**Koheleth (Ecclesiastes)**

# Chapter 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 The words of Koheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem. | 1 The words of prophecy which Coheleth, that is, the son of David the King, who was in Jerusalem, prophesied. |
| 2 Vanity of vanities, said Koheleth; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. | 2 When Solomon the King of Israel foresaw, by the spirit of prophecy, the kingdom of Rehoboam his son, which will be divided with Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and that Jerusalem and the holy temple will be destroyed, and that the people of Israel will be led into captivity, he said by the divine word, Vanity of vanities is this world! Vanity of vanities is all which I and my father David have laboured for, all of it is vanity! |
| 3 What profit has man in all his toil that he toils under the sun? | 3 What advantage is there to a man, after his death, from all his labour which he laboured under the sun in this world, except he studied the word of God, in order to receive a good reward in the world to come from before the Lord of the world? |
| 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the Earth endures forever. | 4 King Solomon said, by the spirit of prophecy, The good generation of the righteous departs from the world because of the sins of the wicked generation that is to follow them, but the earth abides for ever and ever, to reserve the punishment which is to come upon the world, on account of the sins of the children of men. |
| 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and to its place it yearns and rises there. | 5 And the sun rises in the day from the east, and the sun goes down in the west by night, and hastens to its place, and goes through the path under the sea and rises the following day from the place where it rested yesterday; |
| 6 It goes to the south and goes around to the north; the will goes around and around, and the will returns to its circuits. | 6 it goes all the side of the south in the day, and goes round to the side of the north by night, through the path under the sea; it turns round and round to the wind of the south corner in the revolution of Nisan and Tamuz, and returns on its circuits to the wind of the north corner in the revolution of Tishri and Tebeth, it comes through the windows of the east in the morning, and goes into the windows of the west in the evening. |
| 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers flow, there they repeatedly go. | 7 All the rivers and streams of water go and flow into the waters of the ocean which surround the world like a ring, and the ocean is not full, and to the place where the streams go and flow there they go again through the channels of the sea. |
| 8 All things are wearisome; no one can utter it; the eye shall not be sated from seeing, nor shall the ear be filled from hearing. | 8 The ancient prophets have exerted themselves in all the things which will take place in the world, and they could not find out their end; therefore, a man has no power to declare what will be after him, neither can the eye see all that is to be in the world, nor can the ear be filled with hearing all the words of the inhabitants of the earth. |
| 9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. | 9 What was aforetime, the same will be afterwards again, and what was done aforetime the same will be done again to the end of all generations, and there is no new thing in the world under the sun. |
| 10 There is a thing of which [someone] will say, "See this, it is new." It has already been for ages which were before us. | 10 There may be something of which a man says, Behold, this a new thing, but it has been long ago, in the generations which were before us. |
| 11 [But] there is no remembrance of former [generations], neither will the later ones that will be have any remembrance among those that will be afterwards. | 11 There is no remembrance of former generations, and also of the coming ones that will be, there will be no remembrance of them among the generations that will be in the days of the King Messiah. |
| 12 I am Koheleth; I was king over Israel in Jerusalem. | 12 When King Solomon was sitting upon the throne of his kingdom, his heart became very proud of his riches, and he transgressed the word of God, and he gathered many horses, and chariots, and riders, and he amassed much gold and silver, and he married from foreign nations, whereupon the anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and he sent to him Ashmoda the king of the demons, who drove him from the throne of his kingdom, and took away the ring from his hand, in order that he should roam and wander about in the world to reprove it; and he went about in the provincial towns and the cities of the land of Israel, weeping and lamenting, and saying, I am Coheleth, whose name was formerly called Solomon, who was king over Israel in Jerusalem; |
| 13 And I applied my heart to inquire and to search with wisdom all that was done under the heaven. It is a sore task that God has given to the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. | 13 and I gave my heart to ask instruction from God at the time when he appeared unto me in Gibeon, to try me, and to ask me what I desire of him, and I asked nothing of him except wisdom, to know the difference between good and evil, and knowledge of whatsoever was done under the sun in this world, and I saw all the works of the wicked children of men - a bad business which God gave to the children of men to be afflicted by it; |
| 14 I saw all the deeds that were done under the sun, and behold, everything is vanity and frustration. | 14 I saw all the works of the children of men which were done under the sun in this world; behold, all is vanity and breaking of the spirit. |
| 15 What is crooked will not be able to be straightened, and what is missing will not be able to be counted. | 15 A man whose ways are perverted in this world, and who dies therein and does not repent, has no power to become right after his death; and whoso departs from the law and the precepts in his life, has no power to be numbered with the righteous in paradise after his death. |
| 16 I spoke to myself, saying, "I acquired and increased great wisdom, more than all who were before me over Jerusalem"; and my heart saw much wisdom and knowledge. | 16 I spake with the thoughts of my heart, saying: I, behold! I have increased and multiplied wisdom above all the wise who were before me in Jerusalem, and my heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge; |
| 17 And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I know that this too is a frustration. | 17 and I gave my heart to know wisdom, and the fear of the Kingdom, and knowledge and discretion, I know it by experience that even this is a breaking of the spirit to the man who is employed to find them out. |
| 18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge, increases pain. | 18 Because a man who increases his knowledge when he is guilty, and does not repent, increases the anger of God; and he who accumulates wisdom and dies in his youth, increases the sadness of heart to his relations. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 1

**1 The words of Koheleth** Wherever it says, “the words of,” it refers to words of reproof. (Deut. 1:1): “These are the words that Moses spoke” … (ibid. 32:15): “And Jeshurun became fat.” (Amos 1:1): “The words of Amos” … (ibid. 4:1): “Hearken to this word, O cows of Bashan.” (Jer. 1:1): “The words of Jeremiah” … (ibid. 30:6): “Ask now and see whether a male gives birth, etc.” (II Sam. 23:1): “And these are the words of David” … (verse 6): “But the wicked are all as thorns thrust away.” “The words of Koheleth… The sun rises… All the rivers run into the sea.” He refers to the wicked as the sun, the moon, and the sea, which have no reward. So it was taught in Sifrei (Deut. 1:1). I learned from there that the section deals with the wicked and compares them to the rising of the sun, which ultimately sets. Addendum: Another explanation: All the rivers run into the sea. What is the meaning of this? This is stated concerning idolaters, the fools who prostrate themselves to the water and think that it has substance since they see the Great Sea, into which all the rivers run, and it is not full, but they do not know that to the place where the rivers flow, they repeatedly go, for the water of the rivers that flow into the sea is the very same water that already flowed. They flow from under the deep and go above the ground until the sea and repeatedly flow. Therefore, the rivers do not stop, and the sea does not become full, and not because they have substance. End of addendum.

**Koheleth** Because he gathered (קִהֵל) many wisdoms, and similarly, elsewhere (Prov. 30:1) Scripture calls him Agur the son of Jakeh, because he gathered (אָגַר) all the wisdom and vomited it (וְהִקִיאָה), and some say that he would say all his words in an assembly (בְּהַקְהֵל).

**king in Jerusalem** the city of wisdom.

**2 Vanity of vanities, said Koheleth** Koheleth complains about the creation of the seven days of Creation, that all is vanity of vanities.

**Vanity of** Heb. הֲבֵל is punctuated with a hataph pattah because it is in the construct state; i.e., the vanity of the vanities. Seven vanities [are mentioned], corresponding to the seven days of Creation.

**3 What profit** reward and remainder.

**under the sun** in lieu of the Torah, which is called light, as it is stated (Prov. 6:23): “and the Torah is light.” All the toil which he does instead of engaging in the Torah-what reward is there in it?

**4 A generation goes and a generation comes** As much as the wicked man toils and labors to oppress and to rob, he does not outlive his works, for the generation goes and another generation comes and takes all away from his sons, as it is stated (Job 20:10): “His sons will placate the poor.”

**but the Earth endures forever** But who are the ones who endure? The humble and low, who bring themselves down to the earth, as it is stated (Ps. 37:11): “But the humble shall inherit the Earth.” And Midrash Tanhuma states: All the righteous of Israel are called Earth [or land], as it is said (Mal. 3:12): “for you shall be a desirable land.”

**5 The sun rises, etc.** A generation goes and a generation comes as the sun rises at dawn and sets at eventide, and it goes throughout the night, yearning to rise from the place whence it rose yesterday, that it will rise from there also today.

**6 the will** Heb. הָרוּחַ, the will of the sun, talant in Old French, like (Ezek. 1:12): “wherever would be the will (הָרוּחַ) to go.”

**returns to its circuits** Also on the morrow, the entire circuit and encircling that it encircled yesterday, it encircles and goes around today.

**it goes to the south** forever in the day.

**and goes around to the north** forever in the night.

**goes around and around** to the eastern and western sides, which it sometimes goes through by day, and sometimes goes around at night. In Tammuz it goes through them, and in Teveth it goes around them. Also the wicked, no matter how much their sun rises, they will ultimately set. No matter how much they gain power, they will ultimately return to the place of filth. From the place of filth they came, and to the place of filth they will go. And so…

**7 All the rivers flow into the sea** because they do not remain therein, for the ocean is higher than the entire world, as it is said (Amos 5:8): “He calls the water of the sea and pours it, etc.” Now from where does a person pour? From above downward, and the rivers flow in the tunnels under the mountains from the ocean and repeatedly flow, and this is the meaning of: “to the place where the rivers flow, there they repeatedly go.” Also, the wicked man, (below 5:15) “just as it came, so shall it go.”

**8 All things are wearisome… the eye shall not be sated from seeing, nor shall the ear be filled** This refers back to, “What profit [has man]” if he exchanges the study of Torah to speak wasteful words? They are only wearisome, and he will not be able to acquire them all, and if he comes to engage in the vision of the eye, it will not be satisfied, and if in the hearing of the ear, it will not be filled.

**9 What has been is what will be, etc.** In whatever he learns, in a matter that is an exchange for the sun, there is nothing new. He will see only that which already was, which was created in the six days of Creation. But one who meditates on the Torah constantly finds new insights therein, as it is stated (Prov. 5:19): “her breasts will satisfy you at all times.” Just as this breast, whenever the infant feels it, he finds a taste in it, so are the words of Torah (Er. 54b), and so we find in Tractate Hagigah, that Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus said things that the ear had never heard, concerning the account of the Celestial Chariot.

**10 There is a thing** that comes to your hand under the sun about which the speaker will say, “See, this is a new thing!” But it is not new, for it has already been so for ages that have passed before us, but “there is no remembrance of former [generations].” Therefore, it seems to be new.

**11 neither will the later ones that will be** after us have any remembrance in the generations that will be after them. And the Midrash Aggadah interprets this as referring to the obliteration of the remembrance of Amalek, for his remembrance will ultimately be obliterated, as it is said (Obadiah 1:18): “and the house of Esau will have no survivors.”

**12 I am Koheleth; I was king** over the whole world, and later, over Israel, and then, over Jerusalem alone, and finally, [only] over my staff, for it says: “I was king in Jerusalem,” but now, I am no longer king.

**13 And I applied my heart to inquire** in the Torah, which is wisdom, and to ponder over it concerning all the evil deeds mentioned above, which are committed under the sun, and I pondered that it is a sore task that the Holy One, blessed be He, set before the children of men. (Deut. 30:15): “life and good, and also death and evil.”

**a sore task** Heb. עִנְיַן רַע. They have evil behavior.

**with which to occupy themselves** Heb. לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ, to behave with it. עִנְיַן may be interpreted as an expression of an abode (מָעוֹן) and a dwelling, and it may also be interpreted as an expression of study (עִיוּן) and thought, and the same is true of בּוֹלַעֲנוֹת.

**has given** has placed before them.

**14 and frustration** Heb. וּרְעוּת רוּח, the breaking of the will, like (Isa. 8:9): “Shatter (רֹעוּ), O peoples, and be broken.” רוּחַ is synonymous with talant in Old French, will. The end of the deed is that he comes to heartache.

**15 What is crooked** during his lifetime, will not be able to be straightened after he dies. Whoever toiled on the eve of the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath, and our Sages explained this as referring to one who was intimate with a woman forbidden to him and begot a mamzer, or to a Torah scholar who parted with the Torah, who was originally straight and became crooked.

**and what is missing will not be able to be counted** One who excluded himself from the number of the righteous will not be able to be counted with them in their reception of reward.

**16 I spoke to myself** Now that I have sunk from my greatness, I set my heart, saying, “Who would have said about me that I would come to such a state?”

Look, I have acquired great wisdom, etc.

**17 And I applied** my heart now to know the nature of wisdom, what its end is, and the nature of madness and folly.

**madness** Heb. הֹלֵלוֹת, dullness and confusion of thoughts, an expression of mixing, like (Isa. 1:22): “diluted (מָהוּל) with water.”

**and folly** foolishness.

**I know** now that also wisdom has frustration in it, for in great wisdom, a person relies on his great wisdom and does not distance himself from prohibition, and much vexation comes to the Holy One, blessed be He. I said, “I will acquire many horses, but I will not return the people to Egypt,” but ultimately, I returned [them]. I said, “I will take many wives, but they will not turn my heart away,” but it is written about me, (I Kings 11:4): “his wives turned away his heart.” And so he says, (Prov. 30:1): “The words of the man concerning, ‘God is with me’; yea, God is with me, and I will be able.”

# Chapter 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
|  |  |
| 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will mix [wine] with joy and experience pleasure"; and behold, this too was vanity. | 1 I said in my heart, I will go now and try mirth, and behold the good of this world; and when pain and affliction befell me, I said by the divine word, Also this is vanity. |
| 2 Of laughter, I said, "[It is] mingled"; and concerning joy, "What does this accomplish?" | 2 To laughter I said, in time of affliction. It is mockery; and to mirth. What profit is it to the man who indulges in it? |
| 3 I searched in my heart to indulge my body with wine, and my heart conducting itself with wisdom and holding onto folly, until I would see which is better for the children of men that they should do under the heavens, the number of the days of their lives. | 3 I tried in my heart to enrapture my flesh in the house of the feast of wine, and my heart conducted with wisdom, and to seize the folly of youth, until I examined and saw which of them was good for the children of men, that they may do while they abide in this world under the heavens, the number of the days of their life. |
| 4 I made myself great works; I built myself houses, and I planted myself vineyards. | 4 I multiplied good works in Jerusalem. I built houses, viz., the temple, to make atonement for Israel, and a royal palace, and the conclave, and the porch, and a house of judgment of hewn stones, where the wise men sit, and the judges, to give judgment; I made a throne of ivory for the sitting of royalty; I planted vineyards in Jabne, that I and the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin might drink wine, and also to make libations of wine, new and old, upon the altar; |
| 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted in them all sorts of fruit trees. | 5 I made watered gardens and parks, and I sowed there all kinds of herbs, some for food, some for drink, and some for medicine, and all kinds of aromatics; I planted therein sterile trees, and aromatic trees, which the spectres and evil spirits brought me from India, and all kinds of fruit- bearing trees ; and its boundary was from the wall of the city of Jerusalem to the margin of the river Siloah; |
| 6 I made myself pools of water, to water from them a forest sprouting with trees. | 6 I made receptacles of water, whence to water the trees and the herbs; I made pools of water, to water from them even the thicket which produces fine wood; |
| 7 I acquired male and female slaves, and I had household members; also I had possession of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. | 7 I bought bond-men and bond-women from the children of Ham, and other foreign nations; and I had officers placed over the eatables of my house, to provide for me and the people of my house food twelve months of the year, and one to provide for me during the leap-year; I had also cattle and sheep more than all generations before me in Jerusalem; |
| 8 I accumulated for myself also silver and gold, and the treasures of the kings and the provinces; I acquired for myself various types of musical instruments, the delight of the sons of men, wagons and coaches. | 8 I gathered also treasures of silver and gold; even right weights and measures I made from good gold; and the treasures of kings and provinces were given to me as tribute; I made for the temple musical instruments, that the Levites might play them at the sacrifices, and citherns and flutes that the male and female singers might play them in the wine house, and the delights of the children of men; and warm springs, and baths, channels pouring out cold water, and channels pouring out warm water; |
| 9 So I became great, and I increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. | 9 and I multiplied goods and increased riches more than all generations before me in Jerusalem, because my wisdom stood with me and assisted me; |
| 10 And [of] all that my eyes desired I did not deprive them; I did not deprive my heart of any joy, but my heart rejoiced with all my toil, and this was my portion from all my toil. | 10 and whatsoever the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin asked of me respecting pure and impure, innocent and guilty, I did not withhold from them any explanation of these things; and I did not keep my heart from the joy of the law, because I had the inclination of heart to enjoy the wisdom given me by God more than any man, and rejoiced in it more than in all my labour; and this was my good portion which was assigned to me, so that I might receive for it a good reward in the world to come, more than for all my labour. |
| 11 Then I turned [to look] at all my deeds that my hands had wrought and upon the toil that I had toiled to do, and behold everything is vanity and frustration, and there is no profit under the sun. | 11 And I considered all my works which my hands had worked, and my labours which I had laboured to do, and behold! it was all vanity and breaking of spirit; and there is no profit in them under the sun in this world; but I shall have full reward for good work in the world to come. |
| 12 And I turned to see wisdom and madness and folly, for what is the man who will come after the king, concerning that which they have already done? | 12 And I gave attention to consider wisdom, and the fear of the kingdom and understanding, because what use is there to a man to pray after the decree of the King, and after retribution? behold! it is then already decreed about him and executed on him. |
| 13 And I saw that wisdom has an advantage over folly, as the advantage of light over darkness. | 13 And I saw by the spirit of prophecy that there is an advantage to wisdom over folly, above the advantage of the light of the day over the darkness of night. |
| 14 The wise man has eyes in its beginning, but the fool goes in the darkness, and I too know that one event happens to them all. | 14 The wise man reflects in the beginning what there will be at last, and prays and averts the evil decree from the world; while the fool walks in darkness; and I also know that if the wise man does not pray, and avert the evil decree from the world, when retribution shall come upon the world, the same destiny shall befall them all. |
| 15 And I said to myself, "As it happens to the fool, so will it happen to me too, so why then did I become wiser?" And I said to myself that this too is vanity. | 15 And I said in my heart, a destiny like that of Saul, the son of Kish, the king, who turned aside, and did not keep the commandment given to him about Amalek, and the kingdom was taken from him, will also befall me; and why then am I wiser than he? And I said in my heart, that also this is vanity, and there is nothing except the decree of the Lord. |
| 16 For there is no remembrance of the wise man even as of the fool forever, seeing that in the coming days, all is forgotten. And how shall the wise die with the fool? | 16 For the remembrance of the wise man is not with the fool in the world to come, for after the death of a man, that which happened long ago in his lifetime, when the days come which are to follow him after his death, everything will be disclosed; and why, then, say the children of men. that the end of the righteous is like that of the wicked? |
| 17 So I hated the living, for the deed that was done under the sun grieved me, for everything is vanity and frustration. | 17 And I hated all evil life, because the evil work which is done against the children of men under the sun in this world displeased me, for it is all vanity, and breaking of spirit. |
| 18 And I hated all my toil that I toil under the sun, that I should leave it to the man who will be after me. | 18 And I hated all my labour which I laboured under the sun in this world, for I must leave it to Rehoboam my son, who comes after me, and Jeroboam his servant will come and take away out of his hands ten tribes, and will possess half of the kingdom. |
| 19 And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish. And he will rule over all my toil that I have toiled and that I have gained wisdom under the sun; this too is vanity. | 19 And who knows whether wise or foolish will be the king who is to be after me, and reign over all my labour which I laboured in this world, and over all which I accomplish in my wisdom under the sun in this world? and I was confounded in my heart, and again said: This, too, is vanity. |
| 20 And I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the toil that I toiled under the sun. | 20 And I turned about to despair respecting all my labour which laboured to acquire, and was wise to accomplish under the sun in this world. |
| 21 For there is a man whose toil is with wisdom and with knowledge and with honesty and to a man who did not toil for it he will give it as his portion; this too is vanity and a great evil. | 21 Because there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, reason, and justice, and he dies without issue; and to a man who did not labour for it, he is to give it, that it may be his portion; also this is vanity, and a great evil. |
| 22 For what has a man out of all his toil and the breaking of his heart that he toils under the sun? | 22 For what pleasure has this man for all his labour and breaking of his heart, wherewith he laboured under the sun in this world? |
| 23 For all his days are pains and his occupation is vexation; even at night his heart does not rest; this too is vanity. | 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his business kindles his anger, even in the night he sleeps not on account of the thoughts of his heart; this too is vanity. |
| 24 Is it not good for a man that he eat and drink and show himself enjoyment in his toil? This too have I seen that it is from the hand of God. | 24 There is nothing comely for a man but that he eat, drink, and make his soul see good before the sons of men, in order to do the commandments, to walk in the straight path before him, so that it may be well with him from his labour; also this I saw, that if a man prospers in this world, it is from the hand of the Lord, who decrees it so for him. |
| 25 For who will eat and who will hasten [to swallow it] except me? | 25 For who is occupied with the words of the law, and who is the man that has anxiety about the great day of judgment which is to come, besides me? |
| 26 For to a man who is good in His sight, He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner He has given an occupation to gather and to accumulate, to give to him who is good in God's sight; this too is vanity and frustration. | 26 For to the man whose works are straight before God, he gave wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come; and to the wicked he gave all evil employment, to gather money and to heap up much wealth, to be taken away from him, and to be given to him who pleases the Lord; this, too, is vanity for the wicked, and breaking of spirit. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 2

**1 I said to myself** since that is so, I will refrain from wisdom, and I will constantly engage in drinking.

**I will mix** Heb. אֲנַסְכָה, an expression of mixing wine to drink, like (Prov. 9:2): “she has mingled (מָסְכָה) her wine,” the mingling of wine with water to improve it or the mingling of spices with wine for conditum (spiced wine).

