



The Book of Ecclesiastes

(The search for the ultimate maxim to explain the nature of life).



Chapter 12

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The book of Ecclesiastes occupies a unique position in the Bible due to its prevalent sense of pessimism and absence of God's intervention in our world. In fact, the all-prevailing mood of a God remote from our human condition sets the tone for Ecclesiastes which seems incongruent with the other books of the Old Testament. It contains reflections, more philosophical in nature, rather than a testimony of belief, which we would normally associate with the Hebrew scriptural tradition. For the traditional author, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, God is the inscrutable originator of the world who determines the fate of humankind. Just as the natural is in constant movement minus the presence of real change, so the human expenditure of energy comes to nought, despite the fact that reason leaves us baffled, the author affirms that life is worth living with all its limitations. The following metaphrase (literal) interpretation, on the chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes, are by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, an early Father of the Church.

Chapter 12

Moreover, it is fight that you should fear God while you are yet young, before you give yourself over to evil things, and before the great and terrible day of God comes, when the sun shall no longer shine, neither the moon, nor the rest of the stars, but when in that storm and commotion of all things, the powers above shall be moved, that is, the angels who guard the world; so that the mighty men shall fail, and the women shall cease their labours, and shall flee into the dark places of their dwellings, and shall have all the doors shut. And a woman shall be restrained from grinding by fear, and shall speak with the weakest voice, like the tiniest bird; and all the impure women shall sink into the earth; and cities and their blood-stained governments shall wait for the vengeance that comes from above, while the most bitter and bloody of all times hangs over them like a blossoming almond, and continuous punishments impend like a multitude of flying locusts, and the transgressors are cast out of the way like a black and despicable caper-plant.

And the good man shall depart with rejoicing to his own everlasting habitation; but the vile shall fill all their places with wailing, and neither silver laid up in store, nor proved gold, shall be of use any more. For a mighty stroke shall fall upon all things, even to the pitcher that stands by the well, and the wheel of the vessel which may chance to have been left in the hollow, when the course of time comes to its end and the ablution-bearing period of a life that is like water has passed away. And for men who lie on earth there is but one salvation, that their souls acknowledge and wing their way to Him by whom they have been made. I say, then, again what I have said already, that man's estate is altogether vain, and that nothing can exceed the utter vanity which attaches to the objects of man's inventions. And superfluous is my labour in preaching discreetly, inasmuch as I am attempting to instruct a people here, so indisposed to receive either teaching or healing. And truly the noble man is needed for the understanding of the words of wisdom. Moreover, I, though already aged, and having passed a long life, laboured to find out those things which are well-pleasing to God, by means of the mysteries of the truth. And I know that the mind is no less quickened and stimulated by the precepts of the wise, than the body is wont to be when the goad is applied, or a nail is fastened in it. And some will render again those wise lessons which they have received from one good pastor and teacher, as if all with one mouth and in mutual concord set forth in larger detail the truths committed to them. But in many words there is no profit. Neither do I counsel you, my friend, to write down vain things about what is fitting, from which there is nothing to be gained but weary labour. But, in conclusion, I shall require to use some such conclusion as this: O men, behold, I charge you now expressly and shortly, that you fear God, who is at once the Lord and the Overseer of all, and that you keep also His commandments; and that you believe that all shall be judged severally in the future, and that every man shall receive the just recompense for his deeds, whether they be good or whether they be evil.