hurries back to where it rises. ⁶The wind blows southward, then turns northward; round and round it swirls, ever returning on its course. ⁷All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full; to the place from which the streams come, there again they flow. ⁸All things are wearisome, more than one can describe; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear content with hearing. ⁹What has been will be again, and what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰Is there a case where one can say, “Look, this is new”? It has already existed in the ages before us. ¹¹There is no remembrance of those who came before, and those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow after.

WITH WISDOM COMES SORROW

¹²I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a miserable task God has laid upon the sons of men to occupy them! ¹⁴I have seen all the things that are done under the sun, and have found them all to be futile, a pursuit of the wind. ¹⁵What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶I said to myself, “Behold, I have grown and increased in wisdom beyond all those before me who were over Jerusalem, and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷So I set my mind to know wisdom and madness and folly; I learned that this, too, is a pursuit of the wind. ¹⁸For with much wisdom comes much sorrow, and as knowledge grows, grief increases.

Chapter 2

THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE

¹I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good!” But it proved to be futile. ²I said of

laughter, “It is folly,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” ³I sought to cheer my body with wine and to embrace folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—until I could see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. ⁴I expanded my pursuits. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵I made gardens and parks for myself, where I planted all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I built reservoirs to water my groves of flourishing trees. ⁷I acquired menservants and maidservants, and servants were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me, ⁸and I accumulated for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered to myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men—many concubines. ⁹So I became great and surpassed all in Jerusalem who had preceded me; and my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰Anything my eyes desired, I did not deny myself. I refused my heart no pleasure. For my heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹Yet when I considered all the works that my hands had accomplished and what I had toiled to achieve, I found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind; there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

¹²Then I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what more can the king’s successor do than what has already been accomplished? ¹³And I saw that wisdom exceeds folly, just as light exceeds darkness. ¹⁴The wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I also came to realize that one fate overcomes them both. ¹⁵So I said to myself, “The fate of the fool will also befall me. What then have I gained by being wise?” And I said to myself that this too is futile. ¹⁶For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise, just as with the fool, seeing that both will be forgotten in the days to come. Alas, the wise man will die just like the fool! ¹⁷So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

THE FUTILITY OF WORK

¹⁸I hated all for which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. ¹⁹And who knows whether that man will be wise or foolish? Yet he will take over all the labor at which I have worked skillfully un-

der the sun. This too is futile. ²⁰So my heart began to despair over all the labor that I had done under the sun. ²¹When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and he must give his portion to a man who has not worked for it, this too is futile and a great evil. ²²For what does a man get for all the toil and striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³Indeed, all his days are filled with grief, and his task is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile. ²⁴Nothing is better for a man than to eat and drink and enjoy his work. I have also seen that this is from the hand of God. ²⁵For apart from Him, who can eat and who can find enjoyment? ²⁶To the man who is pleasing in His sight, He gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner He assigns the task of gathering and accumulating that which he will hand over to one who pleases God. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

Chapter 3

TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

¹To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: ²a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ³a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build, ⁴a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, ⁵a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, ⁶a time to search and a time to count as lost, a time to keep and a time to discard, ⁷a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, ⁸a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

GOD'S WORKS REMAIN FOREVER

⁹What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰I have seen the burden that God has laid upon the sons of men to occupy them. ¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom the work that God has done from beginning to end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and do good while they live, ¹³and also that every man should eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his labor—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴I know that everything God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God does it so that they should fear Him. ¹⁵What exists has already been, and what will be has already been, for God will call to account what has passed.

FROM DUST TO DUST

¹⁶Furthermore, I saw under the sun that in the place of judgment there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. ¹⁷I said in my heart, “God will judge the righteous and the wicked, since there is a time for every activity and every deed.” ¹⁸I said to myself, “As for the sons of men, God tests them so that they may see for themselves that they are but beasts.” ¹⁹For the fates of both men and beasts are the same: As one dies, so dies the other—they all have the same breath. Man has no advantage over the animals, since everything is futile. ²⁰All go to one place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. ²¹Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and the spirit of the animal descends into the earth? ²²I have seen that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will come after him?