**and experience pleasure** Heb. וּרְאֵה, like בְּטוֹב וּרְאוֹת.

**and behold, this too was vanity** For I saw through prophecy that many misfortunes come about through laughter. Belshazzar died through a banquet, and the people of the Generation of the Flood were inundated because of the abundant goodness that You lavished upon them.

**2 Of laughter, I said, “[It is] mingled”** mixed with weeping and sighs.

**and concerning joy, what** good does it accomplish? Behold, its end is grief.

**3 I searched in my heart** I returned to search in my heart to maintain all of them: feasting, wisdom, and folly, and to indulge and to pamper my body with wine feasting. Every feast of enjoyment is called מִשְּׁתֶּה because of the wine.

**conducting itself with wisdom** Even if my body is being indulged with wine, my heart is being conducted with wisdom, to hold onto the Torah.

**and holding onto folly** to things that appear to me as folly, concerning which I said, (Prov. 30:1): “God is with me; yea, God is with me, and I will be able,” for example, the wearing of shaatnez and mingled species in a vineyard, which Satan and the nations of the world dispute, and so he says (below 7:18): “It is good that you should take hold of this,” and also, concerning Saul, to whom it appeared folly to slay both man and woman, both infant and suckling, but it was the commandment of the Omnipresent, and he called it folly.

**4 I made myself great works** in the days of my greatness.

**5 all sorts of fruit trees** for Solomon recognized with his wisdom the veins of the earth: which vein leads to Cush, and there he planted peppers; which one goes to a land of carob fruits, and there he planted carob trees. For all the veins of the lands come to Zion, from where the world was founded, as it is said (Ps. 50:2): “From Zion, the all-inclusive beauty.” Therefore, it is said: “all sorts of fruit trees.” Midrash Tanhuma (Kedoshim 10).

**6 pools of water** Like a sort of vivaria for fish, which they dig in the ground.

**8 and the treasures of the kings** the treasures of the kings-gold, silver and precious stones, which the kings collect in their treasure houses.

**and the provinces** the treasure of all merchants.

**various types of musical instruments** Heb. שָּׁרִים וְשָּׁרוֹת, various types of musical instruments.

**wagons and coaches** Heb. שִּׁדָה וְשִּׁדוֹת beautiful coaches, covered wagons, and in the Gemara, [we find] a coach (שִּׁדָה), a chest, and a closet.

**9 also my wisdom remained with me** Also, I did not forsake my wisdom because of all these affairs, and it remained with me; I did not forget it. Another explanation: It stood by me to aid me against all these.

**10 I did not deprive** I did not distance them to separate from them, and so (Num. 11:25): “and He held back (וַיָאצֶל) some of the spirit… and placed [it] on… the elders,” like a candelabrum from which many candles are kindled, and its light is not at all diminished.

**and this was my portion** And after doing all these, I have nothing [left] of all of them but this. Rav and Shmuel [differ]: One says, his staff, and one says, his cup. קִידוֹ is an earthenware cup, from which [people] drink (Gittin 68b). Others in the Midrash Aggadah (Ecc. Zuta 2:8) interpret the entire section as referring to study halls, students, and synagogues [as follows]:

**a forest sprouting with trees** the ignorant people, for the work of fields and vineyards.

**11 Then I turned** now in all my deeds, and I see that there is no profit in them, for from all of them I am lacking.

**12 And I turned to see wisdom** I turn from all my affairs to ponder over the Torah and madness and folly, [meaning] the punishment for transgressions.

**for what is the man who will come after the king** to supplicate him concerning a decree that they decreed upon him, and they already executed the decree. It is better for him to ponder at first upon his deeds, and he will find it unnecessary to beg.

**13 over folly** That is wickedness.

**14 The wise man has eyes in its beginning** In the beginning of the matter, he observes what will be at its end.

**and I too know** Also, I, who praise the wise man over the fool, know that they both will die.

**15 And I said to myself, etc.** i.e., since they will both die, perhaps I will think in my heart from now on that as it happens to the wicked man, so will it happen to me. So why should I be more righteous?

**And I said to myself** that if I think so, that is vanity, for the remembrances of the wise man and the fool are not equal. After their deaths, both of them will not be remembered together, for this one will be remembered for good, and this one will be remembered for evil.

**16 for seeing that in the coming days all is forgotten** Because I see the wicked who already lived, and who were very successful, and in the days that came after them, all their heroism and their success were forgotten.

**And how shall the wise die with the fool** I see the righteous prospering in their deaths and availing their children, for example (Lev. 26:42): “And I shall remember My covenant with Jacob, etc.;” (Jer. 2:2): “I remember for you the love of your youth.”

**17 So I hated the living** for he was prophesying about the generation of Rehoboam, who were wicked.

**19 This too is vanity** This too is one of the vanities that were created in the world, that the wise man toils, and the fool inherits him.

**20 And I turned about to cause my heart to despair** not to toil and labor.

**21 For there is a man** Its apparent interpretation is according to its simple meaning, but the Midrash Aggadah in Tanhuma (Buber, vol. 1, p. 24) interprets it as an expression referring to the Holy One, blessed be He, concerning Whom it is said (Ezek. 1:26): “and on the likeness of the throne was a likeness like the appearance of a man.”

**whose toil is with wisdom** as it is said (Prov. 3:19f): “The Lord founded the Earth with wisdom… With His knowledge the depths were split,” and to the creatures who did not toil in it, He gave a share in it.

**this too is vanity and a great evil** And they became a generation of vanity and the evil of man became great on the Earth in the Generation of the Flood.

**22 For what has, etc.** For what profit has a man in all his toil and the breaking of his heart with toil and worry, which he toils, and leaves for others.

**23 his occupation** Heb. עִנְיָנוֹ, his custom.

**this too** is one of the vanities that prevail in the world.

**24 Is it not good for a man** This is a question. [Is it not good for a man] that he eat and drink and show himself enjoyment? That is, let him pay heed to performing justice and righteousness with the eating and the drinking, and so it was said to Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:15): “Your father-did he not eat and drink and perform justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.”

**25 For who will eat, etc.** Why shall I not rejoice with my portion in eating and drinking? Who is fit to eat what I toiled for, and who will hasten to swallow it, except me?

**except me** lit. outside of me. This is the trait of the wicked, who gather for others [i.e., they gather wealth that will ultimately go to others.

**26 For to a man who is good in His sight** in the sight of God, mentioned above, “that it is from the hand of God.”

**He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy** a heart to engage in the Torah and in the commandments and to rejoice in his portion of eating, drinking, and clean clothing.

**but to the sinner He has given an occupation** a habit and a concern to gather and to accumulate, and to give to him who is good in God’s sight, as it is stated (Esther 8:2): “and Esther placed Mordecai in charge of the house of Haman.”

**this too** is one of the vanities that were given to the creatures, that they toil, and someone else takes [the fruits].

# Chapter 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 Everything has an appointed season, and there is a time for every matter under the heaven. | 1 To every man comes a time, and to every thing an opportune season under the sun. |
| 2 A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted. | 2 There is a special time to beget sons and daughters, and a special time for killing disobedient and perverse children, to kill them with stones according to the decree of the judges; and an opportune time for planting a tree, and an opportune time for rooting up a planted tree: |
| 3 A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break and a time to build. | 3 an opportune time for killing in war, and an opportune time for healing the sick; an opportune time to destroy a building, and an opportune time to build up a ruin: |
| 4 A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing. | 4 a time to beweep the dead, and an opportune time to be joyful with laughter; an opportune time to mourn over the slain, and an opportune time to dance at nuptials; |
| 5 A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. | 5 an opportune time to throw away a heap of stones, and an opportune time to gather stones for a building; an opportune time to embrace a wife, and an opportune time to abstain from embracing her, in the seven days of mourning; |
| 6 A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away. | 6 an opportune time to wish for riches, and an opportune time to lose riches; an opportune time to keep merchandise, and an opportune time to throw merchandise into the sea, during a great storm; |
| 7 A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak. | 7 an opportune time to tear the garment for the dead, and an opportune time to sew together the torn pieces; an opportune time to be silent and not to rebuke, and an opportune time to speak words of reproof; |
| 8 A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. | 8 an opportune time to love each other, and an opportune time to hate the wicked; an opportune time to make war, and an opportune time to restore peace. |
| 9 What profit has the one who works in that which he toils? | 9 What advantage has the toiling man, who labours to make treasures, and to gather mammon, unless he is helped by Providence from above? |
| 10 I have seen the occupation that God gave to the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. | 10 I saw the painful business and punishment which the Lord gave to the children of men who are wicked, to afflict them therewith. |
| 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time; also the [wisdom of] the world He put into their hearts, save that man should not find the deed which God did, from beginning to end. | 11 King Solomon said by the spirit of prophecy, God made everything beautiful in its time; for it was opportune that there should be the strife which was in the days of Jeroboam, son of Neboth; it was to have been in the days of Sheba, son of Bichri, and it was delayed, and came to pass in the days of Jeroboam, son of Nebat; for if it had been in the days of Sheba, son of Bichri, the temple would not have been built, because of the golden calves which the wicked Jeroboam made, and placed one in Beth-el and one in Dan, and put watches on the road, and they stopped the pilgrims to the feasts; and therefore it was delayed up to the time when the temple was built, in order not to hinder Israel to build it. He concealed from them also the great Name written and expressed on the foundation-stone, the evil inclinations in their hearts being known to Him; for if it had been delivered into the hands of men, they would have used it, and found by it what will come to pass in the latter days, world without end; and He also hid from them the day of death, in order that it should not be known to man from the beginning what will come to pass at the end. |
| 12 I knew that there is nothing better for them but to rejoice and to do good during his lifetime. | 12 King Solomon said by the spirit of prophecy, I know that there is nothing good among the children of men, but that they rejoice in the joy of the law, and do good in the days of their life. |
| 13 And also, every man who eats and drinks and enjoys what is good in all his toil, it is a gift of God. | 13 And also that if any man eats and drinks and sees good in his days, and causes his children to inherit all his labour in the time of his death, this is a gift given to him from the Lord. |
| 14 I knew that everything that God made, that will be forever; we cannot add to it, nor can we subtract from it; and God made it so that they fear Him. | 14 I know by the spirit of prophecy, that everything which the Lord does in the world, whether good or evil, whatsoever is decreed from His month, will be for ever; to it man has no power to add, nor has any one power to take from it; and at the same time, when punishment comes into the world, it is the Lord who does it, that the children of man may fear before Him. |
| 15 That which was is already [done], and that which is [destined] to be, already was, and God seeks the pursued. | 15 What has been from the beginning has come to pass; and what will be at the end of days has already happened; and at the great day of judgment the Lord will demand the poor and the needy from the hands of the wicked who persecuted him. |
| 16 And moreover, I saw under the sun, [in] the place of justice, there is wickedness, and [in] the place of righteousness, there is wickedness. | 16 And further, I saw under the sun in this world, the place of judgment, in which false judges condemn the innocent, in his judgment, in order to acquit the guilty; and the place where the innocent is found, there the guilty is to tyrannise over him, because of the guilt of the wicked generation. |
| 17 I said to myself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every deed there." | 17 I said in my heart, that God will judge in the great day of judgement the righteous and the guilty, because a time is appointed for every thing, and for every work done in this world they will be judged there. |
| 18 I said to myself, [that this is] because of the children of men, so that God should clarify for them, so that they may see that they are [like] beasts to themselves. | 18 I said in my heart concerning the children of men, as to the chastisements and evil events which come upon them, God sends these to try and to prove them, to see whether they will return in repentance and be forgiven and healed; but the wicked who are like beasts do not repent, therefore they are reproved thereby to their own condemnation. |
| 19 For there is a happening for the children of men, and there is a happening for the beasts-and they have one happening-like the death of this one is the death of that one, and all have one spirit, and the superiority of man over beast is nought, for all is vanity. | 19 For as to the destiny of the wicked, and the destiny of the unclean beast, it is one destiny for both of them; and as the unclean beast dies so he dies who does not return in repentance before his death; and the breath of life over both is judged alike in every manner, and the advantage of a sinner over the unclean beast is nothing but the burial place; for all is vanity. |
| 20 All go to one place; all came from the dust, and all return to the dust. | 20 All go to one place; all the inhabitants of the earth are made of dust, and when they die, all return to the dust. |
| 21 Who knows that the spirit of the children of men is that which ascends on high and the spirit of the beast is that which descends below to the Earth? | 21 Who is wise to know the breathing spirit of the children of men, whether it goes upward to heaven, and the breathing spirit of cattle, whether it goes down to the earth? |
| 22 And I saw that there is nothing better than that man rejoice in his deeds, for that is his portion, for who will bring him to see what will be after him? | 22 I saw, therefore, that there is no good in this world, but that man should rejoice in his good works, and eat and drink, and do good to his heart; because this is his good part in this world, to acquire thereby the world to come, so that no man should say in his heart, “Why am I distributing money to do charity? I had better leave it to my son after me, or be nursed tor it in my old age;" because who can bring him to see what will be after him? |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 3

**1 Everything has an appointed season** Let not the gatherer of wealth from vanity rejoice, for even though it is in his hand now, the righteous will yet inherit it; only the time has not yet arrived, for everything has an appointed season when it will be.

**for every matter** Heb. חֵפֶץ, for every thing. All things are called חֲפָצִים in the language of the Mishnah.

**2 A time to give birth** at nine months.

**and a time to die** the limit of the years of every generation.

**a time to plant** a nation and a kingdom.

**and a time to uproot** A time will come for it to be uprooted.

**3 A time to kill** an entire nation, when the day of its visitation arrives, as it is said (Isa. 14:30): “and he shall slay your remnant with the sword (sic).”

**and a time to heal** their ruin, as it is written concerning Egypt (ibid. 19:22): “and they shall return to the Lord, and He shall accept their prayer and heal them.”

**a time to break** the wall of the city, when it is decreed upon it, as it is said (Neh. 1:3): “and the wall of Jerusalem is breached.”

**and a time to build** as it is said (Amos 9:11): “and build it up as in the days of yore.”

**4 A time to weep** on the ninth of Av.

**and a time to laugh** in the future, as it is said (Ps. 126:2): “Then our mouths will be filled with laughter.”

**a time of wailing** in the days of mourning.

**and a time of dancing** with bridegrooms and brides.

**5 A time to cast stones** The youths of Israel scattered during the destruction of the Temple: (Lam. 4:1): “The holy stones are scattered.”

**and a time to gather** them from the exile, as it is written (Zech. 9:16): “And the Lord God (sic) shall save them on that day like the flocks of his people, for crown stones are exalted on His land.”

**a time to embrace** (Jer. 13:11): “For, just as a girdle clings etc.”

**and a time to refrain from embracing** (Isa. 6:12): “And the Lord removes the people far away.”

**6 A time to seek** As it is stated (Ezek. 34:16): “I will seek the lost,” concerning those of Israel gone astray.

**and a time to lose** and a time when He lost them in exile, as it is said (Lev. 26: 38): “And you will become lost among the nations.”

**a time to keep** (Num. 6:24): “May the Lord bless you and keep you,” when you do His will.

**and a time to cast away** (Deut. 29:27): “and cast them into another land.”

**7 A time to rend** the kingdom of the House of David, as it is said (I Kings 14:8): “And I tore the kingdom, etc.”

**and a time to sew** (Ezek. 37:17): “and they shall be one in your hand;” (ibid. verse 22): “neither shall they any longer be divided into two kingdoms.”

**a time to be silent** Sometimes a person is silent and receives a reward, as it is said (Lev. 10:3): “and Aaron was silent,” and he merited that the Divine speech be especially addressed to him, as it is said (ibid. verse 8): “And the Lord spoke to Aaron: Drink neither wine nor strong drink.”

**and a time to speak** (Exod. 15:1): “Then Moses… sang;” (Jud. 5:1): “Now Deborah… sang;” (Hos. 14:3): “Take words with you.”

**8 A time to love** (Deut. 7:13): “and He will love you.”

**and a time to hate** (Hos. 9:15): “All their evil is in Gilgal; therefore (sic) I hated them.”

**9 What profit has the one who works** What is the profit of the one who does evil in all that he toils? He too-his time will come, and all will be lost.

**10 the occupation** Heb. הָעִנְיָן, the behavior.

**to occupy themselves** Heb. לַעֲנוֹת, to behave.

**11 everything beautiful in its time** At the time of good, it is beautiful that the reward be given for good deeds, and at the time of evil, it is fitting for the recompense for evil deeds.

**also the world He put in their hearts, etc.** Also the wisdom of the world that He put into the hearts of the creatures-He did not put it all into the heart of everyone, but [He gave] a little to this one and a little to that one, in order that man should not comprehend the entire deed of the Holy One, blessed be He, to know it; and he will not know the day of his visitation [i.e., the day of his death] and on what he will stumble, in order that he put his heart to repent, so that he will be concerned and say, “Today or tomorrow I will die.” Therefore, הָעֹלָם is written here defectively, an expression of concealment (הַעֲלָמָה), for if man would know that the day of his death was near, he would neither build a house nor plant a vineyard. Therefore, he says that He made everything beautiful in its time. The fact that there is a time for death is a beautiful thing, for a person relies and says, “Perhaps the time of my death is far off,” and he builds a house and plants a vineyard, and it is [therefore] beautiful that it is concealed from people.

**12 I knew** now, since the time of visitation is concealed, that there is no [other] good for man but to rejoice with his portion and to do that which is good in the sight of his Creator, as long as he lives.

**13 and enjoys what is good** The Torah and the commandments.

**14 I knew that everything that God made** [i.e.,] that the Holy One, blessed be He, [made] in the Creation, is fit to exist forever, and it cannot be changed, either by adding or by diminishing, and when it is changed, God commanded and caused it to be changed, in order that they should fear Him. The ocean broke through its boundary in the generation of Enosh and inundated a third of the world, and God did this so that they would fear Him. For seven days, the course of the sun was changed in the Generation of the Flood, to rise in the west and set in the east, in order that they fear Him. The sun went back ten steps in the days of Hezekiah, and in the days of Ahaz his father, the day was shortened and the night was lengthened on the day of his death, so that he should not be eulogized. All this was so that they would fear Him. Therefore, there is nothing better for a man to occupy himself with than with His commandments and to fear Him.

**That which was is already** That which was before us, was already done, and we saw it or heard it from others who saw it, and we can attest to it, for we saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, seeks the pursued. Jacob was pursued, [and] Esau was a pursuer, (Mal. 1:2f): “And I loved Jacob. And I hated Esau.” The Egyptians pursued Israel. The Egyptians drowned in the sea, and Israel went forth with a high hand.

**and that which** is destined to be at the end is a model of what already was. As it was in the beginning, so will it be at the end. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not change His standards in the world.

**and God seeks the pursued** to punish the pursuer. Therefore, what is the profit of one who does evil in what he toils? He is destined to be called to account.

**16 the place of justice, etc.** I saw with the holy spirit the place of the Chamber of Hewn Stone in Jerusalem, which was (Isa. 1:21): “full of justice;” there they will judge wickedly, as it is said (Micah 3:11): “Its heads judge for bribes,” and I saw their punishment.

**and the place of righteousness** the middle gate, which was the place of deciding the laws.

**there is wickedness** there sat Sarsachim, Rab-Saris, Nergal- Sarezer, Rab-Mag (Jer. 39:3), and Nebuchadnezzar and his hosts, and they judged Israel with harsh tortures and death sentences.

**there is wickedness** Heb. הָרָשַׁע. The accent mark is before the last syllable, indicating that it is a noun like הָרֶשַּׁע, but since it is the end of the verse, it is changed to be vowelized with a “kamatz,” although we do not find another instance of this word that changes in the case of an ethnachta or a sof pasuk.

**17 I said to myself, etc.** Therefore, I say: The Holy One, blessed be He, judges everyone after a time, and even though the matter is delayed, it will ultimately reach its time, for there is a time for every matter, even for retribution, and there is a time for the visitation of judgment.

**and for every deed** that man did, they will judge him there when the time of the visitation arrives; there at that time, a time is given for every deed, to be judged for it. [The Rabbis say:] At the gate of the fold there are words (of bargaining), but in the stall (where the sheep are delivered) there is strict accounting (Shab. 32a).

**18 I said to myself** when I saw all this.

**[that this is] because of the children of men** who adopted the trait of haughtiness, to exert rulership and superiority over those smaller than they.

**[so that God] should clarify for them** The Holy One, blessed be He [judges them], to let them know that their rulership is naught, and to show them and also the princes and the kings.

**that they are like beasts to themselves** like other cattle and beasts they are to themselves.

**19 For the happening of the children of men, etc.** This is the reason for the matter, that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave a fate and a mishap to the children of men, and there is a fate and a mishap to the beasts, and He gave one fate to them both, for just as this one dies, so does that one die.

