

The Book of Ecclesiastes

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



Chapter 10



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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 metaphor (literal) interpretation, on the chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes, are by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, an early Father of the Church.

Chapter 10

Moreover, flies falling into myrrh, and suffocated therein, make both the appearance of that pleasant ointment and the anointing therewith an unseemly thing; and to be mindful of wisdom and of folly together is in no way proper. The wise man, indeed, is his own leader to right actions; but the fool inclines to erring courses, and will never make his folly available as a guide to what is noble. Yea, his thoughts also are vain and full of folly. But if ever a hostile spirit fall upon you, my friend, withstand it courageously, knowing that God is able to propitiate even a mighty multitude of offenses. These also are the deeds of the prince and father of all wickedness: that the fool is set on high, while the man richly gifted with wisdom is humbled; and that the slaves of sin are seen riding on horseback, while men dedicated to God walk on foot in dishonour, the wicked exulting the while. But if any one devises another's hurt, he forgets that he is preparing a snare for himself first and alone. And he who wrecks another's safety, shall fall by the bite of a serpent. But he who removes stones, indeed shall undergo no light labour; and he who cleaves wood shall bear danger with him in his own weapon. And if it chance that the axe spring out of the handle, he who engages in such work shall be put to trouble, gathering for no good and having to put to more of his iniquitous and shortlived strength. The bite of a serpent, again, is stealthy; and the charmers will not soothe the pain, for they are vain.

But the good man does good works for himself and for his neighbours alike; while the fool shall sink into destruction through his folly. And when he has once opened his mouth, he begins foolishly and soon comes to an end, exhibiting his senselessness in all. Moreover, it is impossible for man to know anything, or to learn from man either what has been from the beginning, or what shall be in the future. For who shall be the declarer thereof? Besides, the man who knows not to go to the good city, sustains evil in the eyes and in the whole countenance. And I prophesy woes to that city the king of which is a youth, and its rulers gluttons. But I call the good land blessed, the king of which is the son of the free: there those who are entrusted with the power of ruling shall reap what is good in due season. But the sluggard and the idler become scoffers, and make the house decay; and misusing all things for the purposes of their own gluttony, like the ready slaves of money, for a small price they are content to do all that is base and abject. It is also right to obey kings and rulers or potentates, and not to be bitter against them, nor to utter any offensive word against them. For there is ever the risk that what has been spoken in secret may somehow become public. For swift and winged messengers convey all things to Him who alone is King both rich and mighty, discharging therein a service which is at once spiritual and reasonable.