# Ecclesiastes

HEBREW BIBLE

# Ecclesiastes

קֹהֶלֶת

*Translated from the Hebrew with AI (Claude) and edited*

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*Ecclesiastes* · Hebrew Bible

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# INTRODUCTION

"Breath of breaths, says Qohelet, breath of breaths—everything is breath." The speaker of Ecclesiastes calls himself Qohelet, a title usually translated "the Teacher" or "the Preacher" (literally "one who assembles"), and presents himself as a son of David and king in Jerusalem. His key word, *hevel*, means breath or vapor: something fleeting, insubstantial, beyond grasping.

Qohelet sets out to find what is worth doing "under the sun." He tries pleasure, great works, wealth and wisdom, and finds that all of them pass, that the wise and the fool die alike, and that no one can know what comes after. Yet he keeps returning to simple goods: to eat and drink and enjoy one's work, to love, to act while there is time. The book includes the famous poem "For everything there is a season" and ends with an image of old age and death.

Its late Hebrew, with some Persian loanwords, leads most scholars to date it to the fourth or third century BC. Its candor about the limits of human knowledge has made it a favorite of readers well beyond religious tradition.

# Ecclesiastes

*Qohelet, "the Teacher," searches out what is worth doing under the sun and finds everything fleeting as breath.*

## EVERYTHING IS BREATH

*Qohelet asks what gain there is in toil and describes the endless round of nature.*

Eccl 1:1 The words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem.
Breath of breaths, says Qohelet, breath of breaths—
everything is breath.
What gain does a human have
from all his toil at which he toils under the sun?
A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth
stands forever.[1]

Eccl 1:5 The sun rises and the sun goes down,
and it pants back to its place, where it rises again.
Going to the south and circling to the north,
round and round goes the wind, and on its rounds the wind
returns.
All the streams go to the sea, and the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams go, there they go again.

1 *Qohelet* is a title, perhaps "one who assembles," traditionally "the Teacher" or "the Preacher" (Greek *Ecclesiastes*). "Breath" (*hevel*) means vapor, something fleeting and insubstantial; it is traditionally rendered "vanity."

Eccl 1:8 All things are wearisome, more than anyone can say.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.
What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.

Eccl 1:10 Is there a thing of which someone says, "Look, this is new"?
It has already been, in the ages that were before us.
There is no remembrance of those who came first,
and of those yet to come there will be no remembrance either, among those who come after them.

### QOHELET'S SEARCH FOR WISDOM

*As king in Jerusalem, Qohelet explores everything by wisdom and finds only vexation.*

Eccl 1:12 I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
I set my heart to seek and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven;
it is an unhappy business that God has given human beings to be busy with.

Eccl 1:14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun,
and look, everything is breath and chasing the wind.
What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is missing cannot be counted.

Eccl 1:16 I spoke with my own heart and said, "Look, I have grown great and gained more wisdom than all who were over Jerusalem before me,
and my heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge."

Eccl 1:17 So I set my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly;
I came to know that this too is chasing the wind.
For in much wisdom is much vexation,
and whoever adds knowledge adds pain.

### THE TEST OF PLEASURE AND GREAT WORKS

*Qohelet tries wine, building, wealth and pleasure, and finds no gain under the sun.*

Eccl 2:1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with joy; see
what is good."
But look, this too is breath.
Of laughter I said, "It is mad,"
and of joy, "What does it accomplish?"

Eccl 2:3 I explored in my heart how to cheer my body with wine—
my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay
hold of folly, until I might see what is good for human
beings to do under heaven during the numbered days of
their life.

Eccl 2:4 I did great works:
I built houses for myself; I planted vineyards for myself.
I made myself gardens and parks,
and planted in them every kind of fruit tree.
I made myself pools of water
to water from them a forest sprouting with trees.