**and the superiority of man over beast** And the superiority and success of man over the beasts is not apparent after he dies, for everything is converted to become vanity, to return to the dust.

**21 Who knows** Like (Joel 2:14): “Whoever knows shall repent.” Who is it who understands and puts his heart to [the fact] that the spirit of the children of men ascends above and stands in judgment, and the spirit of the beast descends below to the Earth, and does not have to give an accounting. Therefore, one must not behave like a beast, which does not care about its deeds.

**22 And I saw** in all of these.

**that there is nothing better** for man.

**than that man rejoice in his deeds** in the toil of his hands he should rejoice and eat, but not to widen his desire like the grave, to covet riches, to accumulate that which is not his.

**for that is his portion** The toil of his hands-that is his portion given him from Heaven, and with it he will rejoice.

**for who will bring him to see** after he dies, what his sons will have; if they too will prosper with the riches that he gathered and left over for them or whether they will not prosper.

# Chapter 4

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 But I returned and saw all the oppressed who are made [so] under the sun, and behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they have no consoler, and from the hand of their oppressors there is power, but they have no consoler. | 1 And I turned and saw all the oppressions which are done to the righteous in this world under the sun, from the hand of their oppressors; and there is none that should speak consolation to them; and there is none to deliver them from the hand of their oppressors with strong hand and power, and none comforts them. |
| 2 And I praise the dead who have already died, more than the living who are still alive. | 2 And I praised the dead who have long since died, and do not see the punishment which comes into the world after their death, more than the living, who live in this world in so much misery, till now. |
| 3 And better than both of them is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. | 3 And better than both of them is he who has not lived till now, and has not been created, who does not see the bad doings which are done in this work under the sun. |
| 4 And I saw all the toil and all the excellence of work, which is a man's envy of his friend; this too is vanity and frustration. | 4 And I saw all the trouble and every good work which the children of men do, to be nothing but jealousy, man emulating his neighbour, to do like him; he who emulates his neighbour to do good like him, the word of heaven will do him good; and if he emulate him in evil, to do like his badness, the word of heaven will do him evil; and also these things are vanity for the wicked, and breaking of spirit. |
| 5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. | 5 The fool goes and folds his hands in summer, and will not labour; and in winter eats all he has, even the garment from the skin of his flesh. |
| 6 Better is a handful of ease than two handfuls of toil and frustration. | 6 Better for a man one handful of food with comfort of soul, and without rapine and violence, than two handsful of eating with rapine and violence, which in future will be requited in the judgment in labour and breaking of spirit. |
| 7 And I returned and saw vanity under the sun. | 7 And I turned and saw the vanity which is destined to be in this world under the sun. |
| 8 There is one, and there is no second; yea, he has neither son nor brother, and there is no end to all his toil; neither is his eye sated from wealth. Now for whom do I toil and deprive my soul of pleasure? This too is vanity and an unhappy affair. | 8 There is a solitary man, and no second besides him, he has even no son nor brother to inherit his property, and there is no end to all his labour, and even his eye cannot be satisfied with his riches, and he does not say to his heart, “Why am I labouring and restraining my soul from good? I will arise now, and will do charity therefrom, and will be joyful in this world with the children of men, and with the righteous in the world to come;” this, too, is vanity, and an evil work. |
| 9 Two are better than one, since they have good reward for their toil. | 9 Better two righteous in a generation than one, and it is they who lead successfully, and cause their words to be heard; they have a good reward in the world to come for their labours which they laboured to sustain their generation. |
| 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his friend, but woe to the one who falls and has no second one to lift him up. | 10 For if one of them falls upon the bed and lies sick, the other will cause his friend to rise by his prayer; but if there is only one innocent man in a generation, if he falls upon the bed and lies sick, he has no companion in his generation to pray for him, yet shall he rise by his own merit from his sickness. |
| 11 Moreover, if two lie down, they will have warmth, but how will one have warmth? | 11 Also if two sleep together—a man and his wife, they will be warm in the winter; but one, how can he be warm? |
| 12 And if a man prevails against the one, the two will stand against him, and a three-stranded cord will not quickly be broken. | 12 And if a wicked and strong man rises in a generation, and his works are injurious, and cause punishments to come in the world, two righteous shall stand up against him, and abolish the punishment by their merits; and how much more useful are three righteous who are in a generation, and peace is among them, like a chain that is woven of three-fold cords, which does not easily break. |
| 13 Better a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who no longer knows to receive admonition. | 13 Better, i. e., Abraham who is the poor youth, and in whom was the spirit of prophecy from the Lord, and to whom the Lord was known when three years old, and who would not worship an idol—than the wicked Nimrod, who was an old and foolish king. And because Abraham would not worship an idol, he threw him into the burning furnace, and a miracle was performed for him from the Lord of the world, and he delivered him from it; and even after this, Nimrod had no sense to be admonished not to worship the idol which he worshipped before. |
| 14 For out of the prison he has come to reign, for even in his kingdom, he becomes humble. | 14 For Abraham went out from the family of idolaters, and reigned over the land of Canaan, for even in the reign of Abraham, Nimrod became poor in the world. |
| 15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun, with the second child who will rise in his stead. | 15 King Solomon said. By the spirit of prophecy from the Lord, I foresaw all the living who walk in their folly rebel against Rehoboam, my son, under heaven, and divide his kingdom to give it to Jeroboam, son of Nebat — except the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, whose heart was faithful with the boy, that is, Rehoboam my son, who, second in my kingdom, is to rise and reign in Jerusalem, the place of his inheritance. |
| 16 There is no end to all the people, to all that were before them; also the last ones will not rejoice with him, for this too is vanity and frustration. | 16 There was no end to all the house of Israel, to all the righteous before whom he ruled; but they advised him in their wisdom to lighten their yoke, and he in his folly went and took counsel with the youth, and they in their folly, advised him to make heavier the yoke of his kingdom upon the people of the house of Israel, and he left the advice of the aged, and followed the advice of the latter; but these latter ones were afterwards confounded and displeased with him, and they caused him to flee, so that the ten tribes should separate from him ; and the wicked Jeroboam ruled over them ; I said this too is vanity for Rehoboam my son, and breaking of spirit to him. |
| 17 Watch your feet when you go to the House of God, and be ready to obey rather than fools should give sacrifice, for they know not that they do evil. | 17 Thou son of man, guard thy feet when thou goest to the sanctuary of the Lord to pray, so that thou goest not there full of sin before thou has repented, and incline thine ear to receive the teaching of the Law from the priests and sages, and be not like fools, who bring sacrifices for their sins, and do not leave off their evil works which they hold in their hands, and they have no acceptance, for they know not whether they do good or evil therewith. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 4

**1 But I returned and saw** with the holy spirit.

**all the oppressed** who were made to be oppressed in Gehinnom for the deeds that are done.

**under the sun** instead of the exchange for Torah.

**and behold, the tears of the oppressed** weeping for their souls, which are oppressed in the hand of the destructive and cruel angels, and so it says (Ps. 84:7): “Transgressors in the valley of weeping make it into a fountain.” These are the ones who descend to Gehinnom (Mid. Ps. 84:3). And this verse too is expounded in this manner in Sifrei (Deut. 11:26).

**and from the hand of their oppressors there is power** Their oppressors overpower them and attack them with force.

**2 who have already died** before the evil inclination overwhelmed them to repel them from the Holy One, blessed be He, like the early Patriarchs, for Moses was not answered except through them, and like my father David, for I was not answered with twenty-four praises until I said, (II Chron. 6:42): “Remember the kind deeds of David Your servant.”

**3 yet** Heb. עֲדֶן, [like] עֲדַיִן.

**who has not seen** I saw in Midrash Koheleth (Zuta pp. 117, 125): These are the 974 generations that were decreed to be created, but were not created.

**4 And I saw all the toil** These are the sins, which are toil in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He.

**and all the excellence of work** which is not for the sake of Heaven, but for one’s envy of his friend, both of which are vanity.

**which is a man’s envy** [as translated,] which is a man’s envy of his friend.

**5 The fool** The wicked man folds his hands and does not toil, and he does not eat except from robbery.

**and eats his own flesh** on the Day of Judgment, when he sees righteous men experiencing honor, while he is being judged. It is explained in this manner in Sifrei (Deut. 11:26).

**6 Better is a handful of ease** to acquire few possessions, but with his toil, so that his Creator should have satisfaction therefrom.

**than two handfuls** many possessions through sin, which is toil and grief to the Omnipresent.

**7 under the sun** like, “under the heaven.”

**8 There is one, and there is no second** There is a man who does his work alone.

**yea, he has neither son nor brother** If he is a Torah scholar, he does not acquire for himself a disciple, who is like a son, or a companion, who is like a brother. And if he is a bachelor, he does not take a wife, to be to him like a brother, and to beget a son. And if he is a merchant, he does not acquire partners for himself, but he goes out on the way alone.

**and there is no end to all his toil** He toils in study, and if he is a merchant, he toils with merchandise.

**neither is his eye sated from wealth** He will not be sated from the insights of Torah, for a person learns much Torah from his pupils, and regarding money, he constantly pursues money.

**Now for whom do I toil** since I do not raise disciples, and I do not take a wife to beget children?

**9 Two are better** in all respects.

**than one** Therefore, a person should acquire for himself a companion and take his wife, for they have more profit in their toil. Much work is done by two, which the individual does not begin alone.

**10 For if they fall** [To be explained] according to its apparent meaning. And regarding studies, if his studies were too difficult for him, his companion will restore them to him, or if he stumbles and was not exact in what he heard from his mentor, his companion will set him on the truthful course.

**but woe** Heb. וְאִילוּ, but woe is to him.

**11 they will have warmth** according to its apparent meaning, and regarding male and female, they are aroused by one another and reproduce.

**12 And if a man prevails against the one** If bandits came upon him to prevail against him, if they are two, they will stand against him, and surely, if they are three, for a three-stranded cord will not easily be broken. Another explanation: Whoever is a Torah scholar, as well as his son and his grandson, the Torah will never cease from his seed, and so Scripture states (Isa. 59:21): “shall not move from your mouth or from the mouth of your seed or from the mouth of your seed’s seed.” Another explanation:

**and a three-stranded cord** in Bible, Mishnah, and good manners-will not quickly sin. “There is one, and there is no second,” is expounded in the Midrash in other ways, but the sequence of all these verses does not fit in with them.

**13 Better a poor and wise child** This is the good inclination, and why is it called a child? Because it does not enter man until thirteen years.

**poor** because the limbs do not obey it, as [they do] the evil inclination.

**wise** which gives a person intelligence to [follow] the good way.

**than an old and foolish king** the evil inclination, which rules over all the limbs.

**old** for when the child is born, it is put into him, as it is said (Gen. 4:7): “sin lies at the opening.”

**and foolish** for it misleads him in the way of evil. In this manner, it is interpreted in the Midrash (Ecc. Rabbah).

**who no longer knows to receive admonition** for he has become old and does not accept reproof.

**14 For out of the prison he has come to reign** Heb. הָסוּרִים; from the place of filth and stench, as we translate: (Exod. 16:29) וַיִבְאַשּׁ, (and it became putrid) as וּסְרִי.

**for even in his kingdom** Since he reigned over man, the poor one was born; the poor one, who was better than he, and who came out of purity, not out of the filth of the womb. So did our Rabbis interpret it in the Midrash. [See Ecc. Rabbah.] Another explanation:

**Better a poor and wise child, etc.** according to its apparent meaning.

**who no longer knows to receive admonition** for he has already aged in his wickedness and foolishness.

**For out of the prison he has come to reign** For the poor child-it will ultimately be said about him that he came to reign from the midst of his affliction and from the place of his imprisonment, for the “sammech” of הָסוּרִים is punctuated without a “dagesh,” which is equivalent to הָאֲסוּרִים. [Some editions: like (Isa. 13:20): “and no Arab shall pitch his tent (יַהֵל) there, like יֶאֶהַל], for so we found that Joseph reigned following his being freed from prison, and so David, (II Sam. 7:8):” I took you from the sheepcote, from following the sheep."

**for even in his kingdom he becomes humble** For it is fitting and proper that he should reign, because even in his kingdom, he changed from the custom of the ruling class and he humbled himself to the sages, like the custom of the poor. And so (Job 11:12): “and [from] a wild donkey a man will be born (יִוָלֵד),” that he will be changed and converted from what he was, resembling a wild donkey, and he will become a man. נוֹלַד means “becomes,” and it is in the present tense.

**15 I saw all the living, etc.** I found in the Midrash of this Book (Ecc. Zuta): This refers to the Generation of the Flood, about which it says (Gen. 6:19): “And of every living thing.”

**with the second child** who will exist instead of that generation, who were Noah and his sons.

**16 There is no end to all the people** They were fruitful and multiplied too much, as it is said (Job 21:8): “Their children are well established in their sight.” A woman would conceive and bear in three days; (ibid. verse 11): “They send forth their infants like sheep.”

**to all that were before them** There was no end to all the good that was before them, but all was lost, and in a moment descended to the grave.

**also the last ones** the Generation of the Dispersion.

**will not rejoice** with the good that was given into their hands.

**for this too** Its end is that of vanity and frustration, when one follows his evil inclination.

**17 Watch your feet when you go the House of God** [Watch] how you go: if you bring a thanksgiving offering or a voluntary peace offering, that is good, but watch yourself that you should not have to bring sin offerings or guilt offerings.

**and be ready** Be ready to obey the words of the Holy One, blessed be He.

**rather than fools should give sacrifice** that he should sin and bring a sacrifice.

**for they know not that they do evil** The fool does not realize that he is doing harm to himself.

# Chapter 5

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 Be not rash with your mouth, and let your heart not be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you are on the Earth; therefore, let your words be few. | 1 Do not hurry on thy language so as to make a mistake in the words of thy mouth, and let not thy heart make a vow, resolving to do something at the time when thou prayest before the Lord, for the Lord rules over all the world, and sits upon the throne of glory in the high heavens, and thou sittest on earth, therefore let the words of thy mouth be few. |
| 2 For a dream comes with much concern, and the voice of the fool with many words. | 2 For as a dream comes through the thoughts of the heart engaged in a multitude of business, so the noise of the fool through the multitude of empty words. |
| 3 When you pronounce a vow to God, do not delay to pay, for He has no pleasure in fools; that which you vow, pay. | 3 When thou vowest a vow before the Lord, do not defer to pay it, for the Lord hath no pleasure in fools, because they defer their vows and do not pay, but thou, whatsoever thou vowest, pay. |
| 4 It is better that you vow not, than that you vow and do not pay it. | 4 It is better for thee that thou vowest not, than that thou vowest and pay not. |
| 5 Do not allow your mouth to cause sin to your flesh, and say not before the messenger that it is an error; why should God be wroth with your voice and destroy the work of your hands? | 5 Do not degrade the words of thy mouth to cause judgments of Gehenna upon thy flesh; and in the day of the great judgment thou wilt not be able to say before the avenging angel who exercises dominion over thee, that it is an error; why then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against the voice of thy shamefully uttered language, and destroy the works of thine hand? |
| 6 For despite many dreams and vanities and many words, only fear God. | 6 For in the multitude of the dreams of the false prophets, and in the vanities of sorcerers, and in the many words of the wicked, believe not, but serve the wise and the just; from them seek instruction, and fear before the Lord. |
| 7 If you see oppression of the poor and deprivation of justice and righteousness in the province, wonder not about the matter, for the Highest over the high waits, and there are higher ones over them. | 7 When thouseest the oppression of the poor, robbery, and justice in the city, be not astonished in thy heart, saying, How can the will of the Lord be with all this? for the mighty God from on high watches the works of the children of men, whether good or evil, and from his presence are sent forth proud and powerful men to rule over the wicked, and to be appointed masters over them. |
| 8 And the loftiness of the Earth is in everything; even the King is subservient to the field. | 8 And the great advantage of cultivating the land is above all, for when the subjects of a country revolt, and the king flies from them into the country, if he has no more to eat, this very king becomes subject to a labourer in the field. |
| 9 Whoever loves silver will not be sated with silver, and he who loves a multitude without increase-this too is vanity. | 9 A merchant who loves to acquire money, and men of business, shall not be satisfied in amassing money ; and he who loves to heap up great mammon, has no praise in the world to come, unless he has done charity with it, because he has not deserved to eat fruit; this, too, is vanity. |
| 10 With the increase of good, its eaters increase, and what is the advantage to its Master, except seeing [with] His eyes? | 10 When good is multiplied in the world, the children of men who eat it are also multiplied; and what advantage is there to the owner who gathers it unless he does good with it, that he may see in the world to come the reward given with his eyes. |
| 11 The sleep of the laborer is sweet, whether he eat little or much, but the satiety of the rich does not allow him to sleep. | 11 Sweet is the sleep of a man who serves the Lord of the world with all his heart; and he has rest in his grave, whether he lives few years or many years; after having served the Lord of the world in this world, he will inherit in the world to come a reward for the works of his hand. And the wisdom of the Law of God belongs to the man who is rich in wisdom; in the same manner as he occupies himself with it in this world, and exerts himself in learning, so will it rest with him in the grave, and not leave him alone; just as a woman does not leave her husband to sleep alone. |
| 12 There is a grievous evil that I saw under the sun; riches kept by their owner for his harm. | 12 There is a sore evil which I saw in this world under the sun, and there is no remedy for it; a man who gathers riches and does no good with them, and at the end of days these riches are kept for him for his condemnation in the world to come. |
| 13 And those riches are lost through an evil design, and he will beget a son who will have nothing in his hand. | 13 And the riches,which he leaves to his son after his death, shall perish, because he got them in an evil employment, and they shall not abide in the hand of the son whom he has begotten, and nothing whatever shall remain in his hand. |
| 14 As he left his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and he will carry nothing with his toil, that he will take in his hand. | 14 As he came out of his mother's womb naked, without a covering, and without any good, so shall he return to his grave, void of merit, just as he came into this world; and he shall receive no good reward whatever for his labour, to carry with him into the world whither he goes, to be a merit in his hand. |
| 15 And this too is a grievous evil, that just as it came so shall it go, and what advantage does he have that he toil for the wind? | 15 And this also is a sore evil, and there is no remedy for it, as he came into this world void of merit, so he shall depart into that world; and what advantage has he that he labored for his spirit? |
| 16 Also all his days he eats in the dark, and he has much vexation and sickness and wrath. | 16 Also all his days he dwells iu darkness, that he may eat his bread alone, and he sees in much indignation, and his life is in sickness and vexation. |
| 17 Behold what I saw; it is good, yea, it is beautiful, to eat and drink and to experience goodness with all his toil that he toils under the sun, the number of the days of his life that God gave him, for that is his portion. | 17 And behold that which I have seen good for the children of men, and that which is comely for them to do in this world, that they eat and drink from their labours, in order not to put forth the hand to oppression and rapine, and to keep the words of the law, and to have compassion on the poor, so that they may see good in all their labours wherewith they labour in this world under the sun, the number of the days of a man's life, which God in his providence gives to him; for this is his portion, and none's beside him. |
| 18Also every man whom God has given riches and property and has given him power to eat thereof and to take his portion and to rejoice with his toil; that is a gift of God. | Also every man to whom the Lord has given riches and wealth, and if the Lord gave him power to eat of it in this world, and to do good with it, and to receive a full reward iu the world to come, and to rejoice in his work with the righteous, behold! this is a gift which is given to him in providence, it is from the Lord. |
| 19For let him remember that the days of his life are not many, for God is testimony of the joy of his heart. | For not many are the days of man's life; who tries to find out the days of his life, how many of them will be good, and how many of them will be evil? because it is not in the power of the children of men; but it is fixed about him from the Lord, how many days he shall suffer, and how many days he shall be in the joy of his heart. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 5

**1 utter a word before God** to speak harshly against Heaven.

**for God is in heaven, and you are on the Earth** And even if a weak one is above, and a mighty one is below, the fear of the weak one is upon the mighty one, and all the more so if a mighty one is above and a weak one is below!

**For a dream comes with much concern** For it is usual for a dream to come because of the many thoughts upon which a person ponders and thinks during the day, and it is usual for the voice of a fool to come with many words, because by increasing his words, he utters a voice of foolishness from his mouth, for [from talking too much] transgression is inevitable; therefore, I say that your words should be few.

**3 He has no pleasure in fools** The Holy One, blessed be He, has no pleasure in the wicked who vow and do not pay.

**5 Do not allow your mouth** with a vow.

**to cause sin to your flesh** that He should visit the iniquity on your children.

**and say not before the messenger** the messenger who comes to demand of you the charity that you pledged in public.

**that it is an error** By error, I pledged it. I thought that I would have the ability to give.

**and destroy the work of your hands** The commandments that were in your hands, that you have already performed, you have lost. It is interpreted in this manner in the Midrash (Ecc. Rabbah).

**with your voice** because of your voice.

**6 For despite many dreams, etc.** for [despite all that,] dreams, false prophets, and many words tell you, to part with the Omnipresent.

**only fear God** כִּי serves as an expression of “but.” Do not obey the dreams, but fear God.

**7 If you see oppression of the poor and deprivation of justice and righteousness, etc.** If you see in the province that they oppress the poor and deprive [them of] justice and righteousness.