Chapter 4

THE EVIL OF OPPRESSION

¹Again I looked, and I considered all the oppression taking place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, and they had no comforter; the power lay in the hands of their oppressors, and there was no comforter. ²So I admired the dead, who had already died, above the living, who are still alive. ³But better than both is he who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. ⁴I saw that all labor and success spring from a man's envy of his neighbor. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind. ⁵The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. ⁶Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and pursuit of the wind. ⁷Again, I saw futility under the sun. ⁸There is a man all alone, without even a son or brother. And though there is no end to his labor, his eyes are still not content with his wealth: “For whom do I toil and bereave my soul of enjoyment?” This too is futile—a miserable task. ⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. ¹⁰For if one falls down, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to help him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though one may be overpowered, two can resist. Moreover, a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

THE FUTILITY OF POWER

¹³Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take a warning. ¹⁴For the youth has come from the prison to the kingship, though he

was born poor in his own kingdom. ¹⁵I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed this second one, the youth who succeeded the king. ¹⁶There is no limit to all the people who were before them. Yet the successor will not be celebrated by those who come even later. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

Chapter 5

APPROACHING GOD WITH AWE

¹Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. ²Do not be quick to speak, and do not be hasty in your heart to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth. So let your words be few. ³As a dream comes through many cares, so the speech of a fool comes with many words. ⁴When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it, because He takes no pleasure in fools. Fulfill your vow. ⁵It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. ⁶Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, and do not tell the messenger that your vow was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷For as many dreams bring futility, so do many words. Therefore, fear God.

THE FUTILITY OF WEALTH

⁸If you see the oppression of the poor and the denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be astonished at the matter; for one official is watched by a superior, and others higher still are over them. ⁹The produce of the earth is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. ¹⁰He who loves money is never satisfied by money, and he who loves wealth is never satisfied by income. This too is futile. ¹¹When good things increase, so do those who consume them; what then is the profit to the owner, except to behold them with his eyes? ¹²The sleep of the worker is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich man permits him no sleep. ¹³There is a grievous evil I have seen under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, ¹⁴or wealth lost in a failed venture, so when that man has a son there is nothing to pass on. ¹⁵As a man came from his mother's womb, so he will depart again, naked as he arrived. He takes nothing for his labor to carry in his hands. ¹⁶This too is a grievous affliction: Exactly as a man is born, so he will depart. What does he gain as he toils for the wind? ¹⁷Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, with much sorrow, sickness, and anger. ¹⁸Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in all the labor one does under the

sun during the few days of life that God has given him—for this is his lot. ¹⁹Furthermore, God has given riches and wealth to every man, and He has enabled him to enjoy them, to accept his lot, and to rejoice in his labor. This is a gift from God. ²⁰For a man seldom considers the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the joy of his heart.

Chapter 6

THE FUTILITY OF LIFE

¹There is another evil I have seen under the sun, and it weighs heavily upon mankind: ²God gives a man riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires; but God does not allow him to enjoy them. Instead, a stranger will enjoy them. This is futile and a grievous affliction. ³A man may father a hundred children and live for many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he is unsatisfied with his prosperity and does not even receive a proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴For a stillborn child enters in futility and departs in darkness, and his name is shrouded in obscurity. ⁵The child, though neither seeing the sun nor knowing anything, has more rest than that man, ⁶even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place? ⁷All a man's labor is for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. ⁸What advantage, then, has the wise man over the fool? What gain comes to the poor man who knows how to conduct himself before others? ⁹Better what the eye can see than the wandering of desire. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind. ¹⁰Whatever exists was named long ago, and it is known what man is; but he cannot contend with one stronger than he. ¹¹For the more words, the more futility—and how does that profit anyone? ¹²For who knows what is good for a man during the few days in which he passes through his fleeting life like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will come after him under the sun?