Eccl 2:7 I acquired male and female slaves, and I had slaves born in
my house;
I also had herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were
before me in Jerusalem.
I also gathered for myself silver and gold, and the treasure
of kings and provinces;
I got myself men who sang and women who sang, and the
delights of human beings—concubines, many of them.[2]

2 The Hebrew phrase (*shiddah weshiddot*) is uncertain; "concubines" is a common guess.

Eccl 2:9 So I grew great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem;
my wisdom, too, stayed with me.
Whatever my eyes asked for, I did not keep from them;
I did not withhold any joy from my heart, for my heart rejoiced in all my toil, and this was my portion from all my toil.

Eccl 2:11 Then I turned to all the works my hands had done and to the toil I had toiled to do them,
and look, everything is breath and chasing the wind, and there is no gain under the sun.

### THE WISE AND THE FOOL DIE ALIKE

*One fate befalls wise and fool, so Qohelet hates his toil; best to eat, drink and see good.*

Eccl 2:12 Then I turned to consider wisdom, and madness and folly;
for what can the one do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.
And I saw that wisdom has gain over folly,
as light has gain over darkness.

Eccl 2:14 The wise one has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness;
yet I also came to know that one fate befalls them all.
So I said in my heart, "The fate of the fool will befall me too; why then have I been so very wise?"
And I said in my heart that this too is breath.

Eccl 2:16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise, any more than of the fool,
since in the days to come everything will long be forgotten.
How the wise one dies just like the fool!
So I hated life, for the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me;
for everything is breath and chasing the wind.

Eccl 2:18 I hated all my toil at which I toil under the sun,
since I must leave it to the one who will come after me.
And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will be master of all my toil at which I toiled and showed myself wise under the sun.
This too is breath.

Eccl 2:20 So I turned and let my heart despair
over all the toil at which I had toiled under the sun.
For there is someone whose toil is done with wisdom and knowledge and skill,
and to someone who has not toiled for it he must give it as his portion. This too is breath and a great evil.

Eccl 2:22 For what does a human get from all his toil and the striving of his heart
at which he toils under the sun?
For all his days are pains, and his business is vexation; even at night his heart does not rest.
This too is breath.

Eccl 2:24 There is nothing better for a human than to eat and drink and see good in his toil.
This too, I saw, is from the hand of God;
for who can eat, and who can have enjoyment, apart from me?

Eccl 2:26 For to the person who pleases him he gives wisdom and knowledge and joy,
but to the sinner he gives the business of gathering and amassing, only to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is breath and chasing the wind.

### A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

*There is a season for every matter; God has made everything beautiful in its time.*

Eccl 3:1 For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:

Eccl 3:2 A time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted,
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build;

Eccl 3:4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

Eccl 3:6 a time to seek and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to sew, a time to keep silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Eccl 3:9 What gain has the worker from that at which he toils?
I have seen the business that God has given human beings to be busy with.
He has made everything beautiful in its time;
he has also put a sense of eternity in their hearts, yet in such a way that a human cannot find out the work that God has done from beginning to end.[3]

Eccl 3:12 I know that there is nothing better for them
than to rejoice and to do good while they live;
and also that every human who eats and drinks and sees good in all his toil—
that is a gift of God.

Eccl 3:14 I know that whatever God does will last forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it.
God has done this so that people will fear before him.

3 The Hebrew is uncertain: *ha'olam* usually means "eternity" or "long duration," but some read "the world" or "ignorance."

### HUMANS AND ANIMALS SHARE ONE FATE

*Wickedness sits in the place of justice, and humans and animals alike return to dust.*

Eccl 3:15 What has been already is, and what is to be already has been;
and God seeks out what is pursued.
Moreover, I saw under the sun:
in the place of justice there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there was wickedness.

Eccl 3:17 I said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked,
for there is a time for every matter, and for every deed, there."
I said in my heart concerning human beings, "God is sifting them
so they may see that they themselves are but animals."

Eccl 3:19 For the fate of human beings and the fate of animals is one and the same fate: as one dies, so dies the other, and all have the same spirit;
the human has no advantage over the animal, for everything is breath.

Eccl 3:20 All go to one place;
all came from the dust, and all return to the dust.
Who knows whether the spirit of human beings goes upward
and the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?

Eccl 3:22 So I saw that there is nothing better than for a human to rejoice in his works, for that is his portion;
for who will bring him to see what will be after him?