**wonder not** about the will of the Omnipresent, when He brings evil upon them.

**for the Highest over the high waits** and sees their deeds, and there are higher ones [i.e., angels] over them who perform the agency of the Omnipresent, and they have a strong hand to punish them.

**and deprivation of justice** Heb. וְגֵזֶל מִשְּׁפָּט, deprivation of justice. Since it is in the construct state, it is vowelized גֶזֶל, with a small “pattah” (seggol), for were it not in the construct state, it would be vowelized גָזֵל with a “kamatz.” Another explanation: If you see that they oppress the poor and deprive them of justice, and you see charity coming to the city, that the Holy One, blessed be He, lavishes goodness upon them and does not mete retribution upon them, do not wonder about the will of the Omnipresent, for so is His custom, to be slow to anger.

**for the Highest over the high waits** He waits until their measure is full.

**and… higher ones** He has over them to recompense them when the time of their visitation arrives, like (Job 14:15): “You do not wait (תִשְּׁמוֹר) for my sin;” (Isa. 26:2): “awaiting (שֹּׁמֵר) the realization;” (Gen. 37:11): “awaited (שָּׁמַר) the matter.”

**8 And the loftiness of the Earth is in everything** and the loftiness of the dwellers of the Earth, who are haughty and provoke the Omnipresent.

**is in everything** In everything, he performs His agency to recompense them, even through mosquitoes, as He did to Titus.

**even the King is subservient to the field** The Holy One, blessed be He, became subservient to Zion, to demand [the punishment for] their mistreatment from her destroyers and to pay her reward to her builders.

**9 Whoever loves silver will not be sated with silver** Whoever loves the commandments will not be sated with them.

**and he who loves a multitude** of many commandments.

**without increase** and none of them has a specific and recognizable commandment, such as the building of the Temple or a synagogue, or a beautiful Sepher Torah.

**this too is vanity** So are these two verses expounded upon in the Midrash, and there are other suitable interpretations, but I stated this one first because it is related to the matter of (verse 7): “and there are higher ones over them,” which Scripture juxtaposed to them. Another explanation:

**And the loftiness of the earth is over everything** The reward for tilling the soil is esteemed over everything, for even the king must be subservient to the field; if the earth produced fruits, he will eat, but if not, he dies from hunger.

**Whoever loves silver will not be sated with silver** He will not eat money, and he who loves a multitude-of money…

**without grain** that he does not gather for himself produce-this too is vanity. Another explanation:

**And the loftiness of the land is in everything** The reward of Israel is in all words of Torah, both in Scripture, in Mishnah, and in Gemara.

**the king is subservient to the field** If he is [well-versed] in Scripture and in Mishnah, he must still be subservient to the one well-versed in Gemara, because he arranges before him the practical decisions of prohibition and permissibility, uncleanness and cleanness, and laws of jurisprudence.

**Whoever loves silver** Whoever loves Torah, will not be sated with it.

**and he who loves a multitude** of Torah.

**without grain** [He] who has [knowledge of] Scripture and Mishnah, but has no [knowledge of] Gemara, what use does he have? All these are in Leviticus Rabbah (23:13).

**10 With the increase of good** when the Israelites improve their deeds.

**its eaters increase** the giving of the reward for the commandments.

**and what is the advantage to its Master** to the Holy One, blessed be He, with all the improvement of their deeds.

**except seeing [with] His eyes** that He sees that they are subservient to Him, and He has satisfaction [from the fact] that He commanded [lit. He said] and His will was done, and so [it is] concerning the sacrifices.

**With the increase of good its eaters increase** When they bring many freewill offerings, the priests who eat it increase.

**and what is the advantage to its Master** to the Holy One, blessed be He.

**except what He sees [with] His eyes** that He commanded, and His will was done.

**11 The sleep of the laborer is sweet** The one who tills the soil sleeps, and he enjoys his sleep, whether he eats little or whether he eats much, for he is already accustomed to it.

**but the satiety of the rich does not allow him to sleep** But the satiety of belongings of the rich man, who owns much merchandise, does not allow him to sleep; all night he thinks about them. Another explanation: The year of the one who serves God is sweet; whether the days of his years are few or many, he will eat his reward-the one who had few years like the one who had many years. Moses led Israel forty years, and the prophet Samuel led them ten years, yet Scripture equated them, this one like that one, as it is said (Ps. 99.6): “Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among those who call in His name, etc.” So is it expounded upon in Tanhuma (Ki Thissa 3).

**but the satiety of the rich** the one who has taught many traditions.

**does not allow him to sleep** in the grave, as it is said (Song 7:10): “making the lips of the sleeping speak.” Every Torah scholar, in whose name a traditional law is recited-his lips speak in the grave.

**12 riches kept by their owner for his harm** like the riches of Korah, because of which he became haughty and descended into the grave.

**13 who will have nothing in his hand** not even the merit of his fathers.

**14 and he will carry nothing with his toil** When he dies, he will not take in his hand any merit of charity that he did with his money during his lifetime.

**15 just as it came** that money, so will it go.

**16 and sickness** Heb. וְחָלְיוֹ, like וְחֹלִי, and the “vav” is superfluous, like the “vav” of (Ps. 104:20): “beast (חֳיְתוֹ) of the forest.”

**17 to eat and drink and to experience goodness** to engage in the Torah, which is a good doctrine; and he should not accumulate much wealth, but he should rejoice with the portion given him, for that is his portion.

**18 and has given him power to eat thereof** during his lifetime.

**and to take his portion** in his death, that He should enable him to engage in the Torah and in the commandments during his lifetime, so that he should receive reward.

**19 are not many** for there is no longevity in this world.

**For let him remember that the days of his life** for they are few and not many; so why should he toil to accumulate wealth? Let him toil in his lifetime with a thing that endures for him in the World to Come.

**for God is testimony, etc.** The Holy One, blessed be He, [testifies] a constant testimony about this forever.

**of the joy of his heart** that he rejoiced to do good in his lifetime, and I saw in the Midrash (Ecc. Rabbah): This refers to Elkanah, who led Israel up to Shiloh on the festivals, and on the way that he brought them up on one year he did not bring them up the following year, in order to publicize the matter and to accustom them [to perform the pilgrimage]. Therefore, Scripture praises him (I Sam. 1:3): “And that man was wont to go up from his city, etc.” I believe [lit., I say] that this Midrash is [based on] the end of the verse: “for God is testimony of the joy of his heart.” This is Elkanah, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, established in the Scriptures, and testified about him: “And that man was wont to go up from his city.”

**testimony** Heb. מַעֲנֶה. This is vowelized with a “pattah kattan” (seggol). Therefore, I explain it as a noun, like (Job 32:5): “for there was no answer (מַעֲנֶה) in the mouth of the three men.”

**of the joy of his heart** that he was happy on the festival.

# Chapter 6

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it is prevalent among men. | 1 There is an evil which I saw in this world under the sun, and it is great upon the children of man. |
| 2 A man whom God gives riches and property and honor, and his soul lacks nothing of all he desires, and God gives him no power to eat of it, but a strange man eats it; this is vanity and a grievous sickness. | 2 A man to whom God gave in his providence riches, honour, and wealth, and his soul lacks nothing of all which he desires, and the Lord has not given him power, on account of his sins, to enjoy it; but he dies without issue, and his kinsman would not take possession of his inheritance, wherefore his wife will be married to a stranger, and he will take away the inheritance and consume it; all this his sins have brought upon him, because he did therewith no good whatever, and his riches turned out to be to him vanity and a sore evil. |
| 3 Should a man beget one hundred [children] and live many years, and he will have much throughout the days of his years, but his soul will not be sated from all the good, neither did he have burial. I said that the stillborn is better than he. | 3 If a man should beget a hundred children, and live many years, and be in power and dominion all the days of his life, and his soul has not enjoyed the good which he has, because he loved his riches, and has not acquired therewith a good name, nor even prepared himself a grave, I say by the divine word, better than he an untimely birth, which has not seen this world. |
| 4 For he comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness his name is covered. | 4 For in vanity he came into this world, and departs in darkness into that world; and in darkness is his name covered, because he has no merit, and has not acquired a good name worthy of remembrance. |
| 5 Moreover, he did not see the sun nor did he know [it]; this one has more gratification than that one. | 5 And even the light of the sun he saw not, and did not know good from evil, to discern between this world and the world to come. |
| 6 And if he had lived a thousand years twice and experienced no pleasure, do not all go to one place? | 6 And if the days of the life of this man were two thousand years, and he had not studied the Law, and had not done judgment and justice by the oath of the word of the Lord, in the day of his death his soul will go to Gehenna, to the same place whither all sinners go. |
| 7 All of a person's toil is for his mouth, and is the appetite not yet sated? | 7 As for all the labours of man, he labours for the food of his mouth; and by the word of the mouth of the Lord he is sustained, and even the soul of man is not satisfied with eating and drinking. |
| 8 For what is the advantage of the wise over the fool? What [less] has the poor man who knows how to go along with the living? | 8 For what advantage has the wise man in this world over the fool, because of the wicked generation by which he is not accepted; and what is this poor man to do but to study the law of the Lord, that he may know how he will have to walk in the presence of the righteous in paradise. |
| 9 Better is what he sees with his eyes than that which goes to sate his appetite; this too is vanity and frustration. | 9 It is better for a man to rejoice about the world to come, and to do righteousness, and to see a good reward for his labours in the day of the great judgment than to go into that world with an afflicted soul; for this is vanity, and a breaking of spirit to a guilty man. |
| 10 What was, its name was already called, and it is known that he is a man, and he will not be able to strive with him who is stronger than he. | 10 That which has been in the world, behold! its name has long been called, and has been made known to the children of men from the day that the first Adam existed, and all is the decree of the Lord; and men cannot stand in judgment with the Lord of the world, who is stronger than he. |
| 11 For there are many things that increase vanity; what will remain for a man? | 11 For there are many things which multiply vanity in the world, what advantage has the man who is occupied with them? |
| 12 For who knows what is good for man in his lifetime, the number of the days of his life of vanity, that he do them like a shadow, for who will tell man what will be after him under the sun? | 12 For who is he that knows what will do men good in this world, but to study the Law, which is the life of the world; and all the number of the days of his vain life which he lives, are in the time of his death considered like a shadow; for who is he that can tell man what there is before him in this world under the sun? |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 6

**1 and it is prevalent among men** It affects many men.

**2 riches and property** According to its simple explanation, it should be interpreted as its apparent meaning.

**and God gives him no power to eat of it** that he should rejoice in his portion to find satisfaction in his riches, for he strives to oppress and to accumulate much wealth, as it is said (Hab. 2:5): “and he is like death and shall never be sated,” and God will also not give him power to perform charity, to eat therefrom in the future, but a strange man will take that money and perform charity with it and derive benefit therefrom. The Midrash Aggadah (Ecc. Rabbah, Yerushalmi Horayoth 3:5) [explains it as referring] to words of Torah.

**riches and property and honor** Bible, Mishnah, and Aggadah.

**gives him no power** Since he did not achieve [knowledge of] Gemara, he consequently has no benefit therefrom in any practical instruction.

**but a strange man eats it** This is the one versed in Gemara.

**3 Should a man beget one hundred** children.

**and he will have much throughout the days of his years** (and much property and all goodness the days of his life). וְרַב is an expression of sufficiency, a sufficient degree of all goodness.

**and his soul will not be sated** from that good, for he is not happy with his portion, to be satisfied with what is in his hand.

**neither did he have burial** Sometimes he is slain, and dogs consume him. Now all these things were found in Ahab: he begot many sons, and he had much property, but he coveted the property of others and did not find satisfaction with his money, and dogs devoured him.

**neither did he have burial** Sometimes he is slain, and dogs consume him. Now all these things were found in Ahab: he begot many sons, and he had much property, but he coveted the property of others and did not find satisfaction with his money, and dogs devoured him.

**6 And if he had lived** And if he had lived two thousand years, what advantage would he have, since he did not experience any pleasure? Will he not ultimately return to the dust like all the poor people?

**7 All of a person’s toil** is for his mouth, that he should derive benefit and eat in this world and in the next, but this one derived no benefit in his lifetime.

**and is the appetite not yet sated** This is a question. But this one-did he not even gratify his desire with a small pleasure? [This is] like (Exod. 15:9): “My lust shall be satisfied upon them (תִּמְלָאֵמוֹ נַפְשִׁי),” an expression of attaining a desire, and since this is so.

**8 For what is the advantage** [i.e., what advantage] did he have with his wisdom, more than if he were a fool?

**What has the poor man** a disadvantage over the rich man who has no satisfaction? He too knows how to go along with the living. Another explanation:

**yet the appetite is not sated** for the World to Come, for he did not perform good deeds in his lifetime.

**9 Better is what he sees with his eyes than that which goes to sate his appetite** It would have been better and more proper for this person to see his riches with the vision of his eyes, than food and drink, which go into his body. Another explanation: עֵינַיִם מֵהֲלָךְ נָפֶשׁ טוֹב מַרְאֵה This person prefers and it seems better and more proper for him to follow his eyes, to rob and to oppress, rather than the course of his soul, that he did not put his mind [to realize] where his soul will go when he dies.

**this too is vanity** It is what is given to the wicked.

**10 What was, its name was already called** the esteem and greatness that he had during his lifetime. Its name was already called, i.e., it already was and passed. He already had a name in his office, and now it has passed, and it was made known that he was a man and not God, and his end was that he died, and he will not be able to strive with the angel of death, who is stronger than he.

**11 For there are many things** with which he occupied himself during his lifetime, such as the games of the kings: monkeys, elephants and lions. They increased vanity for him, and what will remain for him after he dies?

**12 For who knows** For who knows good deeds and what man should do during his life, so that it should be good for him in the everlasting world?

**the number of the days of his life of vanity** which are few in number.

**that he do them** those deeds, in the short time that he lives, for this time is as short as the shadow of a passing bird, and although Solomon said, “like a shadow,” in general, and did not specify whether the shadow of a palm tree, or the shadow of a wall, which are permanent, his father David had already specified (Ps. 144:4): “his days are as a fleeting shadow.” This is the shadow of a flying bird. It is interpreted in this manner in the Midrash (Ecc. Rabbah).

**for who will tell man** how the wealth that he gathered from oppression will remain for his sons after him under the sun?

# Chapter 7

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 A [good] name is better than good oil, and the day of death than the day of one's birth. | 1 Better the good name which the righteous acquire in this world, than the anointing oil which was poured upon the heads of kings and priests; and the day wherein a man dies and departs to the grave with a good name and merits, than the day wherein the wicked is born into the world. |
| 2 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 man, and the living shall lay it to his heart. | 2 It is better to go to a mourning man to comfort him, than to go to the house of a feast of wine of the scorners; for into the house of mourning thither is the end of all men to go, for upon all is decreed the decree of death, and by going into the house of mourning the righteous man sits down and takes to heart the words of death; and if there be any evil in his hand he will leave it, and return in repentance before the Lord of the world. |
| 3 Vexation is better than laughter, for with a stern countenance the heart will rejoice. | 3 Better is the anger wherewith the Lord of the world is angry with the righteous in this world, than the laughter wherewith he laughs at the wicked; for by the displeasure of the face of the Shechinah come famine and punishment into the world to improve the heart of the righteous, and they pray before the Lord of the world, who has mercy upon them. |
| 4 The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, whereas the heart of the fools is in a house of joy. | 4 The heart of the wise mourns over the destruction of tlie temple, and grieves over the captivity of the house of Israel; and the heart of fools is in the joy of the house of their scoffings; they eat and drink and fare sumptuously, and do not take to heart the affliction of their brethren. |
| 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of a wise man than for a man to hear the song of the fools. | 5 Better to sit at the teaching of the house of instruction, and to hear the reproof of the wise in the Law, than for a man to go to hear the sound of a musical instrument of a fool. |
| 6 For as the sound of the thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of the fool, and this too is vanity. | 6 For as the sound of the crackling of thorns which burn under a pot, so is the noisy laughter of the fool; this also is vanity. |
| 7 For the taunt makes the wise foolish, and it destroys the understanding, which is a gift. | 7 For the robber mocks at the wise man because he goes not in his way, and destroys with his evil speech the prudent heart of the wise, which was given to him as a gift from heaven. |
| 8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning; better the patient in spirit than the haughty in spirit. | 8 Better the end of a thing than the beginning thereof, for in its beginning man knows not what its end will be, but the end of a good thing is known to a good man; and better before the Lord is a man who rules over his spirit and subdues his carnal thouglits, than a man who walks in the pride of his spirit. |
| 9 Be not hasty with your spirit to become wroth, for wrath lies in the bosom of fools. | 9 And when chastisements from heaven come upon thee, do not hasten thy heart to anger, and to utter words of rebellion against heaven, for if thou bearest them patiently, they will depart from thee; and if thou art rebellious and angry, know that anger rests in the lap of fools till it has destroyed them. |
| 10 Do not say, "How was it that the former days were better than these?" For not out of wisdom have you asked concerning this. | 10 In the time of oppression, say not what was before now was good in the world; for the former days were better, and the men of that generation had better doings than these, therefore good came to them; and thou askest not according to wisdom about this. |
| 11 Wisdom is good with a heritage, and it is a profit to those who see the sun. | 11 Good is the wisdom of the law, along with the inheritance of money, and better still for a man to humbly conduct himself with men, the dwellers of the earth, who see good and evil under the sun in this world. |
| 12 For whoever is in the shade of wisdom is in the shade of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to its possessor. | 12 For as a man is sheltered under the shadow of wisdom, so he is sheltered under the shadow of money, when he does alms with it; and the advantage of knowing the wisdom of the law is that it raises its possessor from the grave for the world to come. |
| 13 See God's work, for who can straighten out what He made crooked? | 13 Consider the work of the Lord, and his strength, who made the blind, the hunchback, and the lame, to be wonders in the world; for who is he that can make straight one of these, but the Lord of the world who made him crooked ? |
| 14 On a day of good, be among the good, and on a day of adversity, ponder; God has made one corresponding to the other, to the end that man will find nothing after Him. | 14 In the day when the Lord is doing good, be thou also happy and do good to all the world; that the evil day may not come upon thee, see and behold! and also God has made this against that to reprove the men of the world, so that man should not find after him any evil in the world to come. |
| 15 I have seen everything in the days of my vanity; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his wickedness. | 15 All this I saw in the days of my vanity, that from the Lord are decreed good and evil to be in the world, according to the planets under which the children of men are created; for there is a righteous man perishing in his righteousness in this world, and his merit is kept for him for the world to come; and there is a wicked man who prolongs his days in his guilt, and the account of his evil doings is kept for him for the world to come, to be requited for it in the day of the great judgment. |
| 16 Be not overly righteous, and be not overly wise; why should you bring desolation upon yourself? | 16 Be not over-righteous when the guilty is found guilty of death in thy court of judgment, so as to have compassion on him and not to kill him; and do not thus become over-wise with the wisdom of the wicked who stand in the way, and do not learn their ways; why, then, wilt thou destroy thy way? |
| 17 Be not overly wicked, and be not a fool; why should you die before your time? | 17 Go not after the thought of thy heart to sin much, and do not make thy way far from the teaching of the law of God to become a fool; why shouldst thou cause death to thy soul, and the years of thy life be shortened to die, before thy time comes to die? |
| 18 It is good that you should take hold of this, and also from this you shall not withdraw your hand, for he who fears God will discharge himself of them all. | 18 It is good thou shouldst combine the affairs of this world, namely, to do good to thyself in the way of merchants, and also that thou hold fast thy portion in the Book of the Law, for a man fearing before the Lord performs the duty of both. |
| 19 Wisdom affords strength to the wise more than ten rulers who were in the city. | 19 And the wisdom of Joseph, son of Jacob, helped him to make him wise before his ten righteous brethren, who ruled in the fear of the Lord; and the evil spirit did not rule in them when they were in the metropolis of Egypt, and did not kill their brother Joseph who annoyed them at that time with the voice of his words. |
| 20 For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and sins not. | 20 For there is no righteous man in the land, who does good all his days, and sins not before the Lord; but the man who sins before the Lord, it behoves him to return in repentance before he dies. |
| 21 Also, take no heed of all the words that they speak, lest you hear your servant curse you. | 21 Moreover give not thy heart to accept all the words which the wicked speak to thee, that the days may not come when thou shalt hear thy servant curse thee, aud thou hast not the power to be delivered from his hands. |
| 22 For your heart knows that many times you too cursed others. | 22 Then see to it, adjudicate thy cause when a man curses thee who is not like thyself; for also many times thy heart knows that thou too hast cursed other men. |
| 23 All this I tested with wisdom; I said, "I will become wise," but it was far from me. | 23 All that I said f have tried by wisdom: I said by my word, I shall also be wise in all the wisdom of the Law, but it was far from me. |
| 24 What was is far off, and [it is] very deep, who can find it? | 24 Behold, long has it been far from the children of men to know all that has been from the days of old; and who is he that will find out by his wisdom the secret of the day of death, and the secret of the day when the King Messiah will come? |
| 25 I turned about with my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness and madness. | 25 I turned to think in my heart, and to know and to examine and to seek wisdom, and the estimate of the reward of the works of the righteous, and to know the punishment of the guilt of the fool, and the understanding of the fear of the Kingdom. |
| 26 And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, her hands are bonds; whoever is good in God's sight will escape from her, and a sinner will be taken by her. | 26 And I found a thing more bitter to man than the bitterness of the day of death, namely, a woman who causes much tribulation to her husband, and entangles him; in whose heart are snares, and whose hands are bound that she might not work with them; the righteous before God is the man who gets rid of her by a bill of divorcement, and relieves himself of her; but the guilty before God is the man who abides with her, and is ensnared with her adultery. |
| 27 See, this I have found, said Koheleth, adding one to another to find out the account. | 27 Behold,thisis the work which I have found, said Coheleth, who is called Solomon, King of Israel, I have examined the planets one in connection with the other, to find out the account of the children of men, what will be in their end. |
| 28 Which my soul sought yet, but I did not find; one man out of a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I did not find. | 28 There is another thing which my soul is still seeking, and I have not found, namely, a perfect and just man, without any corruption, as Abraham; from the days of the first Adam till the righteous Abraham was born, who was found faithful and just among the thousand kings that gathered together to build the tower of Babel? and a woman, as Sarah, among all the wives of those kings, I have not found. |
| 29 See, only this one have I found, for God made man straight, but they sought many intrigues. | 29 Only, behold! this I found, that God made the first Adam upright before him and just; and the serpent and Eve seduced him to eat of the fruit of the tree, because those who eat its fruit would be wise to discern between good and evil, and they brought upon him and all the inhabitants of the earth the day of death; and they sought to find many accounts in order to bring terror upon the inhabitants of the earth. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 7

**1 A [good] name is better than good oil** A good name is better for a person than good oil, and on the day of death the name is better than on the day of his birth. For this reason, a good name is compared to good oil more than to other liquids, for oil-you put water into it, and it floats and rises, and is recognizable, but other liquids-you put water into them, and they absorb it.

