

# **Eighth Part**

## **The Wisdom Books of David and Solomon**

### **Book V**

#### ***Ecclesiastes***

#### **Prologue**

1. King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Ghost, wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, of moral character, in which are expounded other aspects of the folly of worldly things, and the benefits that the possession of Divine Wisdom entails.

2. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon at seventy years of age and therefore one year prior to his death, is reflected a certain repentance for a considerable part of the turpitude of his life, as well as his disillusionment with the vanity of things of the Earth, which he possessed with opulence and inordinate appetites. Across the pages of Ecclesiastes, Divine Wisdom preaches against the vanity of human things, so that men, while they live in this world, learn to govern themselves wisely and know how to direct their footsteps towards eternal blessedness.

#### ***Chapter I***

##### **Vanity of human things that do not lead man to his supernatural end**

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity: If man does not employ his life in the service of God, what lasting benefit does he gain from all the work he labours at on Earth?

One generation passes and another comes: some die and others are born, and what the former left the latter take; but the Earth remains ever stable.

The sun rises and sets; rises again and is hidden, and so on and on.

The wind blows right around the Earth in a continuous cycle.

The rivers enter the sea, and it does not overflow; and from the sea, by the evaporation of its waters from the effects of the sun, the wellsprings are replenished again and rivers once more flow towards the sea.

All things of earth hold their mysteries, which man can scarcely understand and much less explain.

The eye does not tire of looking nor the ear of hearing.

What has been up till now, the same will continue to be.

What has been done up until now, the same will continue to be done.

Regarding common things basic to man, there is nothing new under the sun, nor can anyone say: “*Here is something new*”, because it already occurred in previous ages with identical or similar characteristics.

#### ***Chapter II***

##### **Vanity of human wisdom or science which does not lead man to his supernatural end**

I, Solomon, king of Israel and author of this book, can speak from personal experience of the vanity that human wisdom is for man when not directed to the

supernatural destiny of his soul; for while it is true that God inspires man to labour at comprehending the things He has created, He does so in order that this redound to the greater service of His divine plans.

I, then, often proposed in my heart to carry out meticulous investigations into the things of this world with the object of being held wiser by men. I even applied my heart to further increasing my knowledge concerning prudence and doctrine, folly and error; however, not with the idea of amending my life, but to make myself appear wiser. I thought then: Here I am exalted and in the forefront of human wisdom, more so than all who have gone before me. In my studies I observed how much men do for their sole material advantage, and not for the good of their souls; for perverse men with difficulty amend and the number of fools is incalculable. Now I see that however often I have put my knowledge to the service of my personal glory and not to God's, it all amounted to no more than vain labour and vexation of spirit.

For all the wisdom that someone might have concerning the things that exist in the world, God's knowledge of them is infinitely greater. It is certainly true that, on a strictly human scale, a wise man differs from an ignorant man in the way that light can differ from darkness; however, considering that both eventually die the same, I thought in my heart: if I, who consider myself wise, have to die the same as the ignorant, what is the use of my applying myself assiduously to acquiring knowledge for my own personal glory? And reasoning now over this, I reached the conclusion that human wisdom, of itself, is vanity.

### *Chapter III*

#### **Vanity of riches and pleasures that distance man from his supernatural end**

I also said in my heart: I shall revel in every delight and enjoy without restraint the good things of this world. But later I came to see that this too was vanity.

I ordered magnificent works to be done, I built myself houses, planted vineyards; I laid out gardens and orchards, planting in them every species of tree. I constructed reservoirs to irrigate the tree plantations. I possessed numerous wives, many men and women slaves, and came to have a large family. I also possessed many herds of cattle, very many flocks of sheep, more than all those who had gone before me. The great riches I already possessed in silver and gold I increased yet further from tributes paid to me by kings of other nations, and from the heavy taxes with which I burdened my people. I surrounded myself with men and women singers, and with whatever serves to delight man; I used precious vessels and flagons to serve wine at my table; and surpassed in wealth all who had lived before me. In short, I did not deny my eyes anything they desired, nor forbid my heart to enjoy every kind of pleasure and take delight in the things I had prepared; rather I considered this to be my portion, to take pleasure in my work. But looking back at all the works of my hands, and considering the labours at which I had so uselessly toiled, I see that all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and that nothing is stable in this world.