### OPPRESSION, ENVY AND COMPANIONSHIP

*Qohelet sees the tears of the oppressed and the envy behind toil; two are better than one.*

Eccl 4:1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun:
look, the tears of the oppressed, and they have no one to
comfort them; power is on the side of their oppressors,
and they have no one to comfort them.
So I praised the dead, who have already died,
more than the living, who are still alive.

Eccl 4:3 But better than both is the one who has not yet been,
who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.
And I saw that all toil and all skill in work comes from one
person's envy of another;
this too is breath and chasing the wind.

Eccl 4:5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.
Better is one handful with quiet
than two fistfuls with toil and chasing the wind.
Again I saw breath under the sun:

Eccl 4:8 There is someone alone, with no second—he has neither
son nor brother—yet there is no end to all his toil, and
his eye is never satisfied with riches.
"For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of good?" This
too is breath, and it is an unhappy business.

Eccl 4:9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good reward for their toil.
For if they fall, one will lift up the other;
but woe to the one who falls with no second to lift him up!
Again, if two lie down together, they keep warm;
but how can one keep warm alone?

Eccl 4:12 And if someone overpowers one, two can stand against
him;
and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.
Better a poor but wise youth
than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to
take advice.

Eccl 4:14 For he came out of prison to reign,
even though he was born poor in his kingdom.
I saw all the living who walk under the sun
side with the youth, the second one, who would stand in his
place.

Eccl 4:16 There was no end to all the people, to all at whose head he
stood; yet those who come later will not rejoice in him.
Surely this too is breath and chasing the wind.
Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw
near to listen is better than for fools to offer a sacrifice,
for they do not know that they are doing evil.

### WORDS BEFORE GOD

*Let your words before God be few, and fulfill what you vow.*

Eccl 5:1 Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart
hurry to utter a word before God;
for God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words
be few.
For a dream comes with much business,
and a fool's voice with many words.

Eccl 5:3 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it, for
he has no pleasure in fools;
fulfill what you vow.
It is better that you not vow
than that you vow and not fulfill it.

Eccl 5:5 Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into sin, and do not
say before the messenger that it was a mistake.
Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the
work of your hands?
For with many dreams come breaths and words in plenty;
so fear God.[4]

### THE LOVE OF MONEY

*Whoever loves silver is never satisfied; riches are lost, and everyone leaves naked as he came.*

Eccl 5:7 If you see the oppression of the poor and the violation of
justice and righteousness in the province, do not be
astonished at the matter;
for one high official watches over another, and there are
higher ones over them.
But the gain of a land in all this is
a king for a cultivated field.[5]

Eccl 5:9 Whoever loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor
whoever loves wealth with income;
this too is breath.
When goods increase, those who eat them increase;
and what benefit has their owner, except to look at them
with his eyes?
Sweet is the sleep of the laborer, whether he eats little or
much;
but the surfeit of the rich man will not let him sleep.

Eccl 5:12 There is a sickening evil I have seen under the sun:
riches kept by their owner to his own harm.
Those riches are lost in an unhappy business,
and he has fathered a son, and there is nothing in his hand.

4 "The messenger" is perhaps a temple official or priest; the ancient Greek translation reads "God."
5 The Hebrew of the last two lines is uncertain.

Eccl 5:14 As he came out of his mother's womb, naked he will return,
going as he came;
and he will carry away nothing for his toil that he can take
in his hand.
This too is a sickening evil: exactly as he came, so he will
go;
and what gain does he have, that he toils for the wind?

Eccl 5:16 Besides, all his days he eats in darkness,
with much vexation, and sickness, and anger.
Look, this is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting for one
to eat and drink and see good in all his toil at which he
toils under the sun, through the numbered days of his
life that God has given him, for that is his portion.

Eccl 5:18 Also, every human to whom God has given riches and
possessions, and the power to eat from them, to take up
his portion and to rejoice in his toil—
this is a gift of God.
For he will not much remember the days of his life,
because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

Eccl 6:1 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun,
and it lies heavy on humankind:
a man to whom God gives riches, possessions, and honor, so
that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does
not give him the power to eat from it, but a stranger eats
it;
this is breath and an evil sickness.