**A [good] name is better than good oil** Good oil runs down, as it is said: (Ps. 133:2): “As the good oil on the head runs down upon the beard.” A good name, however, goes up, as it is said: (Gen. 12:2): “and I will make your name great.” Good oil is temporary, but a good name is eternal, as it is said: (Ps. 72:17): “May his name be forever.” Good oil flows from the flask to the palace, and no more, but a good name goes to the end of the world. Said Rabbi Judah the son of Rabbi Simon: We find that those who had good oil entered the place of life and emerged burnt up. These are Nadab and Abihu, who were anointed with the anointing oil. And we find those who possessed a good name, who entered a place of death and emerged alive, viz. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who emerged from the fiery furnace.

**and the day of death than the day of one’s birth** When Miriam was born, no one knew what she was. When she died, however, the well disappeared, and so [it was with] Aaron with the pillar of cloud and Moses with the manna.

**2 It is better to go to a house of mourning** a type of conduct that serves both the living and the dead.

**than to go to a house of feasting** A type of conduct that serves only the living.

**for that is the end of every man** Since mourning marks the end of every man, every man will ultimately come to this. Therefore, the living should put his heart [to the fact] that whatever loving-kindness I bestow upon the dead, I will require that they bestow the same to me upon my death. He who raises his voice in lamentation-they will raise their voices in lamentation for him; he who bears the dead-they will bear him; he who eulogizes-they will eulogize him; he who escorts [the dead]-they will escort him (Ecc. Rabbah, Keth. 72a). Another explanation:

**for that is the end of every man:** For that is the end of the whole man; for death is the end of all man’s days, and if now he does not bestow kindness upon him, he will no longer bestow it upon him, but if he invited him to a house of feasting and he did not go, he can say to him, “A son will ultimately be born to you, and there I will be with you. The joy of your children’s wedding will come to you, and there I will go.”

**and the living shall lay it to his heart** this matter, that if he does not bestow kindness now, he will no longer [have the opportunity to] bestow it upon him.

**3 Vexation is better than laughter** If one is pursued by the Divine Standard of Justice, let him not be distressed. It would have been better for the Generation of the Flood if the Holy One, blessed be He, had shown them an angry countenance because of the sins in their hands, rather than the laughter that He laughed with them, for had He shown them a slight expression of displeasure, they would have returned to do good (Ecc. Rabbah). It would have been better for Adonijah had his father caused him grief for every sin that he committed, rather than the laughter that he showed him, and for which he was ultimately slain (Ecc. Zuta).

**the heart will rejoice** It will turn over the heart of man to improve his ways.

**4 The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning** Their thought is about the day of death.

**whereas the heart of the fools is in a house of joy** They do not quake because of the day of death, and their hearts are as sound as a palace.

**6 For as the sound of the thorns** the wood of the thorns, pines in French.

**under the pot** under a copper pot turned over a fire of thorns, and they rattle in it (sic). Said Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi: When all other woods are kindled, their sound does not travel far, but when thorns are kindled, their sound travels far, as if to say, “We too are wood.” They let people know, “We too are wood, and we are needed.” So are the fools very talkative, saying, “We, too, are important!”

**this too is vanity** And it is labor, which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the people to toil and be vexed with them.

**7 For the taunt makes the wise foolish** When the fool taunts the wise man, he confuses his thoughts, and he too stumbles. Dathan and Abiram taunted Moses, saying, (Exod 5:21): “May the Lord look down upon you and judge, etc.,” and they confused him and destroyed his understanding and caused him to speak in anger against the Holy One, blessed be He, and he said, “and You did not save Your people,” and he was punished for this matter, when He replied to him, “Now you will see,” but you will not see the war of the thirty-one kings.

**the understanding, which is a gift** the heart of wisdom, which is a gift to man, as it is said (Prov. 2:6): “For the Lord gives wisdom.”

**the taunt** Heb. עֹשֶּׂק, an expression of conflict and taunts. There are other ways of interpretation; however, they separate the verses one from the other, but כִּי stated at the beginning of the verse proves that it is connected to the preceding verse.

**8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning** [This is to be interpreted] according to its apparent meaning. At the beginning of a matter, we do not know what will be at its end, but when the end is good, it ends well. Another explanation: The end of a thing is good from its beginning: when it is good from its beginning, i.e., that they had good intentions when they started it. Rabbi Meir stood and expounded the entire matter as referring to Elisha the son of Abuyah, in Midrash Koheleth (Ecc. Rabbah).

**a patient one** one who is slow to anger and does not hasten to quarrel.

**9 Be not hasty** Heb. אַל תְּבַהֵל. Do not hasten.

**10 Do not say, How was it that the former days, etc.** Do not wonder about the good that came to the early righteous men, such as the generation of the desert and the generation of Joshua and the generation of David.

**For not out of wisdom have you asked concerning this** For everything is according to the merit of the generations.

**11 Wisdom is good, etc.** Their wisdom stood them in good stead with the heritage of the merit of their forefathers, for wisdom is good.

**and it is a profit to those who see the sun** The wisdom is a profit for all mankind.

**to those who see the sun** This refers to all the creatures, as it was taught in the Mishnah (Ned. 3: 7): He who vows not to derive benefit from those who see the sun, is also prohibited from benefiting from the blind. The intention is to anyone whom the sun looks down upon.

**12 For whoever is in the shade of wisdom** Whoever is in the shade of wisdom is in the shade of money, for wisdom causes riches to come.

**and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to its possessor** And moreover, wisdom has an advantage over money insofar as wisdom gives life to its possessor.

**13 See God’s work** how straight it is, everything according to man’s deed: Paradise for the righteous and Gehinnom for the wicked. See for yourself to which one you will cleave.

**for who can straighten out** after death that which he made crooked during his lifetime?

**14 On a day of good, be among the good** On a day in which you have the ability to do good, be among those who do good.

**and on a day of adversity, ponder** When evil comes upon the wicked, you will be among those who see it, as it is said (Isa. 66:24): “And they shall go out and see the corpses of the people, etc.,” and you will not be among those who are seen, [i.e., the dead], “and they shall be a sight for all flesh.”

**God has made one corresponding to the other** the good and the reward for doing it, in contrast to the evil and the recompense for its being perpetrated.

**that man will find nothing after Him** to complain about the Holy One, blessed be He.

**15 there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness** Even though he is perishing, he still persists in his righteousness. There was an incident concerning Joseph the son of Phinehas the priest who had an ulcerating sore on his foot. They called the physician to amputate his foot. He said to him, “When you reach [the last remaining] hairbreadth, let me know.” He did so, and he called his son Hunia. He said to him, “My son, until now, you were obligated to care for me. From now on, you are not obligated to care for me, because a kohen may not become unclean from a limb cut off from his father during his lifetime.”

**16 Be not overly righteous** like Saul, who thought to be righteous and had mercy on the wicked.

**and be not overly wise** to deduce from a foolish inference from a minor case to a major case, namely that if the Torah said that for [the murder of] one person, bring a decapitated heifer, [surely we must not be allowed to slay an entire nation, i.e., this refers to Saul’s erroneous concern about killing Amalek].

**17 Be not overly wicked** Even if you have dealt wickedly in a small degree, do not continue to deal wickedly.

**why should you die before your time** like Saul, as it is said: (I Chron. 10:13): “And Saul died because of the treachery that he had committed” in the case of Nob the priestly city and in the case of Amalek.

**18 It is good that you should take hold of this, etc.** Take hold of both righteousness and wickedness. If the righteous prophet told you something that appears to you as wickedness, e.g., what Samuel said to Saul, let it not be light in your eyes to doubt it.

**will discharge himself of them all** both of them, to preserve the righteousness and the wickedness according to their rule.

**19 Wisdom affords strength to the wise** Since he said: Be not overly wicked-if you have dealt wickedly in a small degree, do not add to it, but search your deeds and regret the sin-he says: Wisdom affords strength to the wise, for it counsels him to return in repentance.

**more than ten rulers** We find regarding Josiah, that Scripture testified about him (II Kings 23:25): “Now before him there was no king like him, etc.” Hence, his wisdom stood him in good stead, and he searched his deeds, and it was better for him than the ten kings who behaved wickedly and did not repent of their ways.

**who were in the city** in Jerusalem, viz. Rehoboam, Abijah, Ahaziah, Joash after the death of Jehoiada, Amaziah, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah.

**20 For there is no righteous man on earth** Therefore, he must examine his deeds.

**21 Also take no heed of all the words, etc.** Because he is speaking of Saul, who accepted slander about Nob the priestly city, and concerning him it was stated: “Be not overly wicked,” he says: “Also take no heed of all the words” that talebearers speak to you; do not take heed to accept them.

**lest you hear your servant curse you** It is not good that you bend your ear to hear your servant cursing you. Another explanation:

**more than ten rulers** These are the ten things that condemn a person. His two eyes [which] show him sinful things, his two ears [which] enable him to hear idle talk, his two hands with which he robs and plunders, his two feet which lead him to sinful acts, and his mouth and his heart (Ecc. Zuta). Another explanation:

**Wisdom affords strength to the wise** This is Noah.

**more than ten rulers** more than the ten generations that were before him (Ecc. Rabbah). Another explanation:

**to the wise** This is Abraham.

**more than ten rulers** more than the ten generations that were before him (Ecc. Rabbah). Another explanation:

**to the wise** This is Joseph.

**more than ten rulers** These are his brothers (Ecc. Zuta). Another explanation:

**to the wise** This is Moses.

**ten rulers** the ten organs that minister to the body with food. From the mouth to the esophagus, from the esophagus to the stomach, etc., as appears in Midrash Koheleth (Ecc. Rabbah), but Moses’ wisdom stood him in good stead so that he did not require food for forty days and forty nights. All these interpretations appear in the Midrash, but I do not know how to reconcile them with the following verse: “For there is no righteous man on the earth.”

**23 All this I tested with wisdom** This refers to the verses below and (some editions: not) to the verses above.

**I tested with wisdom** with the Torah.

**I said, “I will become wise”** to know the Torah.

**but it was far from me** And what is this?

**24 What was is far off** the distant things that were in the Creation.

**and very deep** it is; who can find it, for I have no permission to think about them, what is above and what is below, what is ahead and what is behind.

**25 And again, I turned about** to know and to search out and to seek the wisdom of the passage of the Red Heifer and the computation of the end of the Redemption.

**and to know the wickedness of folly** to foresee the ultimate end of heresy. וְהַסִכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוֹת, and the confusion and madness therein.

**26 And I find more bitter than death** which is the most severe of the ten severe things that were created in the world, as appears in Baba Bathra, in [the chapter entitled] “The Partners” (10a), and I find more bitter and more severe than it, the woman, i.e., apostasy.

**whose heart is snares and nets** Heb. חֲרָמִים, an expression of a net, like (Hab. 1:15): “he catches them in his net (בְּחֶרְמוֹ) and gathers them in his trawl.”

**her hands are bonds** and as soon as she seizes a man, he is as though bound in bonds of ropes.

**bonds** Heb. אֲסוּרִים, a noun meaning bonds, like (Jud. 15:14);“and his bonds (אֲסוּרָיו) melted,” and so did Menahem explain it (Machbereth p. 28).

**27 See, this I have found, said Koheleth, adding one to another to find out the account** All the commandments that the righteous perform and the transgressions that the wicked commit are counted before the Holy One, blessed be He, one to another, until they add up to a large sum. So did our Rabbis explain it in Tractate Sotah (8b).

**said Koheleth** said the collection of wisdom, and said his intellectual soul, which collects the wisdom.

**Koheleth** This is a feminine noun, and when it is used in the masculine sense, it refers to the one who gathers it, and that is Solomon. In the Midrash (Ecc. Zuta): Said Rabbi Jeremiah the son of Eleazar: The holy spirit sometimes speaks in the masculine gender and sometimes it speaks in the feminine gender. One verse says (Ps. 70: 6): “You are my help (עֶזְרִי) and my rescuer,” and one verse says (ibid. 40:18): “You are my help (עֶזְרָתִי) and my rescuer.” One verse says: (Nahum 2:1): “a herald (מְבַשֵּׂר) announcing peace,” and one verse says (Isa. 40:9): “the voice of (sic) the herald (מְבַשֶּׂרֶת) of Zion.”

**28 which my soul sought yet** In addition to those stated above, which I sought and did not find, my soul sought a proper one among women, but I did not find [one], because they are all lightheaded."

**one man out of a thousand I found** It is customary in the world that [out of] a thousand who enter [a school] to learn Scripture, only one hundred emerge from them to succeed to be fit for Mishnah, and [of] those hundred who enter to [learn] Mishnah, only ten emerge from them to [learn] Gemara, and of those ten who enter to [learn] Gemara, only one emerges who is capable of giving religious instruction, the result being one out of a thousand.

**but a woman among all these** even in a thousand. Therefore, you must be cautious with her.

**29 See, only this one have I found** for a stumbling block came into being through her.

**that… made** The Holy One, blessed be He [made] the first man straight.

**but they** when his wife Eve was paired up with him, and they became two and were called “they.”

**sought many intrigues** plans and designs of sin. So is it explained in the Midrash (Ecc. Rabbah).

# Chapter 8

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 Who is like the wise man, and who knows the meaning of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the boldness of his face is changed. | 1 Who is as a wise man, that he can stand before the wisdom of the Lord, and know the interpretations of his words, like the prophets? The wisdom of a wise man enlightens the brightness of his face among the righteous, and as for the impudent, all his ways are changed from good to bad. |
| 2 I [am prepared to] observe the commandment of the King, and concerning the oath of God. | 2 Guard thy mouth about the commands of the King to keep whatsoever he commands, and be also on thy guard about the matter of an oath of the Lord, that thou swear not by the name of his word in vain. |
| 3 Hasten not to go away from before Him; stay not in an evil thing; for all that He wishes, He will do. | 3 And in the time of the anger of the Lord do not cease to pray before him, tremble before him, go and pray and seek mercy from him, because thou canst not stand in an evil matter; for the Lord of all worlds, the Lord, will do what he pleases. |
| 4 Inasmuch as the King's word is the rule, and who will say to Him, "What are You doing?" | 4 In the place where the word of the King who rules over all the world is gone forth, it is done immediately, and who is the man that would restrain his hand, and say unto him, What doest thou? |
| 5 Whoever keeps the commandment shall know no evil thing, and the heart of a wise man knows time and justice. | 5 The man who keeps the commandments of the Lord shall not know any evil in the world to come; and the time of prayer, and judgment, and truth, is known in the heart of the wise. |
| 6 For every desire has a time and judgment, when the evil of man is great upon him. | 6 For to every business there is a good and an evil time, and by a true judgment is the whole world judged; and when it is decreed from the Lord that punishment should be in the world, it is because of the guilt of evil doers which is heavy upon them. |
| 7 For he knows not what will be, for how it will be, who will tell him? | 7 For no wise man knows what will bewith him at the end, for when it shall be the pleasure before the Lord to afflict him, who is he that will tell him it? |
| 8 No man controls the will [of God's messenger] to retain the spirit, and there is no ruling on the day of death; neither is there discharge in war, nor will wickedness save the one who practices it. | 8 There is no man who has power over his breathing soul to retain the soul of life, that it should not depart from the human body; and there is no power in the day of death for a man to save his companion, and no instruments of war to help in the battle, and guilt will not save its master in the great day of judgment. |
| 9 I saw all this, and I applied my heart to all the work that is done under the sun, a time that a man ruled over [another] man for his [own] harm. | 9 All this I saw which has happened in this world, and I gave my heart to know all the work which is worked in this world under the sun, at the time when man rules over man to afflict him. |
| 10 And so I saw the wicked buried, and they came, and from the place of the Holy One they go away, and they will be forgotten in the city that they did so; this too is vanity. | 10 And indeed I have seen sinners who are buried and blotted out of the world, from the holy place where the righteous dwell, and went to be burned in Gehenna, and are forgotten from among the inhabitants of the city, and as they have done to others, so it is done to them; also this is vanity. |
| 11 Because the sentence of the deed of evil is not executed swiftly; therefore, the heart of the children of men is encouraged to do evil. | 11 And because the evil thing, the punishment of the wicked, is not quickly executed upon their evil works, therefore the heart of the children of men is full in them to do evil in this world. |
| 12 For a sinner does evil a hundred [years], and He grants him an extension; but I know too that it will be good for those who fear God because they fear Him. | 12 And when a sinner does evil a hundred years, and space is given him from the Lord in order that he may repent, yet is it revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and I know that it will be well in the world to come with those that fear the Lord, that fear before him,and do his will; |
| 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, and he will not prolong [his] days, like a shadow, because he does not fear God. | 13 and that it shall not be well with the wicked, and there shall be no space for him in the world to come; and in this world the days of his life shall be cut off, they shall fly and pass away like a shadow, because he feared not before the Lord. |
| 14 There is vanity that is done on the Earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deed of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deed of the righteous; I said that this too is vanity. | 14 There is a vanity that is decreed to be done upon the face of the earth; there are righteous to whom evil happens as if they had done like the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked to whom it happens as if they had done like the works of the righteous; and I saw by the Holy Spirit that the evil which happens to the righteous in this world is not for their guilt, but to free them from a slight transgression, that their reward may be perfect in the world to come; and the good that comes to the sinners in this world is not for their merits, but to render them a reward for their small merit they have acquired, so that they may eat their reward in this world, and to destroy their portion in the world to come; I said, by my word, this also is vanity. |
| 15 And I praised joy, for there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be merry, and that will accompany him in his toil the days of his life that God gave him under the sun. | 15 And I praised the joy of the Law, since there is no good for man in this world under the sun, but to eat and drink and rejoice in his labour and in his portion, which is given to him from heaven, and not stretch out his hands in violence and rapine; and this will lead him to peace in that world, and he shall receive a perfect reward for his labours wherewith he sincerely laboured all the days of his life, which the Lord gave him in this world under the sun. |
| 16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the conduct that is done upon the Earth, for neither by day nor by night does he see sleep with his eyes. | 16 As I gave my heart to know the wisdom of the Law, and to see the business which is done upon the earth, for even the wise who desires to be occupied with the Law and to find wisdom must toil, since he has no rest in the day, and sees no sleep with his eyes in the night. |
| 17 And I saw all the deed of God, for a person will not be able to fathom the deed that is done under the sun, becau | 17 And I saw every mighty work of the Lord, for it is awful; and man cannot find out the mighty work of the Lord which is done in this world under the sun; when man labours to seek what will be, he shall not find it; and even if a wise man says by his word, that he will know what will be at the end of days, he cannot find it. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 8

**1 Who is like the wise man** Who in the world is as esteemed as a wise man?

**and who knows the meaning of a thing** Heb. פֵשֶּׁר, the interpretation, as we find regarding Daniel; because of his wisdom-for [because] he was wise in the fear of Heaven, the secrets of interpretations were revealed to him. Who is like Moses, who made compromises (פְּשָּׁרִים) between Israel and their Father in Heaven?

**and the boldness of his face is changed** from that of other people, to the extent that (Exod. 34:30) they feared to approach him because the skin of his face was radiant.

**2 I… observe the commandment** Therefore, I need to and I am prepared to observe the commandment of the King of the Universe, which is the best of them all [i.e., better than all intrigues.]

**and concerning the oath of God** which we swore to Him on Horeb, to keep His commandments. [See Ecc. Rabbah.] Another explanation: I am prepared to observe the command of the kings of the nations who rule us with head taxes and property taxes.

**and alongside the oath of God** provided that they do not cause us to transgress the oath that we swore to the Omnipresent.