So then, if man dispenses with God, what benefit will he gain from all the toil and vexation of spirit with which he burdens himself in this world? Is this not vanity? Nevertheless, it is a gift of God that man live in peace of spirit, piously enjoy his work, and eat and drink with moderation. Who shall be able to indulge himself and abound in delights as much as I, and withal I am unhappy? To the man who is right-minded in His presence, God gives Divine Wisdom, knowledge and good cheer; but leaves the sinner with his troubles and useless worries to accumulate and hoard goods which will later go to others; which is vanity and useless torment of soul.

#### *Chapter IV*

##### **Man's inordinate efforts are vanity, since everything has its time**

All things have their time, and everything there is under the heavens takes place within its appropriate term: There is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to sow, and a time to reap; a time to sicken, and a time to get well; a time to build, and a time to pull down; a time to laugh, and a time to cry; a time to dance, and a time to mourn; a time to gather stones, and a time to scatter them; a time to embrace, and a time to detest; a time to win, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and time to cast aside; a time to sew, and a time to rend; a time to speak, and a time to keep silent; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Of what use is so much toil in life for things that later have to end? I have seen the suffering that always accompanies man in his efforts, which is the just penalty for his sins. All things that God made are good for man, provided he uses them at their proper time and in accord with God's plan; but, because of sin, man oftentimes toils to use them according to his cravings, and not according to the proper end for which they were created. However, I know that there is nothing better for man than to do good in his life, be of good cheer, eat and drink moderately and see the good his work brings him, since this is a gift from God. I have seen that all things God has created, always subsist in one way or another, and that we cannot add to or subtract from what God has made in order that He be feared and adored. What was made, that same remains; what is to be, already was, because God renews what is past.

#### *Chapter V*

##### **The vanity of the miseries of life**

I have seen under the sun wrongdoing in place of piety, and injustice instead of justice. And I said in my heart: God is to judge the righteous man and the ungodly; because for each the time arrives to be called to order. The man who does not act uprightly and becomes a slave to his lower passions: in what does he differ from a beast? The difference between one and the other is that a man should behave as a man acting uprightly, and not as a beast. Besides, a man of depraved life is worse than the beasts, since they at least act in accordance with the natural laws God has placed in them. I understand, then, that there is nothing better for a man

than to act uprightly and attend to his occupations with pious good spirits, since this is what God requires of him while he lives.

I turned my attention to other things, and I saw the violence committed on Earth, the tears of the innocent without anyone to console them, and the impossibility of their freeing themselves from the hands of their oppressors, lacking all human succour. I considered that any good action of man comes from God alone.

I also contemplated all the labours of men, and I came to see that their disproportionate successes and talents are exposed to envy and persecution from others; so that undue concern for material things is vanity and needless care. Though I have also seen the lazy, arms folded, saying foolishly, *“Better is a small handful of goods together with repose, than two handfuls by dint of hard work and vexation of heart”*; which is vanity and sloth.

Considering further, I found another vanity under the sun: A man who lived alone, without wife, without children, without brothers or sisters, without any heir; who never wearied of gathering wealth, and who never once reflected, saying: *“I, why do I toil so much for my gain to the detriment of my soul?”* Vain indeed, then, is his conduct. It is preferable for a man who lives alone to share his goods with the needy, and thus at least count on their company; for good company usually has its advantages; since if one falls another will support him. Alas for whoever has no one to help him up when he falls! And if someone should attack either of the two, both will offer resistance; since a cord of many threads is hard to snap.