Eccl 6:3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years,
however many the days of his years may be, but he does
not get his fill of good things, and has no burial either—
I say the stillborn child is better off than he.
For it comes in breath and goes in darkness,
and in darkness its name is covered.

Eccl 6:5 It has not even seen the sun or known it,
yet it has more rest than he.
Even if he lived a thousand years twice over and saw no good—
do not all go to one place?
All the toil of a human is for his mouth,
and still the appetite is not filled.

Eccl 6:8 For what advantage has the wise over the fool?
What has the poor man who knows how to conduct himself before the living?
Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire;
this too is breath and chasing the wind.
Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what a human is;
he cannot contend with one stronger than he.

Eccl 6:11 For there are many words that increase breath;
what advantage is that to a human?
For who knows what is good for a human in life, through the numbered days of his life of breath, which he passes like a shadow?
For who can tell a human what will be after him under the sun?

### BETTER THE DAY OF DEATH: PROVERBS

*Sayings weigh mourning against feasting, rebuke against praise, and patience against pride.*

Eccl 7:1 A good name is better than good oil,
and the day of death than the day of one's birth.
It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for that is the end of every human,
and the living will take it to heart.[6]

6 The Hebrew plays on *shem* "name" and *shemen* "oil."

Eccl 7:3 Vexation is better than laughter,
for when the face is sad, the heart may grow better.
The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of joy.
It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
than for someone to hear the song of fools.

Eccl 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool;
this too is breath.
For oppression drives the wise mad,
and a bribe destroys the heart.
Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;
better is patience of spirit than pride of spirit.[7]

Eccl 7:9 Do not be quick in your spirit to be vexed,
for vexation rests in the bosom of fools.
Do not say, "How is it that the former days were better than these?"
For it is not out of wisdom that you ask this.

Eccl 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
and an advantage to those who see the sun.
For to be in the shade of wisdom is to be in the shade of silver,
and the gain of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.
Consider the work of God:
for who can make straight what he has made crooked?

Eccl 7:14 On a good day, enjoy the good, and on a bad day, consider:
God has made the one as well as the other, so that a human may not find out anything that will come after him.

7 The Hebrew plays on *sirim* "thorns" and *sir* "pot."

### DO NOT BE OVERLY RIGHTEOUS

*The righteous perish and the wicked live long; Qohelet advises fearing God and avoiding extremes.*

Eccl 7:15 I have seen everything in my days of breath:
there is a righteous person who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked person who lives long in his evil.
Do not be overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise;
why should you ruin yourself?
Do not be overly wicked, and do not be foolish;
why should you die before your time?

Eccl 7:18 It is good that you hold on to this, and from that too do not let go your hand;
for whoever fears God will come through them all.
Wisdom makes the wise stronger
than ten rulers who are in a city.
For there is no human on earth so righteous
that he does good and never sins.

Eccl 7:21 Also, do not give your heart to every word that people speak,
lest you hear your servant cursing you;
for your heart knows that many times
you too have cursed others.
All this I tested by wisdom;
I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

Eccl 7:24 Far off is whatever has been,
and deep, deep—who can find it out?
I turned, I and my heart, to know and to explore and to seek wisdom and the sum of things,
and to know that wickedness is folly, and foolishness is madness.

Eccl 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a
snare, whose heart is a net and whose hands are fetters;
one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is caught
by her.
"See, this is what I have found," says Qohelet,
"adding one to one to find the sum of things—[8]

Eccl 7:28 which my soul still seeks, but I have not found:
one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman
among all these I have not found.
Only see, this I have found: that God made human beings
upright,
but they have sought out many schemes."

### THE KING'S COMMAND AND THE INJUSTICE OF THE WORLD

*Obey the king, Qohelet advises, though he sees the wicked honored and the righteous treated as wicked.*

Eccl 8:1 Who is like the wise, and who knows the interpretation of a
thing?
A person's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness
of his face is changed.
I say: keep the king's command, and that because of the
oath to God.
Do not hurry to leave his presence; do not persist in a bad
cause,
for he does whatever he pleases.