**And alongside** the oath of God, I will keep the command of the kings. And so we find with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, who said to Nehuchadnezzar, (Dan. 9:16): “to you they say: O King Nebuchadnezzar (sic), we do not care to answer you about this matter.” If he was king, why did they call him Nehuchadnezzar, and if Nebuchadnezzar, why did they call him king? However, this is what they said to him: To you we say that you are king over us regarding work and regarding the head tax, but concerning your ordering us to worship idols, you are [merely] Nebuchadnezzar, and not a king.

**3 Hasten not to go away from before Him** Do not hasten, saying that you will go and flee from before Him to a place where He does not rule, for He rules everywhere.

**stay not in an evil thing** Do not persist in engaging in evil things.

**for all that He wishes** to mete retribution upon you, He has the authority and ability to do so.

**4 Inasmuch as the King’s word is the rule** The word of the Holy One, blessed be He, rules, and who will say to Him, “What are You doing?” But if you keep the commandment, you will not know any evil matter, and it will not befall you.

**5 and the heart of a wise man knows time and justice** The wise man knows that there is a set time for the punishment of the wicked, and there are judgments before the Holy One, blessed be He, with which He will ultimately recompense them. מִשְׁפָּט is justize in Old French, and that refers to the punishment.

**6 For every desire has** When a person executes his desire and transgresses the Law, there is a time to exact retribution upon him, and justice and punishment are ready.

**when the evil of man is great upon him** When the evil of man is great and his measure is heaped up, then his punishment arrives; כִּי is used as an expression of “when,” like (Exod. 18:16): “Whenever (כִּי) they have a concern, it comes to me.”

**7 For he knows not what will be** When the wicked man commits a transgression, he does not put his heart to [the prospect] that the Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring him to judgment, and woe is to him because of that.

**for how it will be** the punishment. Who will tell him to confer with him and to take counsel with him and to ask permission, for it will suddenly befall him.

**8 No man controls the will** the spirit and the inclination of the agent of the Omnipresent, to retain and to withhold from him the spirit in his body, that the angel of death should not take it.

**and there is no ruling** of any king discernible on the day of his death. Everywhere [in Scripture] we find mentioned, “King David,” but on the day of his death it is written, (I Kings 2:1): “And the days of David drew near that he should die.” No kingship is mentioned here.

**neither is there discharge in war** [In] this [war], saying, “I will send my son or my servant in my stead.”

**9 I saw all this** mentioned above.

**and I applied my heart to all the work** And also to all the work of the children of men I applied my heart, and I saw the time that a man ruled over his companion and overpowered him, and it ultimately turned to his own harm. Amalek overpowered Israel, (Num. 24:20): “and his end will be that he will be lost forever.” So it was with Pharaoh, so with Nebuchadnezzar, and so with Sennacherib.

**10 And so** and then.

**I saw the wicked buried** In this prophecy, I saw wicked men buried, who were fit to be hidden in the dust, for they were despised among the nations, about whom it is said (Isa. 23:13): “this people has never been,” and they ruled over the Temple of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is a holy place, and when they went from there to their land, they boasted that they did such and such a thing in the Temple of the Omnipresent. Do not read וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ, and they will be forgotten, but וְיִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ, and they will boast. So did our Rabbis of blessed memory expound it (Gittin 56b). Concerning the forgetting, [i.e., the legitimate wording of the verse], it is expounded as follows in the Aggadah (unknown): and ultimately, their name and their remembrance will be forgotten from that very city, that they did so therein, as it is said (Joel 4:2): “I will gather all the nations and I will take them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.” In the place where they angered Him, He will mete out retribution upon them, and so Scripture states (Ps. 73:20): “O Lord, in the city You will despise their form.”

**this too** is one of the vanities that were given to the world to weary mankind, for the Holy One, blessed be He, does not hasten to mete out retribution upon evildoers, and mankind thinks that there is neither judgment nor Judge.

**11 Because the sentence of the deed of evil is not executed swiftly** The Holy One, blessed be He, does not hasten to mete out retribution upon the evildoers, and therefore, they think that there is no judgment, and their heart is encouraged to do evil.

**12 For a sinner, etc.** because they see that the sinner does evil a hundred thousand and myriads [of times], and the Holy One, blessed be He, grants him an extension.

**a hundred** This is an ellipsis, and it is connected to the words preceding it, saying: a hundred days, a hundred years, a hundred thousand. And so, (Isa. 51:21): “and drunk”, וּשְׁכֻרַת, is an ellipsis, and it is missing [the word כַּעַס]: drunk from wrath and not from wine, like other drunkenness.

**but I know too** For despite all this, that He does not hasten to mete retribution upon the wicked to make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, I know that each one will ultimately receive his recompense, and that those who fear Him will fare well.

**13 But it will not be well with the wicked** because he does not fear God.

**14 There is vanity** which causes people to think foolishly.

**that there are righteous men** to whom evil happens [fitting as retribution for] the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked to whom good happens [fitting as reward for] the deeds of the righteous. I said that this too is one of the vanities that prevail in the world. However, our Rabbis expounded it in a different manner in Tractate Horayoth (10b), but to me, it is not explained satisfactorily, according to the line of thought here where the wise man (Koheleth) concludes by saying, “This too is vanity.”

**15 joy** for he should rejoice in his lot and engage in the “upright commands,” (See Ps. 19:9) which cause the heart to rejoice, and he should not be absorbed in increasing his wealth with usury and interest and robbery. Whoever does not rejoice in his lot and is absorbed in amassing money, eventually commits the sins of robbery, fraud, and taking interest. One who does not rejoice in his lot concerning the love of his wife, has a passionate lust for women, and harbors erotic thoughts about married women.

**to eat and to drink** from what the Holy One, blessed be He, graciously granted him, and to rejoice with his lot. And [according to] the Midrash Aggadah (Ecc. Rabbah 2:26): All mention of eating and drinking in Ecclesiastes, refers only to the study of Torah, as it is stated (Isa. 55:1): “go, buy and eat, etc.”

**and that will accompany him** will join him, as it is stated (ibid. 58:8): “and your righteousness shall go before you.”

**the days of his life that God gave him** he shall do so, and the end of the verse is connected to its beginning, and it is a transposed verse, [to be interpreted thus:] there is nothing better for man in the days of his life that God gave him than to eat, drink and rejoice, and that will accompany him in his toil.

**16 When I applied my heart** Heb. כַּאֲשֶּׁר. This כַּאֲשֶּׁר is not used as an expression of an example, like (Lev. 24:19): “as (כַּאֲשֶּׁר) he did, so shall it be done,” but as an expression of time, like (Gen. 37:23): “When (כַּאֲשֶּׁר) Joseph came;” (ibid 43:2): “when (כַּאֲשֶּׁר) they finished eating, etc.” This is similar: When I applied my heart to know… and to search, etc., then I saw all that God had wrought.

**does he see sleep with his eyes** [i.e.,] the wicked man who has a passionate lust for money and for forbidden women.

**17 And I saw all the deed of God** that He gave over to mankind.

**for a person will not be able to fathom, etc.** Mankind cannot fathom the way of the Holy One, blessed be He, what the reward is for all the deed that is done under the sun, for they see wicked men prospering and righteous men declining.

**because though a man toils to seek** because I saw many people toiling to seek and to fathom this phenomena, but they are unable [to understand it].

**and even if the wise man claims** that he understands it, he will not be able to, for [even] Moses our teacher could not fathom the matter, when he said, (Exod. 33:13): “please let me know Your ways.”

# Chapter 9

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 For all this I laid to my heart and to clarify all this, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in God's hand; even love, even hate, man does not know; everything is before them. | 1 For all this I set my heart to investigate all this that the righteous and the wise and their students who serve them on the business of the study of Torah and are given in the hand of god and from him is decreed on all the world all what will be in their days even the mercy they will feel even the hatred they will feel, there is no person who is a prophet in the world who will know what will be in people: All in their mazal[luck or planet] God decrees to be ahead of them. |
| 2 Everything [comes to them] as [it comes] to all; [there is] one occurrence for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good, and for the pure, and for the unclean, and for he who sacrifices, and for he who does not sacrifice; like the good, so is the sinner; he who swears is like him who fears an oath. | 2 Everything depends on mazal, from heaven it is decreed what will happen in the future to the entire earth, One to the innocent and the guilty, who fixes his way and makes modest his soul,and one who defiles his soul [makes himself impure] one who sacrifices a holy property and one who does not sacrifice a holy property, like the good like the guilty, like a man whose days are for lying like a man who fears an oath. |
| 3 This is the most evil in all that is done under the sun, that all have one occurrence, and also the heart of the children of men is full of evil, and there is madness in their heart in their lifetime, and after that they go to the dead. | 3 This is an evil mazal in all the world that is done under the sun, for one happening is for all, to all the inhabitants of the earth, even if the heart of people is filled with badness about this, and intrigues are in their heart, all the days of their life. and after a man’s end it is saved for him to argue with the dead about the judgement of the guilty. |
| 4 For whoever is joined to all the living has hope, for concerning a live dog [it is said that] he is better than a dead lion. | 4 For who is the man who adheres to all the words of the Torah to purchase the life of the world to come? He has hoper. For a live dog is better than a lion that is dead. |
| 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for their remembrance is forgotten. | 5 For the righteous know that if they sin, they will be considered as dead in the world to come. Therefore, they guard their ways and do not sin and if they sin, they return in repentance. But the sinners do not know anything good because they do not make their deeds good in their lifetime and they do not know anything good in the world to come and they do not have a good reward after their death for their memory is forgotten from the righteous. |
| 6 Also their love, as well as their hate, as well as their provocation has already been lost, and they have no more share forever in all that is done under the sun. | 6 After the death of the wicked they have no needs. Their love, their hatred, and their envy have already perished from the world and they no longer have a good portion with the righteous in the world to come. And they have no pleasure from anything that is done in this world under the sun. |
| 7 Go, eat your bread joyfully and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already accepted your deeds. | 7 Solomon said by the spirit of prophecy from before the Lord, “The Master of the World will say to all the righteous ones individually, Go eat in joy your bread which was given to you for the bread which you gave to the poor and the needy who were hungry, and drink with a happy heart your wine which is hidden for you in the Garden of Eden in exchange for the wine which you mixed for the poor and needy who were thirsty. For God has already accepted your good deeds. |
| 8 At all times, let your garments be white, and let oil not be wanting on your head. | 8 At all times let your garments be white without all stain of sin and acquire a good name which is compared to anointing oil so that blessing may come upon your head and your goodness will not be lacking. |
| 9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, whom He has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity, for that is your portion in life and in your toil that you toil under the sun. | 9 See a good life with a wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which the Lord gave you by your mazal in this world under the sun. For it is your portion in your life and in your labor wherein you labor in this world under the sun. |
| 10 Whatever your hand attains to do [as long as you are] with your strength, do; for there is neither deed nor reckoning, neither knowledge nor wisdom in the grave, where you are going. | 10 Whatever charity your hand finds to do, do for the needy with all your strength, for after death a man has neither work nor reckoning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave where you are going and nothing will help you but good deeds and charity alone. |
| 11 I returned and saw under the sun, that the race does not belong to the swift, nor the war to the mighty; neither do the wise have bread, nor do the understanding have riches, nor the knowledgeable, favor; for time and fate will overtake them all. | 11 King Solomon said, “While I was sitting on my royal throne, I observed and saw in this world under the sun that not men who are swift as the eagle are helped to run to escape death in battle and heroes are not helped by their might when they instigate a war and also sages are not helped by their wisdom to be sated with bread in a time of famine and the intelligent are not helped by their intelligence to be sated with bread in a time of famine and even those who are wise are not assisted by their wisdom to gather the grain place and the discerning are not helped by their knowledge to find mercy in the eyes of the king. For time and chance happen to all of them according to their mazal. |
| 12 For a person does not even know his time, like the fish that are caught with an inferior trap and like the birds that are caught in the snare; like them, the children of men are trapped at a time of evil, when it falls upon them suddenly. | 12 For even it is not made known to a man his time, whether good or bad what will be in the world and come upon him. Like fish of the sea which are captured in a net and like birds of heaven which are captured in a snare, like them people are snared in an evil time which falls on them in one moment from the sky. |
| 13 This also have I seen as wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. | 13 Also this I saw, that she is wisdom in this world under the sun and it is much to me. |
| 14 [There was] a small city, with few people in it, and a great king came upon it and surrounded it and built over it great bulwarks. | 14 The body of a man is compared to a little city and heroes, a few soldiers are in its midst and are slight in its merit in the heart of man helpful to the body [against] the evil inclination which may be compared to a great and powerful king enters the body to conquer and it surrounds the heart in order to make it err and it builds against it a dwelling place because it wishes to cause him to depart from the way which is straight before the Lord to capture him in the great snares of Gehenna in order to burn him seven times for his sins. |
| 15 And there was found therein a poor wise man, and he extricated the city through his wisdom, but no man remembered that poor man. | 15 And there was found in the body the good inclination humble and wise and it prevailed over it and conquered it by its wisdom and it saved the body from the judgment of Gehenna by its power and its wisdom just as the soldier does battle and saves the inhabitants of the city by the wisdom of his heart and no man remembered afterward the good inclination which saved him but says to himself “I am innocent just as the inhabitants of the city do not remember that poor man who saved them. |
| 16 And I said, "Wisdom is better than might, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heard." | 16 And I said ,the good words of the righteous are better than the force of the heroism of the sinner, for the wisdom of the righteous and his merit saves him and the people of his generation. But the strength of the wicked who persists in the stubbornness of his heart without returning in repentance destroys only him. And the wisdom of the righteous poor is despised in the eyes of the wicked of his generation and when he reproves them for their evil deeds the words of reprove are not accepted. |
| 17The words of the wise are heard [when spoken] softly, more than the shout of a ruler of fools. | 17 The word of the silent prayer of the sages are accepted by the Master of World more than the acceptance of the wicked man who rules over fools who entreats but is not accepted. |
| 18 Wisdom is better than weapons, and one sinner destroys much good. | 18 The wisdom of the wise in the time of trouble is better than weapons when war breaks out one sinner in a generation causes much good to be destroyed from the world. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 9

**1 and to clarify** Heb. וְלָבוּר [like] וּלְבָרֵר.

**all this** I clarified and tested.

**that the righteous and the wise and their works are in God’s hand** He helps them and He judges them in order to benefit them in their end.

**and their works** These are their disciples, their servants, who follow in their ways.

**even love, even hate** The rest of mankind does not know, and they do not discern to apply their hearts to what makes them beloved by the Omnipresent and what causes them to be hated.

**everything is before them** before the righteous and the wise.

**2 Everything as to all** All take heart when an occurrence happens to someone, and they know that ultimately everyone will receive his just deserts.

**one occurrence** And they know that the end of everyone-whether righteous or wicked-is to die, and they all have one fate in this world. All this they know, but nevertheless, they choose for themselves the good way, because they know that there is a difference between them in the World to Come.

**for the righteous** such as Noah.

**and for the wicked** such as Pharaoh-Neco. This one became crippled, and that one became crippled.

**for the good** This is Moses.

**and for the pure** This is Aaron.

**and for the unclean** These are the Spies. These [Moses and Aaron] spoke well of the Land of Israel, but those spoke derogatorily about it. These did not enter the Land, and those did not enter the Land; hence, they have one fate.

**and for he who sacrifices** This is Josiah, as it is said: “And Josiah offered a sacrifice.”

**and for he who does not sacrifice** This is Ahab, who caused Israel to refrain from performing the festival pilgrimages. This one died from arrows, and that one died from arrows.

**like the good** This is David.

**so is the sinner** This is Nebuchadnezzar. This one built the Temple, and that one destroyed it. This one reigned forty years, and that one reigned forty years.

**he who swears** This is Zedekiah, who swore falsely, as it is said (II Chron. 36:13): “And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who adjured him, etc.”

**like him who fears an oath** This is Samson, as it is said (Jud. 15:12): “And Samson said to them: Swear to me, lest you strike me yourselves.” We learn that he was strict in his observance of an oath. [Nevertheless], this one died after his eyes were plucked out, and that one died after his eyes were plucked out. Therefore…

**3 the heart of the children of men is full of evil** for they say: There is no judgment of retribution for the wicked. Everything is pure happenstance. Sometimes [bad things happen] to the righteous, and sometimes to the wicked.

**and after that, they go to the dead** and they ultimately descend to Gehinnom.

**4 For whoever is joined to all the living has hope** For as long as he is alive, even if he is wicked and is joined to the wicked, as it is said: “to all the living” -even [if he is joined] to the wicked-he has hope, perhaps he will repent before his death.

**for concerning a live dog he is better than a dead lion** and they are both wicked. It was better for Nebuzaradan, who was a wicked slave and converted to Judaism, that death did not overtake him early, than for Nebuchadnezzar his master, who was called “lion,” as it is said (Jer. 4:7): “A lion has come up from his thicket,” who died in his wickedness, [and ended up] in Gehinnom, while his slave is in the Garden of Eden. Our Rabbis expounded upon this the rule that we may butcher a carcass for dogs on the Sabbath, but a human corpse, lying in the sun, may not be moved unless one places a child or a loaf of bread thereon.

**5 For the living know that they will die** and perhaps their hearts will return on the day of death and they will repent of their ways, but after they die, they do not know anything, and they have no more reward for the actions that they do from their deaths and onwards, for whoever toils on the eve of the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath.

**6 Also their love** that they loved folly and scorn.

**as well as their hate** that they hated knowledge.

**as well as their provocation** that they provoked the Holy One, blessed be He, with the deeds of their hands.

**and they have no more share, etc. in all that is done, etc.** The merit of a son or daughter did not avail those wicked men who worshipped idols, and they have no atonement after death.

**7 Go, eat your bread joyfully** But you, the righteous man, whose good deeds the Holy One, blessed be He, has accepted, and who will merit the World to Come, go, eat, joyfully.

**8 At all times, let your garments be white** Prepare yourself at all times with good deeds, so that if you die today, you will enter in peace. And Solomon likened this to a man whom the king invited for a day of feasting, without setting a time for him. If he is wise or clever, he will immediately launder his garments, and bathe, and anoint himself. So did our Rabbis expound it in Tractate Shabbath (153a).

**9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love** See and understand to learn a craft to earn a livelihood therefrom, together with the study of the Torah which you have acquired.

**for that is your portion in life** If you have done so, your share will be life in this world, by earning a livelihood from the craft, and in the World to Come, because toiling with both causes one to forget sin.

**10 Whatever your hand attains to do** the will of your Maker, as long as you have your strength, do.

**for there is neither deed, etc. in the grave** for your merit after you die, and if you did so, you have no reckoning in the grave to worry about. The verse is transposed, [to be explained]: for there is neither deed nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave for the wicked, nor reckoning for the righteous, when the wicked give their accounting. So is it expounded in the Midrash (unknown). And one who interprets it without transposing it, according to its apparent meaning, interprets חֶשְּׁבּוֹן as an expression of “thought,” what he can still do to free himself from judgment.

**11 I returned and saw** Heb. וְרָאֹה, seeing, like זָכוֹר, vadant or vedant in Old French, (continually) looking.

**the race does not belong to the swift** Asahel’s swiftness did not avail him when his time arrived.

**nor the war to the mighty** Abner’s might did not avail him when his day arrived.

**neither do the wise have bread** For example, I (Solomon), whose bread for a day was (I Kings 5:2): “thirty kor of fine flour etc.,” and now, (above 2:10): “this was my portion from all my toil,” my staff and my cup.

**nor do the understanding have riches** e.g., Job, in the beginning, (Job 1:3): “His livestock consisted of, etc.,” and when his time came, he said, (ibid. 19:21): “Have pity on me, you, my friends.”

**nor the knowledgeable, favor** Moses, for example-there was no one more knowledgeable and wiser than he in Israel, and yet he did not find favor with his prayer to enter the Land.

**for time and fate** as its apparent meaning. Another explanation: for time will befall them, and they should be accustomed to entreaty (פְּגִיעָה) and supplication, that these things should not befall them.

**12 like the fish that are caught with an inferior trap** Like large fish that are caught in an inferior and weak trap, and our Rabbis (Ecc. Rabbah) explained: This is a fishhook, which is no more than a sort of needle, yet a large fish is caught with it.

**like them, the children of men are trapped** with a small and weak trap, like the weak trap and the snare. People stumble at the time of the visitation of their evil, when the time comes for evil to fall upon them suddenly, in an inferior trap, malvayse in Old French, bad, evil.

**like them** Heb. כָּהֵם, כְּמוֹתָם.

**15 but no man remembered** No one attributed any importance to him.

**16And I said** when I saw this, “Wisdom is better than might,” for this one’s wisdom was despised by all, but now, they were all rescued through him. The Midrash Aggadah, [however, explains the verses as follows]:

**[There was] a small city** This is the body.

**with few people in it** These are the limbs of a person.

**a great king** This is the evil inclination, which all his limbs feel.

**a poor man** This is the good inclination.

**17 are heard [when spoken] softly** They are accepted by mankind.

**more than the shout of a ruler of fools** Moses passed away many years ago, but his decrees are still accepted by Israel, and how many kings of the nations make decrees over Israel, but their words are not accepted.

**18 Wisdom is better** This refers to the wisdom of Serah, of whom it is said (II Sam. 20:22): “And the woman came to all the people in her wisdom,” [which] availed them more than the weapons that were in their hands, to fight with Joab.

