

# ECCLESIASTES

## The emptiness of all endeavour

**1**<sup>1</sup>THE WORDS OF THE SPEAKER, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, emptiness, all is empty. <sup>3</sup>What does man gain from all his labour and his toil here under the sun? <sup>4</sup>Generations come and generations go, while the earth endures for ever.

<sup>5</sup>The sun rises and the sun goes down; back it returns to its place [back ... place: *prob. rdg, Heb to its place panting*] and rises there again. <sup>6</sup>The wind blows south, the wind blows north, round and round it goes and returns full circle. <sup>7</sup>All streams run into the sea, yet the sea never overflows; back to the place from which the streams ran they return to run again.

<sup>8</sup>All things are wearisome [*prob. rdg, Heb weary*]; no man can speak of them all. Is not the eye surfeited with seeing, and the ear sated with hearing? <sup>9</sup>What has happened will happen again, and what has been done will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look, this is new'? No, it has already existed, long ago before our time. <sup>11</sup>The men of old are not remembered, and those who follow will not be remembered by those who follow them.

<sup>12</sup>I, the Speaker, ruled as king over Israel in Jerusalem; and in wisdom <sup>13</sup>I applied my mind to study and explore all that is done under heaven. It is a sorry business that God has given men to busy themselves with. <sup>14</sup>I have seen all the deeds that are done here under the sun; they are all emptiness and chasing the wind. <sup>15</sup>What is crooked cannot become straight; what is not there cannot be counted. <sup>16</sup>I said to myself, 'I have amassed great wisdom, more than all my predecessors on the throne in Jerusalem; I have become familiar with wisdom and knowledge.' <sup>17</sup>So I applied my mind to understand wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly, and I came to see that this too is chasing the wind. <sup>18</sup>For in much wisdom is much vexation, and the more a man knows, the more he has to suffer.

**2**<sup>1</sup>I said to myself, 'Come, I will plunge into pleasures and enjoy myself'; but this too was emptiness. <sup>2</sup>Of laughter I said, 'It is madness!' And of pleasure, 'What is the good of that?' <sup>3</sup>So I sought to stimulate myself with wine, in the hope of finding out what was good for men to do under heaven throughout the brief span of their lives. But my mind was guided by wisdom, not blinded by [not blinded by: *prob. rdg, Heb to grasp*] folly.

<sup>4</sup>I undertook great works; I built myself houses and planted vineyards; <sup>5</sup>I made myself gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit-trees in them; <sup>6</sup>I made myself pools of water to irrigate a grove of growing trees; <sup>7</sup>I bought slaves, male and female, and I had my home-born slaves as well; I had possessions, more cattle and flocks than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem; <sup>8</sup>I amassed silver and gold also, the treasure of kings and

provinces; I acquired singers, men and women, and all that man delights in [*prob. rdg, Heb adds two unintelligible words*]. <sup>9</sup>I was great, greater than all my predecessors in Jerusalem; and my wisdom stood me in good stead. <sup>10</sup>Whatever my eyes coveted, I refused them nothing, nor did I deny myself any pleasure. Yes indeed, I got pleasure from all my labour, and for all my labour this was my reward. <sup>11</sup>Then I turned and reviewed all my handiwork, all my labour and toil, and I saw that everything was emptiness and chasing the wind, of no profit under the sun.

<sup>12</sup>I set myself to look at wisdom and at madness and folly. [*The rest of v12 transposed to follow v18*] <sup>13</sup>Then I perceived that wisdom is more profitable than folly, as light is more profitable than darkness: <sup>14</sup>the wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in the dark. Yet I saw also that one and the same fate overtakes them both. <sup>15</sup>So I said to myself, 'I too shall suffer the fate of the fool. To what purpose have I been wise? What [*prob. rdg, Heb Then*] is the profit of it? Even this', I said to myself, 'is emptiness. <sup>16</sup>The wise man is remembered no longer than the fool, for, as the passing days multiply [*for ... multiply: prob. rdg, Heb because already*], all will be forgotten. Alas, wise man and fool die the same death!' <sup>17</sup>So I came to hate life, since everything that was done here under the sun was a trouble to me; for all is emptiness and chasing the wind. <sup>18</sup>So I came to hate all my labour and toil here under the sun, since I should have to leave its fruits to my successor. What sort of a man will he be who succeeds me, who inherits what others have acquired [*What sort ... acquired: see note on v12*]. <sup>19</sup>Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master of all the fruits of my labour and skill here under the sun. This too is emptiness.