Eccl 8:4 Since the word of the king is power,
who can say to him, "What are you doing?"
Whoever keeps a command will know no harm,
and the heart of the wise knows a time and a judgment.
For every matter has a time and a judgment,
for the evil of humankind lies heavy upon them.

8 Commentators differ on whether this refers to a particular type of woman, like the seductress of Proverbs 7, or to women in general.

Eccl 8:7 For no one knows what will be;
for who can tell him how it will be?
No one has power over the spirit to hold back the spirit, and no one has power over the day of death; there is no discharge in war,
and wickedness will not deliver those who practice it.

Eccl 8:9 All this I saw as I gave my heart to every work that is done under the sun,
a time when one human has power over another to his harm.

Eccl 8:10 And so I saw the wicked buried; they used to come and go from the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had done such things.
This too is breath.
Because sentence against an evil deed is not carried out quickly,
therefore the heart of human beings is fully set on doing evil.[9]

Eccl 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and lives long,
yet I also know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before him;
but it will not be well with the wicked, and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow,
because he does not fear before God.

Eccl 8:14 There is a breath that is done on the earth: there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous.
I said that this too is breath.

9 The Hebrew of the first line is difficult; some manuscripts and ancient versions read “praised” for “forgotten.”

Eccl 8:15 So I praised joy, for there is nothing better for a human
under the sun than to eat and drink and rejoice;
this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life
that God has given him under the sun.

Eccl 8:16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the
business that is done on earth—
for neither by day nor by night do one's eyes see sleep—

Eccl 8:17 then I saw all the work of God: that a human cannot find out
the work that is done under the sun; however much a
human may toil in seeking, he will not find it.
Even if the wise one claims to know, he cannot find it.

### ONE FATE FOR ALL: ENJOY YOUR LIFE

*The same fate comes to all, so eat your bread with joy and work with all your strength.*

Eccl 9:1 For all this I laid to heart, examining all this: that the
righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand
of God;
whether it is love or hate, no human knows; everything lies
before them.

Eccl 9:2 Everything is the same for everyone: one fate comes to the
righteous and to the wicked, to the good, to the clean
and to the unclean, to the one who sacrifices and to the
one who does not sacrifice;
as is the good, so is the sinner; the one who swears is like
the one who fears an oath.

Eccl 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate
comes to all;
also, the heart of human beings is full of evil, and madness
is in their hearts while they live, and after that—to the
dead.

Eccl 9:4 For whoever is joined to all the living has hope,
for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
For the living know that they will die,
but the dead know nothing at all; they have no more reward, for their memory is forgotten.

Eccl 9:6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished,
and they have no portion ever again in all that is done under the sun.
Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a glad heart,
for God has already approved your works.

Eccl 9:8 At all times let your garments be white,
and let oil not be lacking on your head.
See life with the woman you love, all the days of your life of breath that he has given you under the sun, all your days of breath;
for that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Eccl 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your strength;
for there is no work, no sum of things, no knowledge, no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going.[10]

### TIME AND CHANCE

*The race is not to the swift; a poor wise man saves a city and is forgotten.*

Eccl 9:11 Again I saw under the sun that the race does not go to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the discerning, nor favor to the knowledgeable;
for time and chance overtake them all.

10 Sheol is the shadowy realm of the dead in the Hebrew Bible.

Eccl 9:12 For a human does not even know his time: like fish caught
in an evil net, and like birds caught in a snare,
so human beings are trapped at an evil time, when it falls
on them suddenly.
This too I saw as wisdom under the sun,
and it seemed great to me:

Eccl 9:14 There was a small city with few people in it,
and a great king came against it, surrounded it, and built
great siegeworks against it.
Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he saved
the city by his wisdom;
yet no one remembered that poor man.

Eccl 9:16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than might,
but the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are
not heard."
The words of the wise, heard in quiet,
are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
but one sinner destroys much good.

### WISDOM AND FOLLY

*Proverbs on fools, rulers, accidents, idle talk, and careless kings.*

Eccl 10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's oil stink and ferment;
a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
The heart of the wise inclines to his right, but the heart of a
fool to his left.
Even on the road, when the foolish one walks, he lacks
sense,
and he tells everyone that he is foolish.