Far better a penniless youth, if he is wise, than an old and foolish king who is unprovided for the future; because sometimes from prison and from shackles a man comes up to reign; while another born to the throne ends up in misery.

Enter the House of God with the proper dispositions, considering the sacred place it is, and approach intending to listen to what He tells you in your heart, and do it; because obedience is far better than the sacrifices of fools, who are not fully mindful of how much ill they do to others and to themselves.

## ***Chapter VI***

### **The vanity of speaking improperly, breaking vows, avarice, injustice and other disorders**

Do not speak without thinking first, nor let your heart be quick to express itself; because God hears all and will judge you severely. Be moderate, then, in your words; since in much talk there will be no lack of folly.

If you have made a vow to God, be sure to fulfil it, because faithless and imprudent promises displease Him. Therefore, fulfil what you have promised; for it is much better to make no vows, than to break those you have made.

Do not let your tongue be occasion of sin, nor say: *“There is no providence”*; lest God, angry at your words, destroy all the work of your hands. By letting the imagination run loose in useless daydreams, man falls into much vanity.

If you see the poor oppressed, violence prevailing in lawsuits and justice subverted in a nation, do not wonder or be alarmed at these disorders; for he who

has a high post has another over and above him; and over the latter there is someone else higher up still; over them all is the king, and over the king is God.

The covetous will never have enough money, and the lover of excessive riches will not reap any benefit from them, which is vanity; since he shall not enjoy them in peace, for where there are great riches there are also many to consume them; and for the miser this is great suffering. The honourable worker, on the contrary, sleeps peacefully, whether he eats much or little; but the wealthy man is so full of delicacies that they scarcely let him sleep.

Besides, hoarding riches can bring to their owner the terrible consequence of their being stolen by thieves. If this happens he will find himself reduced to the greatest misery; and as he came forth from his mother's womb, so will he leave this world, possessing nothing of all he acquired by his labours. Therefore, I hold it to be a good thing that a man eat and drink moderately, live uprightly and cheerfully relish the fruits of his fatigues for the days God grants to him. When God bestows wealth and property on a man, if he puts them to God's service and does not employ them for evil, it is good that he wholesomely enjoy them, since this is a gift from God.

If the man to whom God has given wealth, property and honour, and who lacks nothing of all that he desires, by his covetousness does not venture to use his riches sensibly to prevent them from being used up, then by his meanness he will leave them to the mercy of strangers following his death, who will squander them in a few days without attaching any importance to them.

## ***Chapter VII***

### **The best for man, and the value of Divine Wisdom**

Of what use to man is the vain investigation of things beyond him, if he has no concern for his soul's fundamental needs, nor ponders the brevity of life?

A good reputation is of greater value than the most costly perfumes; and the day of the righteous man's death is better than that of his birth.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to one of feasting; because in the first is remembered the end of every man, and gives us opportunity to reflect upon what we should do so that death may not catch us in mortal sin.

The seriousness and gravity of the righteous is better than the false smile of the ungodly flatterer; because the aspect of the righteous will be for many motive to avoid other faults and to amend for those already committed. Thus the heart of the wise and prudent is where there is rectitude and discipline; and the heart of the fool is where there is licentiousness.

Better to be censured by the wise and prudent, than to be seduced to evil by the blandishments of the fool.

Do not be quick tempered, because anger nests in the heart of the fool.

Some say that past times were better than the present, for the sole reason of being past; which is folly, since present times often surpass in virtue and prosperity many past times.

I have seen the righteous die in righteousness, and the ungodly die in ungodliness. Therefore, do not pile up sin upon sin, nor seek to live thoughtlessly, lest death catch you unawares.

In your desire to be righteous, do not fall into extremes and idiosyncrasies, nor try to know more than is convenient; lest you fall into absurdity.

It is good that with preference you help the righteous, but do not withdraw your hand from others who are not so, since whoever fears God turns no one away.

Divine Wisdom makes a wise man stronger, but does not make him faultless.