<sup>20</sup>Then I turned and gave myself up to despair, reflecting upon all my labour and toil here under the sun. <sup>21</sup>For anyone who toils with wisdom, knowledge, and skill must leave it all to a man who has spent no labour on it. This too is emptiness and utterly wrong. <sup>22</sup>What reward has a man for all his labour, his scheming, and his toil here under the sun? <sup>23</sup>All his life long his business is pain and vexation to him; even at night his mind knows no rest. This too is emptiness. <sup>24</sup>There is nothing better for a man to do than to eat and drink and enjoy himself in return for his labours. And yet I saw that this comes from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup>For without him who can enjoy his food, or who can be anxious? <sup>26</sup>God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the man who pleases him, while to the sinner is given the trouble of gathering and amassing wealth only to hand it over to someone else who pleases God. This too is emptiness and chasing the wind.

**3<sup>1</sup>FOR EVERYTHING ITS SEASON, and for every activity under heaven its time:**

- <sup>2</sup>a time to be born and a time to die;  
a time to plant and a time to uproot;
- <sup>3</sup>a time to kill and a time to heal;  
a time to pull down and a time to build up;
- <sup>4</sup>a time to weep and a time to laugh;  
a time for mourning and a time for dancing;
- <sup>5</sup>a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them;  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
- <sup>6</sup>a time to seek and a time to lose;  
a time to keep and a time to throw away;

<sup>7</sup>a time to tear and a time to mend;  
a time for silence and a time for speech;  
<sup>8</sup>a time to love and a time to hate;  
a time for war and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup>What profit does one who works get from all his labour? <sup>10</sup>I have seen the business that God has given men to keep them busy. <sup>11</sup>He has made everything to suit its time; moreover he has given men a sense of time past and future, but no comprehension of God's work from beginning to end. <sup>12</sup>I know that there is nothing good for man [for man: *prob. rdg, cp 2.24; Heb in them*] except to be happy and live the best life he can while he is alive. <sup>13</sup>Moreover, that a man should eat and drink and enjoy himself, in return for all his labours, is a gift of God. <sup>14</sup>I know that whatever God does lasts for ever; to add to it or subtract from it is impossible. And he has done it all in such a way that men must feel awe in his presence. <sup>15</sup>Whatever is has been already [*Or Whatever has been already is*], and whatever is to come has been already, and God summons each event back in its turn. <sup>16</sup>Moreover I saw here under the sun that, where justice ought to be, there was wickedness, and where righteousness ought to be, there was wickedness. <sup>17</sup>I said to myself, 'God will judge the just man and the wicked equally; every activity and [*prob. rdg, Heb and upon*] every purpose has its proper time.' <sup>18</sup>I said to myself, 'In dealing with men it is God's purpose [*it is God's purpose: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] to test them and to see what they truly are [*prob. rdg, Heb adds they to them*]. <sup>19</sup>For man is a creature of chance and the beasts are creatures of chance, and one mischance awaits them all: death comes to both alike. They all draw the same breath. Men have no advantage over beasts; for everything is emptiness. <sup>20</sup>All go to the same place: all came from the dust, and to the dust all return. <sup>21</sup>Who knows whether the spirit [*Or breath*] of man goes upward or whether the spirit [*Or breath*] of the beast goes downward to the earth?' <sup>22</sup>So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, since that is his lot. For who can bring him through to see what will happen next?

**4**<sup>1</sup>Again, I considered all the acts of oppression here under the sun; I saw the tears of the oppressed, and I saw that there was no one to comfort them. Strength was on the side of their oppressors, and there was no one to avenge them. <sup>2</sup>I counted the dead happy because they were dead, happier than the living who are still in life. <sup>3</sup>More fortunate than either I reckoned the man yet unborn, who had not witnessed the wicked deeds done here under the sun. <sup>4</sup>I considered all toil and all achievement and saw that it comes from rivalry between man and man. This too is emptiness and chasing the wind. <sup>5</sup>The fool folds his arms and wastes away. <sup>6</sup>Better one hand full and peace of mind, than both fists full and toil that is chasing the wind.