Eccl 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place,
for calmness lays great offenses to rest.
There is an evil I have seen under the sun,
like an error that goes out from the one in power:
folly is set in many high places,
while the rich sit in low places.

Eccl 10:7 I have seen slaves on horses,
and princes walking on the ground like slaves.
Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
and whoever breaks through a wall, a snake will bite him.
Whoever quarries stones will be hurt by them;
whoever splits logs will be endangered by them.

Eccl 10:10 If the iron is blunt and one has not sharpened its edge, he must put forth more strength;
but wisdom has the gain of success.
If the snake bites before it is charmed,
there is no gain for the charmer.
The words of a wise man's mouth win favor,
but the lips of a fool swallow him up.

Eccl 10:13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly,
and the end of his talk is evil madness.
Yet the foolish one multiplies words—
no human knows what will be, and what will be after him, who can tell him?
The toil of fools wears them out,
those who do not even know the way to town.

Eccl 10:16 Woe to you, land, whose king is a boy
and whose princes feast in the morning!
Happy are you, land, whose king is a son of nobles
and whose princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness!
Through sloth the roof sinks,
and through idle hands the house leaks.

Eccl 10:19 For laughter they make bread, and wine gladdens life,
and money answers everything.
Do not curse the king even in your thoughts, and do not
curse the rich even in your bedroom,
for a bird of the air will carry the voice, and some winged
creature will tell the matter.

### SEND YOUR BREAD ON THE WATERS

*No one knows what will happen, so give generously and sow your seed morning and evening.*

Eccl 11:1 Send your bread out on the face of the waters,
for after many days you will find it.
Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you do not know what evil may come on the earth.
If the clouds are full of rain, they empty it on the earth; and
if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

Eccl 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not sow,
and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.
Just as you do not know the way of the wind, or how the
bones grow in the womb of a pregnant woman,
so you do not know the work of God, who makes
everything.[11]

Eccl 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not let
your hand rest;
for you do not know which will succeed, this or that, or
whether both alike will be good.

**11** The Hebrew *ruach* means both "wind" and "spirit" or "life-breath," so the line may also speak of how life comes to the unborn child.

## YOUTH AND OLD AGE

*Rejoice in youth and remember your Creator before old age and death arrive.*

Eccl 11:7 Sweet is the light,
and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.
For if a human lives many years, let him rejoice in them all;
but let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that comes is breath.

Eccl 11:9 Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your prime; 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 into judgment.
Remove vexation from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh,
for youth and the dawn of life are breath.

Eccl 12:1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,
before the evil days come and the years arrive of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;
before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark,
and the clouds return after the rain;[12]

Eccl 12:3 on the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent,
and the grinders stop because they are few, and those who look through the windows grow dark;
when the doors to the street are shut, as the sound of the mill grows low,
and one rises at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low;

Eccl 12:5 when they are afraid of what is high, and terrors are on the road; when the almond tree blossoms, and the grasshopper drags itself along, and the caper berry fails —
for the human goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about in the street;

Eccl 12:6 before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is crushed,
and the jar is shattered at the spring and the wheel is broken at the cistern,
and the dust returns to the earth as it was,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

## EPILOGUE: THE WORDS OF THE WISE

*A narrator describes Qohelet's work and concludes: fear God and keep his commandments.*

Eccl 12:8 Breath of breaths, says Qohelet; everything is breath.
Besides being wise, Qohelet
also taught the people knowledge; he weighed and searched out and arranged many proverbs.
Qohelet sought to find pleasing words,
and what was written uprightly, words of truth.

Eccl 12:11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails driven in are the masters of collections;
they are given by one shepherd.
Beyond these, my son, take warning:
there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wears out the body.[13]

12 The images of 12:1–7 are commonly read as pictures of old age and death.
13 "Masters of collections" may mean collected sayings or their compilers; the "one shepherd" is variously understood.

Eccl 12:13

The end of the matter; all has been heard:
fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole
of being human.
For God will bring every deed into judgment, concerning
everything hidden,
whether good or evil.