Do not stop to hear all that is said, lest you hear complaints against yourself, and your conscience remind you that you too have often murmured about others.

O how wonderful to delve into Divine Wisdom! Who shall ever fathom it!

### ***Chapter VIII***

#### **Vanity of the seductress**

I examined everything in the interior of my soul with the object of knowing, considering and seeking wisdom and the reason behind things, and of understanding the ungodliness of the fool and the error of the imprudent. I found that more bitter than death is the seductress, a noose of seduction and a net for the heart; her hands are shackles. Whoever is righteous flees from the seductress; whoever is ungodly falls prey to her seduction. I arrived at this conclusion, contrasting one thing with another to ascertain the reason for the loss of so many men, without yet having completely discovered it. Among a thousand men I found a few with wisdom, but among the women with whom I have lived I found only one wise. I also reached the conclusion that God created man and woman righteous; that the first woman sinned for not having rebuffed Satan's seduction; and that the first man sinned for not having rebuffed his spouse's seduction. Sin, then, entered the world through a woman.

### ***Chapter IX***

#### **The honest man. Virtue, unknown. Uncertainty of destiny**

Who like the truly wise? Divine Wisdom is reflected in the face of the man with righteous heart; folly is reflected in the face of the man with ungodly heart. The wise man keeps the commandments given by God, and keeps the just laws given by the legitimate temporal authority.

Whoever keeps the Commandments of God and the upright laws of His legitimate representatives, can always rely on God's protection during life, and above all at the hour of death. The heart of the wise man endeavours to do good during life, knowing that he has to render an account of his actions at the hour of death. Man has no power to prolong his life, neither does he possess arms with which to oust death. At that moment the ungodliness of the fool will avail him nothing.

In my considerations, I also took into account the following vanities: I saw that many ungodly men were given splendid funerals, having been honoured in the city as righteous during life, when they were hypocrites. There are also many men



who do evil without fear, when they see the ungodly live contentedly for long years, with God in no hurry to call them to judgment; but it must be borne in mind that, while it is true that the ungodly commit a hundred wrongs, and the good suffer them in patience, God at the same time will reward those who fear Him with eternal life, whilst He will chastise those others, if they do not convert, with eternal death. How often temporal evils come upon the righteous in this world as if they were chastised for wrongdoing; while the ungodly enjoy prosperity, comfort and security as if rewarded for having done righteous deeds. But it must be borne in mind that, in this world, the intelligence of man will never come to understand completely why God acts in one manner or another; and the greater the effort made to understand, the more obscure it all seems; for whoever, pretending to be wise, says that he understands it all, is not to be believed.

## **Chapter X**

### **Temperance and prudence**

I turned all these things over in my heart trying to understand them as best I could: the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hands of God, and all the same they are not entirely sure whether they deserve love or hatred. As far as purely temporal things are concerned, they happen equally to the righteous and to the ungodly, to the good and to the bad, to the clean and to the unclean, to whoever offers sacrifices to God and to whoever despises them. In this way, then, the innocent is treated like the sinner, and whoever takes an oath truthfully like the perjurer. This then, is a mystery difficult to unravel, to see that, in this world, the same merely temporal things happen to all. And if, in view of this, man does not act uprightly and prudently, and take into account the end of all things and the eternal destiny that awaits each, he will give himself up wholly to iniquity, thinking that, in this world, the righteous and the ungodly are treated alike.

Many think vainly, saying: *“No one can live forever, nor hope in the existence of another lasting life; better, therefore, to be a live slave than a dead king. For though it is true that the living know they will die, as long as they live they have the chance of enjoying this life. But the dead are of no use for anything, since neither are they able to enjoy this world nor do they have any recompense in another life, so that their memory is buried in oblivion.”*

But, to whoever is righteous, I say: *“Go and eat your bread with gladness and drink your wine with gusto, as long as your actions are pleasing to God. Enjoy a holy life all the days given you to live, since that is your portion in this world as recompense for the work at which you labour. Let your soul be clean at all times, and the oil of Grace be not lacking, so that you be rewarded by eternal life and your memory shine out forever.”*

Whatever good work you can perform, do it without delay, because after death you will have no further opportunities for acquiring merit by good works.