<sup>7</sup>Here again, I saw emptiness under the sun: <sup>8</sup>a lonely man without a friend, without son or brother, toiling endlessly yet never satisfied with his wealth – 'For whom', he asks, 'am I toiling and denying myself the good things of life?' This too is emptiness, a sorry business. <sup>9</sup>Two are better than one; they receive a good reward for their toil, <sup>10</sup>because, if one falls, the other [*if one falls, the other: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] can help his companion up again; but alas for the man who falls alone with no partner to help him up. <sup>11</sup>And, if two lie side by side, they keep each other warm; but how can one

keep warm by himself? <sup>12</sup>If a man is alone, an assailant may overpower him, but two can resist; and a cord of three strands is not quickly snapped.

<sup>13</sup>Better a young man poor and wise than a king old and foolish who will listen to advice no longer. <sup>14</sup>A man who leaves prison may well come to be king, though born a pauper in his future kingdom. <sup>15</sup>But I have studied all life here under the sun, and I saw his place taken by yet another young man, <sup>16</sup>and no limit set to the number of the subjects whose master he became. And he in turn will be no hero to those who come after him. This too is emptiness and chasing the wind.

**5**<sup>1</sup>Go carefully when you visit the house of God. Better draw near in obedience than offer the sacrifice of fools, who sin without a thought. <sup>2</sup>Do not rush into speech, let there be no hasty utterance in God's presence, God is in heaven, you are on earth; so let your words be few. <sup>3</sup>The sensible man has much business on his hands; the fool talks and it is so much chatter. <sup>4</sup>When you make a vow to God, do not be slow to pay it, for he has no use for fools; pay whatever you vow. <sup>5</sup>Better not vow at all than vow and fail to pay. <sup>6</sup>Do not let your tongue lead you into sin, and then say before the angel of God that it was a mistake; or God will be angry at your words, and all your achievements will be brought to nothing [*prob. rdg, Heb adds* <sup>7</sup>for in a multitude of dreams and empty things and many words]. You must fear God.

<sup>8</sup>If you witness in some province the oppression of the poor and the denial of right and justice, do not be surprised at what goes on, for every official has a higher one set over him, and the highest [*for every ... the highest: or though every ... over him, the Highest*] keeps watch over them all. <sup>9</sup>The best thing for a country is a king whose [*whose: prob. rdg, Heb for*] own lands are well tilled.

<sup>10</sup>The man who loves money can never have enough, and the man who is in love with great wealth enjoys no return from it. This too is emptiness. <sup>11</sup>When riches multiply, so do those who live off them; and what advantage has the owner, except to look at them? <sup>12</sup>Sweet is the sleep of the labourer whether he eats little or much; but the rich man owns too much and cannot sleep. <sup>13</sup>There is a singular evil here under the sun which I have seen: a man hoards wealth to his own hurt, <sup>14</sup>and then that wealth is lost through an unlucky venture, and the owner's son left with nothing. <sup>15</sup>As he came from the womb of mother earth, so must he return, naked as he came; all his toil produces nothing which he can take away with him. <sup>16</sup>This too is a singular evil: exactly as he came, so shall he go, and what profit does he get when his labour is all for the wind? <sup>17</sup>What is more, all his days are over-shadowed; gnawing anxiety and great vexation are his lot, sickness [*sickness: prob. rdg, Heb and his sickness*] and resentment. <sup>18</sup>What I have seen is this: that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and enjoy himself in return for his labours here under the sun, throughout the brief span of life which God has allotted him. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, it is a gift of God that every man to whom he has granted wealth and riches and the power to enjoy them should accept his lot and rejoice in his labour. <sup>20</sup>He will not dwell overmuch upon the passing years; for God fills his [*his: prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] time with joy of heart.

**6**<sup>1</sup>Here is an evil under the sun which I have seen, and it weighs heavy upon men.

<sup>2</sup>Consider the man to whom God grants wealth, riches, and substance [*Or honour*], and who lacks nothing that he has set his heart on: if God has not given him the power to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them instead, that is emptiness and a grave disorder. <sup>3</sup>A man may have a hundred children and live a long life; but however many his days may be, if he does not get satisfaction from the good things of life and in the end receives no burial, then I maintain that the still-born child is in better case than he. <sup>4</sup>Its coming is an empty thing, it departs into darkness, and in darkness its name is hidden; <sup>5</sup>it has never seen the sun or known anything [*Or it*], yet its state is better than his. <sup>6</sup>What if a man should live a thousand years twice over, and never prosper? Do not both go to one place?