Chapter 7

THE VALUE OF WISDOM

¹A good name is better than fine perfume, and one's day of death is better than his day of birth. ²It is better to enter a house of mourning than a house of feasting, since death is the end of every man, and the living should take this to heart. ³Sorrow is better than laughter, for a sad countenance is good for the heart. ⁴The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. ⁵It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to

listen to the song of fools. ⁶For like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This too is futile. ⁷Surely extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. ⁸The end of a matter is better than the beginning, and a patient spirit is better than a proud one. ⁹Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger settles in the lap of a fool. ¹⁰Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is unwise of you to ask about this. ¹¹Wisdom, like an inheritance, is good, and it benefits those who see the sun. ¹²For wisdom, like money, is a shelter, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner. ¹³Consider the work of God: Who can straighten what He has bent? ¹⁴In the day of prosperity, be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider this: God has made one of these along with the other, so that a man cannot discover anything that will come after him.

THE LIMITS OF HUMAN WISDOM

¹⁵In my futile life I have seen both of these: A righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. ¹⁶Do not be overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸It is good to grasp the one and not let the other slip from your hand. For he who fears God will follow both warnings. ¹⁹Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers in a city. ²⁰Surely there is no righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ²¹Do not pay attention to every word that is spoken, or you may hear your servant cursing you. ²²For you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others. ²³All this I tested by wisdom, saying, “I resolve to be wise.” But it was beyond me. ²⁴What exists is out of reach and very deep. Who can fathom it? ²⁵I directed my mind to understand, to explore, to search out wisdom and explanations, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the folly of madness. ²⁶And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a net, and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is ensnared. ²⁷“Behold,” says the Teacher, “I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find an explanation. ²⁸While my soul was still searching but not finding, among a thousand I have found one upright man, but among all these I have not found one such woman. ²⁹Only this have I found: I have discovered that God made mankind upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

Chapter 8

OBEY THE KING

¹Who is like the wise man? Who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man’s wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed. ²Keep the king’s command, I say, because of your oath before God. ³Do not hasten to leave his presence, and do not persist in a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. ⁴For the king’s word is supreme, and who can say to him, “What are you doing?” ⁵Whoever keeps his command will come to no harm, and a wise heart knows the right time and procedure. ⁶For there is a right time and procedure to every purpose, though a man’s misery weighs heavily upon him. ⁷Since no one knows what will happen, who can tell him what is to come? ⁸As no man has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has authority over his day of death. As no one can be discharged in wartime, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. ⁹All this I have seen, applying my mind to every deed that is done under the sun; there is a time when one man lords it over another to his own detriment.

FEAR GOD

¹⁰Then too, I saw the burial of the wicked who used to go in and out of the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they had done so. This too is futile. ¹¹When the sentence for a crime is not speedily executed, the hearts of men become fully set on doing evil. ¹²Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and still lives long, yet I also know that it will go well with those who fear God, who are reverent in His presence. ¹³Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

GOD’S WAYS ARE MYSTERIOUS

¹⁴There is a futility that is done on the earth: There are righteous men who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked men who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile. ¹⁵So I commended the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be merry. For this joy will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun. ¹⁶When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the task that one performs on the earth—though his eyes do not see sleep in the day or even in the night—¹⁷I saw every work of God, and that a man is unable to comprehend the work that is done under the sun. Despite his efforts to search it out, he cannot find its meaning; even if the wise man claims to know, he is unable to comprehend.

Chapter 9

DEATH COMES TO GOOD AND BAD

¹So I took all this to heart and concluded that the righteous and the wise, as well as their deeds, are in God's hands. Man does not know what lies ahead, whether love or hate.

²It is the same for all: There is a common fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the good and the bad, for the clean and the unclean, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not. As it is for the good, so it is for the sinner; as it is for the one who makes a vow, so it is for the one who refuses to take a vow. ³This is an evil in everything that is done under the sun: There is one fate for everyone. Furthermore, the hearts of men are full of evil and madness while they are alive, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴There is hope, however, for anyone who is among the living; for even a live dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, because the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶Their love, their hate, and their envy have already vanished, and they will never again have a share in all that is done under the sun.