## ***Chapter XI***

### **Wisdom is worth more than strength**

There is a species of wisdom that I esteem as decidedly great: there was once a town with few inhabitants against which a powerful king came up, besieged it, built strongholds on all sides and encircled it completely. During the siege, a poor but wise man who found himself inside the town, counselled the citizens on how best to liberate it; and they, following his instructions, succeeded in doing so; but, later, nobody remembered the wise man any more. Faced with this, I thought: If wisdom is worth more than strength, why should the wisdom of the wise man be despised, though he be poor, and his memory not be lasting? For the soft-spoken words of the wise man are more efficacious than the bellowing of the powerful fool. Wisdom then, is better than weapons of war; for though a man possess a great army, if he acts foolishly in the stratagems of war, he loses everything.

## ***Chapter XII***

### **Wisdom, temperance and prudence in man**

Dead flies fallen into perfume spoil its fragrance; likewise a little untimely stupidity stains the most brilliant wisdom and glory. The heart of the wise is always in his right hand to act uprightly, and the heart of the fool is in his left to act wrongfully. The fool, in his career, judges all to be such. When a magnate is placed over you, do not abandon your post, because your watchfulness will avoid very grave sins.

Here is another folly I have observed: the prince places the fool in the highest post, and the wise and prudent in the lowest. I have seen servants on horseback, and princes walk about on foot like servants.

He who secretly tells another's ill, is like the serpent that strikes noiselessly.

The fool talks much. The fruit of the fool's toil will be affliction, because he does not even know the way to town.

Unfortunate are you, O land, whose king is wanting in wisdom and prudence, and whose princes are more concerned about dining than about good government. On the contrary, blessed are you, O land, whose king is noble in his deeds, in his wise government and in the use of arms, and whose princes eat to keep alive and not to gorge themselves with delicacies.

By neglecting to replace broken tiles, the entire roof will give way; by lazy work badly done, the house will be full of leaks.

Do not speak ill of anyone in the privacy of your room, because even the birds of the air will bear off your words and songsters will publish what you have said.

## ***Chapter XIII***

### **Liberality, youth and old age**

Give alms to the poor without seeking any recompense, since at the end you will encounter your eternal reward.

When the clouds are laden they pour down abundant rain upon the earth. Thus should you distribute your alms.



Whoever stays observing the wind will never sow; and whoever keeps watching the clouds will never reap.

As you are ignorant of the route by which the soul enters the body, and the manner that bones are set up in the womb of the expectant mother, in the same way neither do you know God's works, who is He who makes everything.

Light is sweet, and to behold the sun is a delight to the eyes.

Were a man to live many years, and in all of them enjoy good spirits, let him reflect that the days of eternity are unending; and that when they come, you will realize the vanity of many things from the past.

O youth, vain are your thoughts when you say to yourself: *"I will enjoy myself in the world in my youth, I will delight in temporal goods while a young man, and follow the cravings of my flesh and what pleases my eyes."* Well, know that God will call you to account for all this on the day He shall judge you. Therefore, cast anger from your heart, and put away the malice of your flesh. For foolish is the youth who gives himself over to the pleasures of the world.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of trials comes, and the years of old age draw nigh, full of vexations and ailments. Do not wait to do good, then, until your hands and legs are atremble.

Remember God before your mind begins to fail with the years, and dementia then hinders you from acting meritoriously, for lack of judgment in your actions; and before your body, converted into dust, returns to the earth from whence it came, and your soul departs to its eternal destiny.

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Fear God and keep His Commandments, because this alone avails man.

God will call us to account at judgement for any action that has not been done uprightly.