<sup>7</sup>The end of all man's toil is but to fill his belly, yet his appetite is never satisfied. <sup>8</sup>What advantage then in facing life has the wise man over the fool, or the poor man for all his experience? <sup>9</sup>It is better to be satisfied with what is before your eyes than give rein to desire; this too is emptiness and chasing the wind. <sup>10</sup>Whatever has already existed has been given a name, its nature is known; a man cannot contend with what is stronger than he. <sup>11</sup>The more words one uses the greater is the emptiness of it all; and where is the advantage to a man? <sup>12</sup>For who can know what is good for a man in this life, this brief span of empty existence through which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what is to happen next here under the sun?

## **Wisdom and folly compared**

**7**<sup>1</sup>A GOOD NAME SMELLS SWEETER than the finest ointment, and the day of death is better than the day of birth. <sup>2</sup>Better to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting; for to be mourned is the lot of every man, and the living should take this to heart. <sup>3</sup>Grief is better than laughter: a sad face may go with a cheerful heart. <sup>4</sup>Wise men's thoughts are at home in the house of mourning, but a fool's thoughts in the house of mirth. <sup>5</sup>It is better to listen to a wise man's rebuke than to the praise of fools. <sup>6</sup>For the laughter of a fool is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. This too is emptiness. <sup>7</sup>Slander drives a wise man crazy and breaks a strong man's [*strong man's: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] spirit. <sup>8</sup>Better the end of anything than its beginning; better patience than pride. <sup>9</sup>Do not be quick to show resentment; for resentment is nursed by fools. <sup>10</sup>Do not ask why the old days were better than these; for that is a foolish question. <sup>11</sup>Wisdom is better than possessions and an advantage to all who see the sun. <sup>12</sup>Better have wisdom behind you than money; wisdom profits men by giving life to those who know her.

<sup>13</sup>Consider God's handiwork; who can straighten what he has made crooked? <sup>14</sup>When things go well, be glad; but when things go ill, consider this: God has set the one alongside the other in such a way that no one can find out what is to happen next [*find out ... next: or hold him responsible*]. <sup>15</sup>In my empty existence I have seen it all, from a righteous man perishing in his righteousness to a wicked man growing old in his wickedness. <sup>16</sup>Do not be over-righteous and do not be over-wise. Why make yourself a laughing-stock? <sup>17</sup>Do not be over-wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? <sup>18</sup>It is good to hold on to the one thing and not lose hold of the other;

for a man who fears God will succeed both ways. <sup>19</sup>Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than the ten rulers of a city. <sup>20</sup>The world contains no man so righteous that he can do right always and never do wrong [can do ... wrong: *or prospers without ever making a mistake*]. <sup>21</sup>Moreover, do not pay attention to everything men say, or you may hear your servant disparage you; <sup>22</sup>for you know very well how many times you yourself have disparaged others. <sup>23</sup>All this I have put to the test of wisdom. I said, 'I am resolved to be wise', but wisdom was beyond my grasp – <sup>24</sup>whatever has happened lies beyond our grasp, deep down, deeper than man can fathom.

<sup>25</sup>I went on to reflect, I set my mind [*prob. rdg, Heb adds to know and*] to inquire and search for wisdom and for the reason in things, only to discover that it is folly to be wicked and madness to act like a fool. <sup>26</sup>The wiles of a woman I find mightier [*Or more bitter*] than death; her heart is a trap to catch you and her arms are fetters. The man who is pleasing to God may escape her, but she will catch a sinner. <sup>27</sup>'See' says the Speaker, 'this is what I have found, reasoning things out one by one, <sup>28</sup>after searching long without success: I have found one man in a thousand worth the name, but I have not found one woman among them all. <sup>29</sup>This alone I have found, that God, when he made man, made him straightforward, but man invents endless subtleties of his own.'