**and one sinner destroys much good** Had she not slain Sheba the son of Bichri, they would all have been destroyed by him. (Ecc. Rabbah). Another explanation:

**and one sinner destroys much good** If Israel were [composed] half of righteous people and half of wicked ones, and one person came and sinned, making the wicked the majority, the result would be that he weighed them all down to the guilty side.

# Chapter 10

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 Dying flies make putrid and foamy the oil of a perfumer; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor. | 1 And the yetzer hara (evil inclination ) which dwells at the gates of the heart is like a fly and causes death in the world because it betrays the wise when he sins and wounds the good name which had resembled anointing oil scented by perfumes, and how much more beautiful and precious than the wisdom of the wise and the wealth of the wealthy is a man whose folly is little and light. |
| 2 The heart of the wise man is at his right, whereas the heart of the fool is at his left. | 2 The heart of the wise is to attain the Torah which is given by the right hand of 'ה and the heart of the fools is to get possession of gold and silver. ... |
| 3 Also on the road, when a fool walks, his understanding is lacking, and he says to all that he is a fool. | 3 And even walking in a bad path in the time his heart is foolish, lacking in wisdom, and he does things not kosher to do, and all say that he is a fool. ... |
| 4 If the spirit of the Ruler ascends upon you, do not leave your place, for a cure assuages great sins. | 4 If the spirit of the yetzer hara (evil inclination) rules over you and grows strong to overcome you, do not leave your good place where you used to stay, for the words of the Torah were created as a cure in the world so that great sins may be forgiven and forgotten by |
| 5 There is an evil that I saw under the sun, like an error that goes forth from before the ruler. | 5 There is an evil I saw in this world under the sun and it causes damage in the world like a matter of error which proceeds hurriedly against a man from a ruler. 6. He gave the wicked and foolish Edom to enjoy mazal (good fortune) and to enjoy prosperity from the highest heavens and his armies are proud and numerous while the people of the house of Israel are enslaved under him in exile, and from their many sins, those rich in property become poor andin their poverty dwell among the nations. ... |
| 6 Folly was set at great heights, and the rich sit in a low place. | יְהַב יְיָ יָת מַלְכָּא רַשִּׁיעָא וְשָׁטְיָא לְמֶהֱוֵי בְּרִיא בְּמַזָּלֵיהּ וּמְשַׁמֵּישׁ בְּאַצְלָחוּתָא מִן שְׁמֵיה מְרוֹמָא וַחֲיָלוּתוֹהִי גֵּיוְתָנִין וְסַגִּיאִין וְעַמָּךְ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁתַּעְבְּדִין תְּחוֹתוֹהִי בְּגָלוּתָא וּמִן סְגִיאוּת חוֹבֵיהוֹן עַתִּירֵי נִכְסִין מִתְמַסְכְּנִין וּבְמַכִּיכוּתָא יַתְבִין בֵּינֵי עַמְמַיָּא: |
| 7 I saw slaves on horses and princes walking like slaves on the ground. | 7 Solomon the prophet said by the spirit of prophecy, “I have seen the people who were enslaved previously to the people of Israel, growing strong and riding on horses like rulers while the people of Israel and their nobles walk like slaves on the earth.” ... |
| 8 One who digs a pit shall fall therein, and one who breaks a fence-a snake shall bite him. | 8 The Attribute of Justice answered and so said: “They caused all this themselves just as a man who digs a pit at the crossroads is liable to fall [in it] so a people who transgressed the decree of the Memra of 'ה and breached the fence of the world falls into the hand of the wicked king who bites them like a snake. ... |
| 9 One who quarries stones shall be wearied by them; one who hews wood shall be warmed by it. | 9 King Solomon the prophet said, “It was revealed to me that Manasseh the son of Hezekiah will sin and bow to idols of stone, therefore he will be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria who will bind him with chains because he made light of the words of Torah which were originally written on tablets of stone, therefore, he will suffer for them, And Rabshakeh his brother will worship images of wood and leave the words of the Torah which were put in the ark of acacia wood, therefore he will be burned with fire by the angel of 'ה.” ... |
| 10 If the iron is dull, and he did not sharpen the edge, it [still] strengthens the armies, but wisdom has a greater advantage. | 10 And when the people of Israel sin, and the heavens will become hard as iron and not give rain and that generation does not pray before 'ה so that the rain does not fall therefore, the whole world is wasted by famine, and when they repent and are assembled overcome their Yetzer and appoint leaders to seek mercy from the God of Heaven, they have pleasure due to the abundance of the excellence of their wisdom. ... |
| 11 If the snake bites, it is because it was not charmed, and there is no advantage to one who has a tongue. | 11 When seraphim [snakes] are stirred up to bite and to cause harm in the world, it is on account of the sins of Israel who do not engage in the words of Torah quietly, and also there is no advantage for a slanderer who speaks with a third tongue for he will be burned in the fire of Gehenum. ... |
| 12 The words of a wise man's mouth [find] favor, but a fool's lips will destroy him. | 12 The words of the mouth of a wise person who is found in the generation, when punishment comes upon the world he prays and drives out the punishment and finds mercy before 'ה, the lips of a foolish man are full of anger and therefore all the world is destroyed. ... |
| 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly, and the end of his speech is grievous madness. | 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness and the end of his utterance is fear and evil. |
| 14 And the fool increases words; a man does not know what will be, and what will be behind him, who will tell him? | 14 And the fool multiples empty words which no one needs until a man does not know what will in his days and what will be at his end who can tell him? ... |
| 15 The toil of the fools wearies him, for he does not know to go to the city. | 15 The labor of a fool who labors in his foolishness wearies him so that he does not learn how to go the city in which the that wise live in it to seek from him instruction. ... |
| 16 Woe to you, O land whose king is a lad, and your princes eat in the morning. | 16 Woe to you O Land of Israel when the wicked Jeroboam rules over you and abolishes for you the morning sacrifice and your nobles, before they offer the morning sacrifice eat bread. ... |
| 17 Fortunate are you, O land, whose king is the son of nobles, and your princes eat at the proper time, in might and not in drinking. | 17 Happy are you O Land of Israel when rules over you Hezekiah the son Ahaz who is a descendent of the House of David king of Israel , for he is a man strong in Torah who fulfills the commandments of the law and your nobles after offering the daily sacrifice eat bread at the time of the fourth hour from the labor of their hands, by the strength of Torah and not by sloth nor by blindness of the eye. ... |
| 18 Through laziness the rafter sinks, and with idleness of the hands the house leaks. | 18 A man is commanded to distance from uncleanness of blood [menstrual blood] and (does not) with laxity engage with Torah and commands this man is in danger of not having children, and in carrying out her duty of watching [her menstrual times] she does not observe them she is (always) in a menstrual state in her house. ... |
| 19 On joyous occasions, a feast is made, and wine gladdens the living, and money answers everything. | 19 In joy the righteous make bread to feed the hungry poor and the wine which they mix for the thirsty it will be joy for them in the world to come, and their redemption money will testify in favor of them in the world to come in the presence of all. |
| 20 Even in your thought, you shall not curse a king, nor in your bedrooms shall you curse a wealthy man, for the bird of the heaven shall carry the voice, and the winged creature will tell the matter. | 20 Do not curse the king even in your thought in the secret places of your heart. and do not curse the sage in your bedroom, for the angel Raziel proclaims everyday from heaven upon Mt. Horeb and a voice goes through the whole world, and Elijah the High Priest flying through the air of הי heaven like an eagle with wings and declares matters that are done in secret to all the dwellers of the earth. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 10

**1 Dying flies make putrid and foamy, etc.** e.g., in the winter season, when the flies have no strength, and they are near death: if it falls into the oil of a perfumer and becomes mingled with the perfumes, it causes it to become putrid and it assumes a foam, which is called zecume in Old French, foam, froth, bubbles, and a sort of bubbles (אֲבַעְבּוּעוֹת) appears in it, and this is the meaning of יַבִּיעַ. Hence we have an insignificant thing spoiling an important thing. So does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor, for it outweighed them all. Let us suppose that this man was equal with half transgressions and half merits, and he came and committed one transgression, which weighed him down to the scale of demerit. It is found that this folly, which is a small thing, is heavy and weighs and is heavier than all the wisdom and the honor that were in him, for behold, it outweighed them all. יָקָר is an expression of weight. It is heavy and weighs more than the wisdom and the honor in him. The Midrash Aggadah (Ber. 61a) states: Scripture compares the evil inclination to dying flies.

**makes putrid and foamy** a good name, which is more pleasant than the oil of a perfumer.

**2 The heart of a wise man is at his right** His wisdom is ready to turn him to the way that is “righted” for his good.

**and the heart of a fool is at his left** to turn him in a crooked way from the right way, which is a glory and a comfort for him.

**3 and he says to all that he is a fool** with his walk and with his speech, everyone recognizes that he is a fool.

**4 If the spirit of the Ruler** the Ruler of the World, ascends upon you to scrutinize you with the Divine Standard of Justice.

**do not leave your place** Do not leave your virtue to say to Him, “What will my righteousness avail me?”

**for a cure** The stringencies of the judgment with the afflictions that come upon you are a cure for your iniquities, and will assuage great sins for you.

**5 like an error that goes forth from before the ruler** It is like a ruler who let an error out of his mouth unintentionally, and it cannot be retracted. So does the Holy One, blessed be He, speak, and it cannot be retracted.

**6 Folly was set at great heights** This is the evil that is like an error which goes forth from before the ruler: that folly and wickedness are set at the loftiest heights, for the Holy One, blessed be He, raised the fools and the wicked, for I see with the holy spirit, that they are destined to stretch out a hand upon His Temple and to make their signs for signs." (Psalms 74:4; see also Gittin 56b.)

**and the rich sit in a low place** Israel, for despite all the greatness and honor that they have now in my days, they are destined to sit in a low place, as it is said (Lam. 2:10): “sit on the ground in silence.”

**7 I saw slaves on horses** These are the Chaldeans, about whom it is said (Isa. 23:13): “this people has never been.” [They] will be elevated to be on horses, leading the captives of Israel, bound with neck irons.

**and princes walking like slaves on the ground** before the chariots of the Chaldeans.

**8 fall therein** Sometimes he falls into it, i.e., sometimes you have someone plotting evil and it ultimately returns upon him in the end, for Nebuchadnezzar’s seed was destroyed through the Temple vessels, as it is said (Dan. 5:23): “but over the Lord of Heaven you exalted yourself,” [and the vessels of His House they brought before you, and you, your dignitaries, your queen, and your concubines drank wine in them, etc.].

**and one who breaks a fence** the fence of the Sages, to transgress their words.

**a snake shall bite him** death by the hands of Heaven, and since he spoke with an expression of breaking a fence, he mentions his recompense with an expression of the biting of a snake, which occupies the holes of the broken walls of houses.

**9 One who quarries stones shall be wearied by them** One who takes stones from their quarry in the mountains is fatigued by them. יִעָצֵב is an expression of weariness, like (Gen. 3:17): “with toil (בְּעִצָבוֹן) shall you eat it,” i.e., every man, according to his work is his weariness. So will he who commits evil reap according to what he sows.

**shall be warmed by it** יִסָכֶן בָּם, shall be warmed by it, like (I Kings 1:2): “and she shall be to him a warmer (סֹכֶנֶת).” So will one who engages in the Torah and in the precepts ultimately benefit from them.

**10 If the iron is dull** sharp swords, whose edges have become dull.

**and he did not sharpen the edge** And they are not sharpened and burnished (Ezek. 21:15): “in order that they may glitter;” nevertheless, it still strengthens the armies. It strengthens the mighty men of the armies to be victorious in battle.

**but wisdom has a greater advantage** But wisdom has another advantage over iron, namely, that if a Torah scholar blackens his face with hunger, and you see him as a poor man among the rich, many armies are strengthened by him. Do not wonder about the “vav” of וַחֲיָלִים, for many “vavin” appear like that in Hebrew, like (Ps. 50:18): “If you saw a thief, you agreed (וַתִּרֶץ) with him;” (Exod. 15:2): “The strength and the cutting of the Lord was (וַיְהִי) to me a salvation,” and many are explained in this manner.

**11 If the snake bites** a man.

**it is because it was not charmed** lit. without charming; because the charmer did not charm him so that he should not bite.

**and there is no advantage** to the wicked charmer who was accustomed to charm it, if he does not charm it. So, if the people of your city stumble over prohibitions because the wise man does not preach to them or teach them the statutes of the Torah, he has no advantage with his silence, and he will not profit.

**12 The words of a wise man’s mouth find favor** in the eyes of their listeners, and they listen to him, and it is good for him that he assumes greatness over them.

**but a fool’s lips will destroy him** This refers to someone who misleads his fellow man from the good way to the bad way; e.g., Balaam, who broke the restrictions that the nations had imposed upon themselves, that they restricted themselves from immorality from the time of the Generation of the Flood and onwards, and he advised them to offer their daughters for prostitution.

**13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly** When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, (Num. 22:9): “Who are these men with you?” he should have replied, “O Lord, You know,” but he said, “Balak ben Zippor the king of Moab sent them to me,” meaning that if I am despised in Your eyes, I am esteemed in the eyes of the Earthly kings.

**and the end of his speech is… madness** Heb. הוֹלֵלוּת, madness and confusion, “Come I will counsel you with foolish lewdness.”

**14 And the fool increases words** for he was boasting that he (ibid. 24:16): “knows the thoughts of the Most High.”

**a man does not know what will be** to him after a while, for he went to take his pay in Midian, and he did not know that he would fall by the sword. According to its simple meaning:

**the fool increases words** He declares and says, “Tomorrow I will do this to so-and- so,” but he does not know what will be tomorrow.

**and what will be behind him, who will tell him** i.e., not only does he not know what will be after a time, but even what is present behind him, which is not in front of his eyes, but behind his back, from afar, he needs someone to tell him [what is happening].

**15 The toil of the fools wearies him** Their folly causes them toil, which wearies them, for they did not learn the ways of the approaches to the city, and he wearies himself by entering by way of pits and marshes, and he is wearied by his feet sinking into the mire; i.e., the laziness of those who abandon the Torah causes them wearying toil in Gehinnom.

**for he does not know to go to the city** to the path of truth, to part from transgression, because he did not learn Torah, as it is said (Ps. 119:105): “Your words are a lamp for my feet.”

**16 Woe to you, O land whose king** when your king and your judges behave childishly.

**17 in might and not in drinking** They engage in the might of wisdom and understanding and not in drinking wine.

**18 Through laziness the rafter sinks** when a person is lazy and does not repair a small breach in the ceiling of the house.

**the rafter sinks** The structure that covers the house and protects it will sink.

**leaks** The dripping rain drips, i.e., when the Israelites are lazy with the Torah, they melt, (i.e., they are defeated) and the House of the pride of their strength (viz. the Temple) becomes destroyed and impoverished.

**19 On joyous occasions, a feast is made** For the joy of the musical entertainment at a wedding, we make a grand feast, and an undefined grand feast is called לֶחֶם, as it is stated (Dan. 5:1): “King Belshazzar made a great feast (לְחֶם).”

**and wine** they give to drink at the feast, which gladdens the living.

**and money answers everything** If there is no money, there is no feast; therefore, a person should not neglect work in order that he should have what to spend.

**20 Even in your thought… a king** even in your thoughts, without speech. גַּם means “even.” You shall not curse a king; do not provoke the King of the World. Another interpretation is that this is a king, according to its apparent meaning, a mortal king.

**the bird of the heaven** the soul, which is placed within you, which will ultimately fly up to the heaven.

**and the winged creature** the angel who escorts you, as it is stated: (Ps. 91:11): “For He will command His angels on your behalf,” and according to its apparent meaning, the passersby. You should worry about every person, perhaps there are people listening, and they will tell the matter to others.

# Chapter 11

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 Send forth your bread upon the surface of the water, for after many days you will find it. | 1 Give your sustaining bread to the poor who go in ships on the face of the water, for after many days there you will find a reward [alternative reading בעלמא הדין in this world] and in the world to come. |
| 2 Give a portion to seven and even to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the Earth. | 2 Put a good part of your seeds into your field in Tishri and do not refrain from sowing also in Kislev [alternative reading Marcheshvan], for you do not know what evil will be on the earth, whether the earlier or the later crops will succeed. |
| 3 If the clouds be full of rain, they will empty it upon the earth, and if a tree rests in the south or in the north, the place where the tree rests, there it will be. | 3 If the clouds will fill with rain, they pour out their water on the earth, because of the merit of the righteous, and if there is no merit in that generation, they descend upon the sea or the desert so that the people will not have benefit from them. And if it is decreed from Heaven that the king and his advisers are to fall from their rule, it is from the Memra of Heaven. And if there is plenty or famine in the south or in the north, the place where that decree exists, there it is sent to be. |
| 4 He who waits for the wind will not sow, and he who looks at the clouds will not reap. | 4 A man who cares for sorcery and divination will never do good, and one who looks at the Mazalim [the horoscopes] does not collect a reward. For sorcery and divination are like the wind, which cannot be grasped by human hands, and the Mazalim are like the clouds of heaven which leave and do not return. |
| 5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, just as things enclosed in the full womb; so will you not know God's work, Who does everything. | 5 Just as you do not know how the breath of the spirit of life enters the body [of an embryo] which is lying in its pregnant mother’s womb, and as you do not know if it will be male or female until the time it is born, so you do not know the work of הי who does everything in His wisdom. |
| 6 In the morning, sow your seed, and in the evening, do not withhold your hand, for you know not which will succeed, this one or that one, or whether both of them will be equally good. | 6 In the days of your youth, marry a wife and get children, and in the time of your old age, do not leave the wife of your portion from stopping birth of children, for you do not know which of them is chosen to be good, the one or the other or if both of them will be equally good. |
| 7 And the light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. | 7 And sweet is the light of the Torah, and it is good to light up dim eyes that they may see the glory of the face of the Shecina, which will light up the face of the righteous from the splendor of His Shecina so that their beauty may be like the sun. |
| 8 For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many; all that befalls [him] is vanity. | 8 For if a man lives many days in all of them he should rejoice and occupy himself with the Torah of 'ה. And let him remember the dark days of death and not sin. For many are the days which the deceased lies in the grave and it is appropriate for him to get judgment from Heaven for his life which he loved. All the time punishment will come on him for vanities he has done. |
| 9 Rejoice, O youth, in your childhood, and let your heart bring you cheer in the days of your youth, and go in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these God will bring you to judgment. | 9 Rejoice, Youth, in the days of your youth, and let your heart be glad in the days of your boyhood, and walk humbly in the ways of your heart, and be careful in what you see not to see evil and know that for all these things 'ה will bring you to judgment. |
| 10 And remove anger from your heart, and take evil away from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. | 10 And remove anger from your heart that you should not cause evil to your flesh for youth and the days of blackness of hair are transient. (A different version: Remove anger from your heart for anger kills people and also, it brings down many to Gehenna, but as for you, it is appropriate to save yourself from the judgment of Gehenna and know that all of this world is considered tansient and nothing remains to a man from all his works except the good deeds which shield him and also benefit him in the world to come.) |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 11

**1 Send forth your bread upon the surface of the water** Do goodness and kindness to a person about whom your heart tells you that you will never see him again, like a person who casts his food upon the surface of the water.

**for after many days you will find it** Days will yet come, and you will receive your recompense. Note what is said about Jethro (Exod. 2:20): “Call him that he should eat bread,” and he thought that he (Moses) was an Egyptian and that he would never see him again. What was his end? He became his son-in-law and reigned over Israel and brought him under the wings of the Shechinah, and his sons and grandsons merited to sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.

**2 Give a portion to seven and even to eight** If you have shared your food and your drink with seven who need kindness, share further with eight who come after them, and do not say, “Enough.”

**for you do not know what evil will be** Perhaps days will yet come and you will need them all. Then you will be saved from the evil by this charity, and if not now, when? Our Sages, however, said:

**Give a portion, etc.** These are the seven days of Creation. Give one of them as a portion to your Creator, to rest on the Sabbath.

**and even to eight** These are the eight days preceding circumcision. Another explanation:

**Give a portion to seven** the communal sacrifices of the seven days of Passover.

**and even to eight** days of the Festival [of Succoth].

**for you do not know what evil will be** if the Temple will be destroyed, and you will not sacrifice any longer, and the first sacrifices will avail to annul the evil decree. Another explanation:

**for you do not know what will be** You do not know what has been decreed on the rains on the Festival [of Succoth], and the sacrifices will avail, and they will annul evil decrees.

**3 If the clouds be full of rain** If you have seen clouds full of rain, you know that they will ultimately empty their rains upon the earth. In the place where the benefit grows and is discernible, there it is destined to come to rest. Likewise, you should know that if a tree rests, etc. If a wise and righteous man resides in a city or in a province, the place where he resides, there his deeds will be discernible after his demise, and his words of wisdom, his exemplary traits and his bestowal of goodness upon the inhabitants of the place through his good custom that he guided them on the straight road.

**rests** Heb. יִפּוֹל, will rest (or dwell), like (Gen. 25:18): “before the face of all his brothers did he settle (נָפָל).”