ENJOY YOUR PORTION IN THIS LIFE

⁷Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already approved your works: ⁸Let your garments always be white, and never spare the oil for your head. ⁹Enjoy life with your beloved wife all the days of the fleeting life that God has given you under the sun—all your fleeting days. For this is your portion in life and in your labor under the sun. ¹⁰Whatever you find to do with your hands, do it with all your might, for in Sheol, where you are going, there is no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom. ¹¹I saw something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither is the bread to the wise, nor the wealth to the intelligent, nor the favor to the skillful. For time and chance happen to all. ¹²For surely no man knows his time: Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds trapped in a snare, so men are ensnared in an evil time that suddenly falls upon them.

WISDOM IS BETTER THAN STRENGTH

¹³I have also seen this wisdom under the sun, and it was great to me: ¹⁴There was a small city with few men. A mighty king came against it, surrounded it, and built large siege ramps against it. ¹⁵Now a poor wise man was found in the city, and he saved the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man. ¹⁶And I said, "Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heeded." ¹⁷The calm words of the

wise are heeded over the shouts of a ruler among fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Chapter 10

WISDOM AND FOLLY

¹As dead flies bring a stench to the perfumer's oil, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. ²A wise man's heart inclines to the right, but the heart of a fool to the left. ³Even as the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking, and he shows everyone that he is a fool. ⁴If the ruler's temper flares against you, do not abandon your post, for calmness lays great offenses to rest. ⁵There is an evil I have seen under the sun—an error that proceeds from the ruler: ⁶Folly is appointed to great heights, but the rich sit in lowly positions. ⁷I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves. ⁸He who digs a pit may fall into it, and he who breaches a wall may be bitten by a snake. ⁹The one who quarries stones may be injured by them, and he who splits logs endangers himself. ¹⁰If the axe is dull and the blade unsharpened, more strength must be exerted, but skill produces success. ¹¹If the snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. ¹²The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool consume him. ¹³The beginning of his talk is folly, and the end of his speech is evil madness. ¹⁴Yet the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming, and who can tell him what will come after him? ¹⁵The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. ¹⁶Woe to you, O land whose king is a youth, and whose princes feast in the morning. ¹⁷Blessed are you, O land whose king is a son of nobles, and whose princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness. ¹⁸Through laziness the roof caves in, and in the hands of the idle, the house leaks. ¹⁹A feast is prepared for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. ²⁰Do not curse the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich even in your bedroom, for a bird of the air may carry your words, and a winged creature may report your speech.

Chapter 11

CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS

¹Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. ²Divide your portion among seven, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may befall the land. ³If the clouds are full, they will pour out rain upon the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. ⁴He who watches

the wind will fail to sow, and he who observes the clouds will fail to reap. ⁵As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the bones are formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. ⁶Sow your seed in the morning, and do not rest your hands in the evening, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or if both will equally prosper.

ENJOY YOUR YEARS

⁷Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. ⁸So if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is futile. ⁹Rejoice, O young man, while you are young, and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. ¹⁰So banish sorrow from your heart, and cast off pain from your body, for youth and vigor are fleeting.

Chapter 12

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

¹Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of adversity come and the years approach of which you will say, "I find no pleasure in them," ²before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is darkened, and the clouds return after the rain, ³on the day the keepers of the house

tremble and the strong men stoop, when those grinding cease because they are few and those watching through windows see dimly, ⁴when the doors to the street are shut and the sound of the mill fades away, when one rises at the sound of a bird and all the daughters of song grow faint, ⁵when men fear the heights and dangers of the road, when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper loses its spring, and the caper berry shrivels—for then man goes to his eternal home and mourners walk the streets. ⁶Remember Him before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is crushed, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel is broken at the well, ⁷before the dust returns to the ground from which it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸"Futility of futilities," says the Teacher. "Everything is futile!"

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

⁹Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also taught the people knowledge; he pondered, searched out, and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰The Teacher searched to find delightful sayings and to record accurate words of truth. ¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, and the anthologies of the masters are like firmly embedded nails driven by a single Shepherd. ¹²And by these, my son, be further warned: There is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. ¹³When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: Fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment, along with every hidden thing, whether good or evil.