**8**<sup>1</sup>Who is wise enough for all this? Who knows the meaning of anything? Wisdom lights up a man's face, but grim looks make a man hated [*make ... hated: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*]. <sup>2</sup>Do as the king commands you, and if you have to swear by God, do not be precipitate. <sup>3</sup>Leave the king's presence and do not persist in a thing which displeases him; he does what he chooses. <sup>4</sup>For the king's word carries authority. Who can question what he does? <sup>5</sup>Whoever obeys a command will come to no harm. A wise man knows in his heart the right time and method for action. <sup>6</sup>There is a time and a method for every enterprise, although man is greatly troubled <sup>7</sup>by ignorance of the future; who can tell him what it will bring? <sup>8</sup>It is not in man's power to restrain the wind [*Or to retain the breath of life*], and no one has power over the day of death. In war no one can lay aside his arms, no wealth will save its possessor. <sup>9</sup>All this I have seen, having applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There was a time when one man had power over another and could make him suffer. <sup>10</sup>It was then that I saw wicked men approaching and even entering [*approaching ... entering: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] the holy place; and they went about the city priding themselves on having done right. This too is emptiness. <sup>11</sup>It is because sentence upon a wicked act is not promptly carried out that men do evil so boldly. <sup>12</sup>A sinner may do wrong [*prob. rdg, Heb adds an unintelligible word*] and live to old age, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God: their fear of him ensures this, <sup>13</sup>but it will not be well with a wicked man nor will he live long; the man who does not fear God is a mere shadow. <sup>14</sup>There is an empty thing found on earth: when the just man gets what is due to the unjust, and the unjust what is due to the just. I maintain that this too is emptiness. <sup>15</sup>So I commend enjoyment, since there is nothing good for a man to do here under the sun but to eat and drink and enjoy himself; this is all that will remain with him to reward his toil throughout the span of life which God grants him hereunder the sun. <sup>16</sup>I applied my mind to acquire wisdom and to observe the business which goes on upon earth, when man never closes an eye in sleep day or night; <sup>17</sup>and always I perceived that God has

so ordered it that man should not be able to discover what is happening here under the sun. However hard a man may try, he will not find out; the wise man may think that he knows, but he will be unable to find the truth of It.

**9**<sup>1</sup>I applied my mind to all this, and I understood that the righteous and the wise and all their doings are under God's control; but is it love or hatred? No man knows. Everything that confronts him, <sup>2</sup>everything is empty, since one and the same fate befalls every one, just and unjust alike, good and bad, clean and unclean, the man who offers sacrifice and the man who does not. Good man and sinner fare alike, the man who can take an oath and the man who dares not. <sup>3</sup>This is what is wrong in all that is done here under the sun: that one and the same fate befalls every man. The hearts of men are full of evil; madness fills their hearts all through their lives, and after that they go down to join the dead. <sup>4</sup>But for a man who is counted among the living there is still hope: remember, a live dog is better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup>True, the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing. There are no more rewards for them; they are utterly forgotten. <sup>6</sup>For them love, hate, ambition [*Or passion*], all are now over. Never again will they have any part in what is done here under the sun.

<sup>7</sup>Go to it then, eat your food and enjoy it, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for already God has accepted what you have done. <sup>8</sup>Always be dressed in white and never fail to anoint your head. <sup>9</sup>Enjoy life with a woman you love all the days of your allotted span here under the sun, empty as they are [*prob. rdg, Heb adds all your days, empty as they are*]; for that is your lot while you live and labour here under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Whatever task lies to your hand, do it with all your might; because in Sheol, for which you are bound, there is neither doing nor thinking, neither understanding nor wisdom. <sup>11</sup>One more thing I have observed here under the sun: speed does not win the race nor strength the battle. Bread does not belong to the wise, nor wealth to the intelligent, nor success to the skilful; time and chance govern all. <sup>12</sup>Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come; like fish caught in a net, like a bird taken in a snare, so men are trapped when bad times come suddenly.

<sup>13</sup>This too is an example of wisdom as I have observed it here under the sun, and notable I find it. <sup>14</sup>There was a small town with few inhabitants, and a great king came to attack it; he besieged it and constructed great. siege-works against it. <sup>15</sup>There was in it a poor wise man, and he alone might have saved the town by his wisdom, but no one remembered that poor wise man. <sup>16</sup>'Surely', I said to myself, 'wisdom is better than strength.' But the poor man's wisdom was despised, and his words went unheeded. <sup>17</sup>A wise man who speaks his mind calmly is more to be heeded than a commander shouting orders among fools. <sup>18</sup>Wisdom is better than weapons of war, and one mistake can undo many things done well.

**10**<sup>1</sup>Dead flies make the perfumer's sweet ointment turn rancid and ferment; so can a little folly make wisdom lose its worth. <sup>2</sup>The mind of the wise man faces right, but the mind of the fool faces left. <sup>3</sup>Even when he walks along the road, the fool shows no sense and calls everyone else [*calls everyone else: or tells everyone he is*] a fool. <sup>4</sup>If your ruler breaks out in anger against you, do not resign your post; submission makes amends for great mistakes. <sup>5</sup>There is an evil that I have observed here under the sun,

an error for which a ruler is responsible: <sup>6</sup>the fool given high office, but [but: *prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] the great and the rich in humble posts. <sup>7</sup>I have seen slaves on horseback and men of high rank going on foot like slaves. <sup>8</sup>The man who digs a pit may fall into it, and he who pulls down a wall may be bitten by a snake. <sup>9</sup>The man who quarries stones may strain himself, and the wood-cutter runs a risk of injury. <sup>10</sup>When the axe is blunt and has not first [first: *prob. rdg, Heb face*] been sharpened, then one must use more force; the wise man has a better chance of success. <sup>11</sup>If a snake bites before it is charmed, the snake-charmer loses his fee.