**a tree** A Torah scholar, who protects with his merit like a tree, which shades the ground.

**4 He who waits for the wind** he who waits and looks forward until the wind comes.

**will not sow** Sometimes he waits, and it does not come.

**and he who looks at the clouds** He looks at the clouds, and when he sees them darkening, he is afraid to reap because of the rains; [such a person] will never reap because he is always afraid.

**5 As you do not know, etc., as things enclosed in the full womb** things closed in and confined in the womb which is full, even though it protrudes outward, just as you do not know the way of the wind. This is a transposed verse, expounded from its end to its beginning. Just as you do not know the way of the wind, i.e., the knowledge of both these things is equal. Neither is this one revealed to you nor is that one revealed to you. Sometimes you think to perceive in the clouds that the wind will come, and it does not come here, but it passes and goes away to another land. This expression is like (Gen. 13:10): “like the garden of the Lord, so the land of Egypt;” (Isa. 24:2): “as with the maidservant, so with her mistress; as with the buyer so with the seller.” Sometimes Scripture compares the former to the latter, and sometimes it compares the latter to the former. Here too, it teaches the knowledge of the wind from the knowledge of the womb, i.e., you should not await the wind by looking at the clouds. (GLOSS: This matter is transposed in Rashi’s words, and it is in the opposite order. We must therefore emend it as it is in exact editions, and then it will better understood, and this is the authentic version:

**As you do not know** This is a transposed verse, explained from the end to the beginning: Just as you cannot identify the things enclosed in the full womb, that is, the things closed in and confined in the full womb, and even though it protrudes outward, you do not know what is in her womb, so do you not know the way of the wind, i.e., the knowledge of both these things is equal [from the book Sifthei Hachamim].)

**as things enclosed** Heb כַּעֲצָמִים, enclos in Old French, like (Isa. 33:15): “and closes (וְעֹצֵם) his eyes.”

**so you will not know, etc.** Also the decrees of the Omnipresent in matters of poverty and riches are hidden from you, and you should not refrain from doing kindness because you are concerned, perhaps I will lack some of my possessions and become impoverished. I will not engage in Torah and neglect my work and become poor. I will not wed and have children, because I will have to spend money on them.

**6 In the morning, sow your seed** If your learned Torah in your youth, learn Torah in your old age. If you had disciples in your youth, you should have disciples in your old age. If you married a woman of childbearing age in your youth, you should marry a woman of childbearing age in your old age. If you performed acts of kindness in your youth, perform acts of kindness in your old age.

**for you know not which will succeed** whether the disciples and the children of your youth will survive you, or perhaps only those of your old age will survive. We find in the case of Rabbi Akiva that he had twenty-four thousand disciples from Gabbath to Antipatris, and they all died between Passover and Shavuoth, and he came to our Sages in the south and taught them. And concerning children, we find in the case of Ibzan, (Jud. 12:9): “and thirty daughters he sent abroad, and thirty daughters he brought in for his sons,” and they all died in his lifetime (Baba Bathra 91a), but in his old age, he begot Obed, who survived him.

**7 And the light is sweet** The light of Torah is sweet.

**and it is good for the eyes to see the sun** And fortunate are the disciples whose eyes see an halachah explained and clarified thoroughly. So is it expounded in Midrash Psalms (ad loc.).

**8 let him rejoice in them all** Let him be happy with his lot, provided that he remember the days of darkness and improve his deeds so that he be saved from them, and these are the days of eternal death; they are the days of the wicked.

**for they will be many** in those days, more than the days of life.

**all that befalls** him will be vanity and darkness. There is הֶבֶל, that is an expression of retribution and troubles, like (above 6:4): “for he comes in vanity and goes in darkness.”

**9 Rejoice, O youth, in your childhood** like a man who says to his slave or to his son, “Sin, sin, for one time you will suffer for all.” Here too, the wise man says: “Rejoice, O youth, in your childhood… and go in the ways of your heart,” but be assured “that for all these, the judge will bring you to judgment.”

**10 And remove anger** things that anger the Omnipresent.

**and take evil away** the evil inclination.

**from your flesh** that you should have a heart of flesh.

**and youth** Heb. וְהַשַׁחֲרוּת, lit. blackness, youth, called thus because [the hair on] a person’s head is black in his youth.

# Chapter 12

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JPS** | **Targum** |
| 1 And remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of evil come, and years arrive, about which you will say, "I have no desire in them." | 1 Remember your Creator to hold Him dear in the days of your boyhood until there will not come to you evil days and you will reach years that you will say, I have no desire for them. |
| 2 Before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars darken, and the clouds return after the rain. | 2 Before that will not change the brightness of your face, which is like the sun, and before the light of your eyes becomes blind, and until the beauty of your cheeks should become dark, and before the pupils of your eyes, which compare to the stars, become dim, and your eyelids run with tears like clouds after rain. |
| 3 On the day that the keepers of the house tremble, and the mighty men are seized by cramps, and the grinders cease since they have become few, and those who look out of the windows become darkened. | 3 On the day your knees will tremble and your arms will knock and the teeth of your mouth will be useless so they are unable to chew food and your eyes which look from the opening of your head will dim. |
| 4 And the doors shall be shut in the street when the sound of the mill is low, and one shall rise at the voice of a bird, and all the songstresses shall be brought low. | 4 Your foot will be bound from going out in the market, and your appetite for food will leave yo, and you will wake from your sleep by the light sound of a bird as if by the voice of thieves that go around at night, and your lips will tremble so they cannot utter songs. ... |
| 5 Also from the high places they will fear, and terrors on the road, and the almond tree will blossom, and the grasshopper will drag itself along, and sexual desire will fail, for man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about in the street. | 5 Also, you will be afraid to remember things which happened before, and a small pile will appear to you like a high mountain when you walk the path, and the top of your spinal column will protrude because of weakness like the almond tree and your ankles will be swollen and you will refrain from sex, for man turns to go to the grave, and the angels who demand your judgment go about like scribes [Alternative is mourners] in the markets to write the judgment of your account. |
| 6 Before the silver cord snaps, and the golden fountain is shattered, and the pitcher breaks at the fountain, and the wheel falls shattered into the pit. | 6 Before your tongue becomes dumb and cannot speak, and your skull will be cracked, and your gall will be broken on your liver, and your body will run to your grave. |
| 7 And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God, Who gave it. | 7 And your flesh that was created from dust will return to the earth like it was previously and the spirit of your soul will return to arise in judgment before 'ה who gave it to you. |
| 8 "Vanity of vanities," said Koheleth; "all is vanity." | 8 When Solomon, king of Israel, looked at the transience of this world and the trivia [הבלים] which people do, Kohelet said with his words, "All is transience." |
| 9 And more [than this], Koheleth was wise, he also taught knowledge to the people; he listened and sought out, he established many proverbs. | 9 And more than all people, Solomon, who was called Kohelet, was wise and also he taught the people of Israel knowledge, and he listened to the voice of the wise and explored the books of wisdom,and by the spirit of prophecy from 'ה , he prepared wisdom books and independently very many clever proverbs. |
| 10 Koheleth sought to find words of delight and properly recorded words of truth. | 10 King Solomon, who was called Kohelet, tried in his wisdom to judge people according to the thoughts of their hearts (minds) without witnesses. Therefore, it was told to him by the spirit of prophecy from 'ה, this is already written in the Torah by Moses the teacher of Israel-- proper are the words and true: "By the word of witnesses shall the matter be established." |
| 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like well-fastened nails with large heads, given from one shepherd. | 11 The words of the sages are compared to goads and nails, which are fastened to teach wisdom to those without knowledge, just as a goad teaches the ox, and the rabbis of the Sanhedrin are masters of halacha, and midrash, which was given by Moses the Prophet, who alone fed the people of Israel in the desert with manna and delicacies. |
| 12 And more than they, my son, beware; making many books has no end, and studying much is a weariness of the flesh. | 12 And more than these, my son, be careful to make books of wisdom without end, but occupy yourself much with words of Torah and become wise with weariness of flesh. |
| 13 The end of the matter, everything having been heard, fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man. | 13 Every word which is done in the world in secret will ultimately be publicized and announced to all of mankind. Therefore, fear the word of 'ה and keep His commandment in order not to sin in secret, and if you do sin,be careful to repent, for this should be the path of all men. |
| 14 For every deed God will bring to judgment-for every hidden thing, whether good or bad. | 14 For every deed 'ה will bring to the great day of judgment and will make public all the hidden words of people whether good or evil. |

## Rashi’s Commentary on Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) Chapter 12

**1 And remember your Creator** There (Avoth 3:1) we learned: Akabia the son of Mahalalel says: Reflect upon three things etc. And he derived it from this verse: And remember your Creator (בּוֹרְאֶיךָ) that you will give an accounting and reckoning before Him; and remember your pit (בּוֹרֶךָ), your grave, a place of earth, maggots, and worms; and remember your well (בְּאֵרֶךְ), the well that flows from its source: that is the putrid droplet of seed and semen.

**the days of evil** the days of old age and feebleness.

**2 Before the sun… darken** Our Sages said: This is the forehead, which gives light and shines on a young man, but when he grows old, it becomes wrinkled and does not shine.

**and the light** This is the nose, which is the form of the features of the face.

**and the moon** This is the soul, which gives light for a person, for once it is taken away from him, he ceases to have light in his eyes.

**and the stars** These are the cheeks, the pomegranates of the face, called pomels (cheekbones) of the cheeks, which shine.

**and the clouds return after the rain** The dimming of the light will come after the tears of the weeping for the many troubles that passed over him.

**3 the keepers of the house** These are the ribs and the flanks, which protect the entire body cavity.

**and the mighty men are seized by cramps** Heb. וְהִתְעַוְּתוּ. עִוּוּת, called crampe, will seize them. וְהִתְעַוְּתוּ is encranpiront in Old French, will be seized with cramp.

**the mighty men** These are the legs, upon which the body supports itself.

**and the grinders cease** These are the teeth.

**since they have become few** In old age, most of his teeth fall out.

**and those who look out of the windows** These are the eyes.

**4 And the doors shall be shut** These are his orifices.

**when the sound of the mill is low** the sound of the mill grinding the food in his intestines, and that is the stomach.

**and one shall rise at the voice of a bird** For even the voice of a bird awakens him from his sleep since he has become old.

**and all the songstresses shall be brought low** Heb. וְיִשַּׁחוּ. All the sounds of musical instruments seem to him like conversation (שִׂיחָה). Its apparent meaning is like its simple interpretation, that יִשַּׁחוּ is like יִשְׁפָּלוּ, shall be brought low. All the singers and songstresses shall be low in his eyes, and so did Barzilai the Gileadite say to David, (II Sam. 19:36): “or can I still listen to the voice of singers and songstresses?”

**5 Also from the high places they will fear** from the mounds and bumps in the streets: he is afraid to go out into the street lest he stumble on them.

**and terrors on the road** Heb. וְחַתְחַתִּים. He has many fears and terrors on the road. חַתְחַתִּים This is a word consisting of doubled language, like גַלְגַלִים, wheels, קַשְׂקַשִׂים, scales, זַלְזַלִים, tendrils.

**and… blossoms** Heb. וְיָנֵאץ, an expression of (Song 7:13): “whether the pomegranates have blossomed (הֵנֵצוּ),” for the “aleph” in it is not pronounced. Our Rabbis said: This is the haunch, hanche in French, into which the hip bone is thrust, and in his old age, the flesh is emaciated, and the bone protrudes, like the blossom of a tree which protrudes.

**the almond tree** Heb. הַשָׁקֵד, an almond tree, i.e., old age will spring upon him like this almond tree, which hastens to blossom before all the other trees.

**and the grasshopper will drag itself along** These are the buttocks, for his buttocks will seem to him to be as one who bears a heavy burden. וְיִסְתַּבֵּל, ert porfessez in Old French, and will be overburdened.

**and the sexual desire will fail** the desire for women; for he will have no urge to be intimate with women. הָאֲבִיוֹנָה, means desire, like (Deut. 1:26): “But you did not want (אֲבִיתֶם)” (Ps. 119:174): “I yearned (תָּאַבְתִּי) for Your salvation.”

**6 Before the silver cord snaps** This is the spinal cord, which is as white as silver, and when he dies, its marrow diminishes and empties out and dries and becomes crooked within the vertebrae, and it becomes like a chain. יֵרָתֵק is an expression of silver chains (רְתֻקוֹת).

**and the golden fountain is shattered** This is the male organ, which emits a flow of water (urine), which flows like a fountain, like (Josh. 15:19): “the upper springs (גֹת).” וְתָרֻץ is an expression of shattering (רְצִיצָה).

**and the pitcher breaks at the fountain** This is the stomach, which is thick and splits upon his death.

**and the wheel falls shattered into the pit** The eyeball will be shattered within its socket. According to its simple interpretation, this is a wheel with which they draw water from the cistern. So is this entire matter expounded in Tractate Shabbath (151b 152a). Midrash Kinoth (Lam. Rabbah, Proem 23), however, interprets it as referring to all Israel:

**And remember your Creator in the days of your youth** As long as your you are still called chosen, as long as the priesthood still endures, as it is said (I Sam. 2:28): “And I did choose him from all the tribes of Israel to be My priest;” as long as the covenant of the Levites still endures, as it is said (Deut. 18:5): “For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes;” as long as the kingdom of the House of David still endures, as it is said (Ps. 78:70): “And He chose His servant David;” as long as Jerusalem still endures, as it is said (I Kings 11:32): “the city that I have chosen;” as long as the chosen Temple still endures, about which it is stated (II Chron. 7:16): “And now I have chosen and consecrated this House;” as long as you still endure, as it is said (Deut. 7:6): “the Lord your God has chosen you.”

**before the days of evil come** These are the days of the exile.

**Before the sun… darken** This is the kingdom of the House of David of which it is written (Ps. 89:37): “And his throne is like the sun before Me.”

**and the light** This is the Torah, as it is said (Prov. 6:23): “For a commandment is a candle and the Torah is light.”

**and the moon** This refers to the Sanhedrin, of which we learned (Sanh. 4:3): “The seating of the Sanhedrin was in the shape of a semi-circular threshing floor.”

**and the stars** These are the Rabbis, as it is said (Dan. 12:3): “and those who bring the multitudes to righteousness are like the stars.”

**and the clouds return after the rain** calamity after harsh calamity. You find concerning all the harsh prophecies that Jeremiah prophesied about them, that they befell them only after the destruction of the Temple.

**On the day that the keepers of the house tremble** This refers to the watches of the priests and the Levites.

**and the mighty men are seized by cramps** These are the priests, who are mighty in strength. Said Rabbi Abba bar Kahana: Aaron lifted twenty-two thousand Levites in one day. Said Rabbi Hanina: The bird’s crop is a light thing, yet the priest would throw it more than thirty cubits.

**and the grinders cease** These are the great collections of Mishnah: the Mishnah of Rabbi Akiva, the Mishnah of Rabbi Hiyya, and the Mishnah of Bar Kappara.

**and those who look… become darkened** that the Talmud will be forgotten from the heart.

**And the doors are shut in the street** for example, the doors of Nehushta the son (read: the daughter) of Elnathan, which were wide open.

**when the sound of the mill is low** because they did not engage in the words of Torah. Said Rabbi Samuel: Israel is compared to the grinding of the millstones; just as the millstones are idle neither by day nor by night, here too, (Josh. 1:8): “you shall meditate therein day and night.”

**and one rises at the voice of a bird** This is the wicked Nebuchadnezzar. Rabbi Levi said: For eighteen years a heavenly voice went forth and in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace and proclaimed: “Wicked slave, go and destroy your Master’s House because His children disobey Him.”

**and all the songstresses are brought low** (Isa. 24:9): “In song, they shall not drink wine.”

**Also from the Most High they fear** He was afraid of He Who is Supreme in the universe, and his heart was concerned lest He do to him as He did to his predecessors.

**and terrors on the road** Because of this, he will seek omens and portents [to see if] he will succeed on the way that he will go, as it is stated (Ezek. 21:26): “For the king of Babylon stood at the crossroads, to divine; he furbished the arrows, he inquired of the teraphim.”

**and the almond tree will blossom** Jeremiah’s prophecy will grow, as it is said (Jer. 1:11): “I see the rod of an almond tree.” Said Rabbi Eliezer: This almond tree, from the time it blossoms until its fruits are ripe, are twenty-one days. Likewise, from the seventeenth of Tammuz until the ninth of Av are twenty-one days.

**and the grasshopper will drag itself along** This is Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Dan. 3:1): “its height sixty cubits, its width six cubits.” Now, if its thickness is not six, it cannot stand, and you say that, “he set it up in the plain of Dura?” Said Rav Beivai: They set it up and it fell; they set it up and it fell, until they brought all the gold in Jerusalem and poured it out as a base on its feet, to fulfill what is stated (Ezek. 7:19): “and their gold will be repugnant.”

**and the avionah fails** This is the ancestral merit; the support of your Patriarchs will fail; accordingly, אֲבִיוֹנָה is derived from אָב, father.

**for man goes** Israel, who were called (Ezek. 36:37) “men like a flock of sheep;” (ibid. 34:31) “you are men.”

**to his everlasting home** They came from Babylon, and they returned to Babylon. Terah, the father of Abraham, was from the other side of the river [Euphrates].

**and the mourners go about in the street** The exile of Jeconiah preceded the exile of Zedekiah by eleven years. When Nebuchadnezzar exiled the exile of Zedekiah in neck irons, the exile of Jeconiah came out toward Nebuchadnezzar against their will, with the rest of the city dwellers, to praise him, that he was a hero and a victor, and they would see the captives and ask them, each one about his kinsman, what happened to him, and they would answer them, (Jer. 15:2): “Such as are for death to death, and such as are for captivity to captivity, and such as are for the sword to the sword.” And they would praise with one hand, and with their other hand, they would clap their hands and beat their sides in mourning for their brothers and for their children.

**before the silver cord snaps** This is the genealogical chain.

**and the golden fountain is shattered** These are the words of Torah, as it is said (Ps. 19:11) “They are to be desired more than gold.”

**and the pitcher breaks at the fountain** The pitcher of Baruch the son of Neriah on the fountain of Jeremiah. They were both exiled to Babylon and stopped their studies because of the hardship of the journey. At first, they were exiled to Egypt, for Johanan the son of Kareah exiled them, and when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Egypt, he exiled them to Babylon.

**and the wheel falls shattered into the pit** This is Babylon, which is the depository of the world.

**7 And the dust returns, etc.** They came from Babylon and they returned to Babylon.

**and the spirit returns** This is the holy spirit, for as soon as the holy spirit departed, they were exiled.

**8 Vanity of vanities** I see in the world.

**said Koheleth** he who had a collection of wisdom within him.

**all is vanity** all that was created in the six days of Creation.

**9 And more [than this], Koheleth was wise** And more than what is written in this Book, Koheleth was wise.

**he listened** Heb. אִזֵן. He made ears (handles) for the Torah, like a basket which has no ears with which to hold it, and he came and made ears for it, for he instituted “Eruvin” as a safeguard for the observance of the Sabbath, and he instituted the ritual washing of the hands as a safeguard for purity, and he instituted secondary forbidden marriages as a safeguard for the prohibitions against incest.

**10 Koheleth sought** He set his heart and sought the matter and found it.

**words of delight** the halachah for Moses from Sinai.

**and properly recorded** This refers to the Written Torah and the Prophets.

**11 The words of the wise** They made a fence for the Torah with decrees to distance a person from sin, e.g., eating hallowed things until dawn, and they said “Until midnight,” and likewise, the evening recitation of the Shema [which the Sages limit to midnight].

**are like goads** Just as this goad directs the cow to its furrows, so do their words direct a person to the ways of life.

**and like well-fastened nails** Just as this nail is fastened, so are their words fastened [i.e., permanent], and just as a sapling (נְטִיעָה) is fruitful and multiplies, so are their words fruitful and multiply, to find for them a reason.

**with large heads** Heb. אֲסֻפּוֹת, nails that have a large and thick head, grosse in French, large. So did Dunash the son of Labrat explain it (Teshuvoth Dunash, p. 44).

**given from one shepherd** All their words are the words of the living God. He said them, and one shepherd gave them, viz. Moses from God. וּכְמַשְׂמְרוֹת This is written with a “sin,” for the Torah (Tenach), with the twenty-four books coincide with the number of the watches (מִשְׁמָרוֹת) of the priests and the Levites.

**12 And more than they, my son, beware** more than the uprightness of the words of truth, the words written in the aforementioned books.

**my son, beware** to observe the words of the Sages. Now if you ask, “If they are necessary, why were they not written down?”

**making many books has no end** If we would attempt to write, we would be unable to do so.

**and studying much is a weariness of the flesh** And if he comes to memorize large amounts, more than the heart can grasp, that is weariness to man, but let one not say, “Since I cannot complete the work, why should I begin?” But…

**13 The end of the matter, everything having been heard, fear God** What you can, do, and let your heart be to Heaven.

**and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man** Because, for this matter, the entire man was created.

**For every deed** that a person performs, God will bring to judgment. Therefore, מַעֲשֶׂה is vowelized with a “pattah,” [meaning a “seggol”], and the cantillation sign is above, since it is not connected to the name [of God].

**for every hidden thing** even for the unintentional sin.

**whether good or bad** even if he stumbled in [the performance of] a commandment, such as giving charity to a poor man in public [causing him embarrassment].

**The end of the matter, everything having been heard, fear God, etc.**