<sup>12</sup>A wise man's words win him favour, but a fool's tongue is his undoing. <sup>13</sup>He begins by talking nonsense and ends in mischief run mad. <sup>14</sup>The fool talks on and on; but no man knows what is coming, and who can tell him what will come after that? <sup>15</sup>The fool wears himself to death [fool ... death: *prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] with all his labour, for he does not know the way to town.

<sup>16</sup>Woe betide the land when a slave has become its king, and its princes feast in the morning. <sup>17</sup>Happy the land when its king is nobly born, and its princes feast at the right time of day, with self-control, and not as drunkards. If the owner is negligent the rafters collapse, <sup>18</sup>and if he is idle the house crumbles away. <sup>19</sup>The table has its pleasures, and wine makes a cheerful life; and money is behind it all. <sup>20</sup>Do not speak ill of the king in your ease, or of a rich man in your bedroom; for a bird may carry your voice, and a winged messenger may repeat what you say.

**11**<sup>1</sup>Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return. <sup>2</sup>Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe, since you do not know what disasters may occur on earth [*Or on land*]. <sup>3</sup>If the clouds are heavy with rain, they will discharge it on the earth; whether a tree falls south or north, it must lie as it falls. <sup>4</sup>He who watches the wind will never sow, and he who keeps an eye on the clouds will never reap. <sup>5</sup>You do not know how a pregnant woman comes to have a body and a living spirit in her womb; nor do you know how God, the maker of all things, works. <sup>6</sup>In the morning sow your seed betimes, and do not stop work until evening, for you do not know whether this or that sowing will be successful, or whether both alike will do well.

## **Advice to a young man**

<sup>7</sup>THE LIGHT OF DAY IS SWEET, and pleasant to the eye is the sight of the sun; <sup>8</sup>if a man lives for many years, he should rejoice in all of them. But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. Everything that is to come will be emptiness. <sup>9</sup>Delight in your boyhood, young man, make the most of the days of your youth; let your heart and your eyes show you the way; but remember that for all these things God will call you to account. <sup>10</sup>Banish discontent from your mind, and shake off the troubles of the body; boyhood and the prime of life are mere emptiness.

**12**<sup>1</sup>Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of trouble comes and the years draw near when you will say, 'I see no purpose in them [*Or I have no pleasure in them*]'. <sup>2</sup>Remember him before the sun and the light of day give place to

darkness, before the moon and the stars grow dim, and the clouds return with the rain –  
<sup>3</sup>when the guardians of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the women  
grinding the meal cease work because they are few, and those who look through the  
windows look no longer, <sup>4</sup>when the street-doors are shut, when the noise of the mill is  
low, when the chirping of the sparrow grows faint [*grows faint: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*]  
and the song-birds fall silent [*prob. rdg, Heb sink low*] <sup>5</sup>when men are afraid of a steep  
place and the street is full of terrors, when the blossom whitens on the almond-tree and  
the locust's paunch is swollen and caper-buds have no more zest. For man goes to his  
everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets. <sup>6</sup>Remember him before the  
silver cord is snapped [*is snapped: prob. rdg, Heb unintelligible*] and the golden bowl is  
broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well,  
<sup>7</sup>before the dust returns to the earth as it began and the spirit [*Or breath*] returns to  
God who gave it. <sup>8</sup>Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, all is empty.

<sup>9</sup>So the Speaker, in his wisdom, continued to teach the people what he knew. He turned  
over many maxims in his mind and sought how best to set them out. <sup>10</sup>He chose his  
words to give pleasure, but what he wrote was the honest truth. <sup>11</sup>The sayings of the  
wise are sharp as goads, like nails driven home; they lead the assembled people, for  
they come from one shepherd. <sup>12</sup>One further warning, my son: the use of books is  
endless, and much study is wearisome.

<sup>13</sup>This is the end of the matter: you have heard it all. Fear God and obey his commands;  
there is no more to man than this. <sup>14</sup>For God brings everything we do to judgement,  
and every secret, whether good or bad.