

# **PART ONE**

## **SECTION 1**

### **ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF GOD**

#### **ECCLESIASTES 1:1 - 4:16**

Solomon/Qohelet

**<sup>1</sup>The words of Qohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**

As explained in the Introduction (page 110), the author of Ecclesiastes wants us to remember Solomon ('the son of David, king in Jerusalem'), though he is never named explicitly in the text. It is Solomon, famed for his power, wealth, and success, who is traditionally accepted as the exemplar of wisdom. One thinks of the superscription at the beginning of the Book of Proverbs, where Solomon is mentioned by name:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.

Likewise with the opening verse of the Song of Songs:

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

In 1 Kings 8:22 we read:

Solomon stood before the altar of YHWH in the presence of all the assembly [לְקָהָל, qāhāl] of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven.

However, as we contemplate him it is a woman's voice that we hear, the voice of 'Qohelet', challenging us to re-evaluate the criteria handed down in the tradition as the measure of true wisdom.

**<sup>2</sup>Vanity of vanities, says Qohelet, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.**

'Re-evaluate' is hardly strong enough for her first words (verse 2), which declare that everything for which Solomon is acclaimed is 'vanity' (לְהֵבֵל, hebel, see Introduction page 116). The image is of a mist that suddenly vanishes, a passing breath, a fleeting shadow. The eye catches a glimpse of something, but it is gone. We think we hear something, but as soon as we pay attention there is silence. We are startled, but there is nothing there. Time does not stand still and everything that exists 'under the sun' (verse 3) is constantly changing, but ultimately achieves nothing new. Things lack substance. Our efforts to understand anything are doomed to futility. If we look to anything 'under the sun' to find meaning in our lives we lack wisdom.

**<sup>3</sup>What do people gain in all the toil at which they labour under the sun?**

People [אָדָם, 'ādām, verse 3] work hard to achieve something. People work hard to understand. But, ultimately, what is the point? The Hebrew word for 'toil' [עָמַל, 'āmal] occurs thirty-five times in Ecclesiastes. The expression 'under the sun' occurs twenty-nine times. What is there to show for all the toil that Solomon laboured at? The Jerusalem temple of the fourth century BC had been rebuilt out of the crumbled remains of Solomon's glorious temple destroyed in 587. The fortified cities of the northern and southern kingdoms are no more. If this is true for Solomon, it is surely true for the rest of us. 'Vanity of vanities' is the Hebrew superlative. Everything under the sun is superlatively 'vanity'.

Nowhere is this expressed more forcefully than by Qohelet, but the author of Ecclesiastes did not invent the insight.

YHWH, let me know my end,  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting my life is.  
You have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.  
Surely everyone stands as a mere breath [hebel].  
Surely everyone goes about like a shadow.  
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;  
they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

– Psalm 39:4-6

Those of low estate are but a breath [hebel],  
those of high estate are a delusion;  
in the balances they go up;  
they are together lighter than a breath [hebel].

– Psalm 62:9

Let me alone, for my days are a breath [hebel].

– Job 7:16

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain [hebel].

– Proverbs 31:30

Because this is the way things are, everything we or others do or think is ‘vanity’. Nothing ‘under the sun’ can satisfy the longings of our heart or our yearning for meaning.

**<sup>4</sup>A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the world remains for ever the same.**

**<sup>5</sup>The sun rises and the sun goes down, and then hurries to the place whence it rises.**

**<sup>6</sup>The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. <sup>7</sup>All the streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they go again.**

**<sup>8</sup>All words are wearying; no one is able to speak. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear with hearing.**

**<sup>9</sup>What has been happening is what will happen, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Is there a thing of which it can be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been, in the ages before us.**

**<sup>11</sup>The people who came before are not remembered, and it will be the same for those yet to come. There will be no remembrance of them among those who come afterwards.**

In verses 4-7, Qohelet looks at the toiling of the sun, the winds, and the flowing waters. For all their activity, nothing really changes. We have eternal longings, but everything we experience, even though it keeps changing, in fact ends up just where it was. We appear to be going nowhere. Why should we expect our toil to be any different? The striving of one generation is ultimately futile. When that generation passes, another comes, and things are the way they were. Look at the sun. It goes from east to west, only to have to hurry by night back to the east in order to start the same process over and over again. The wind blows one way and then the other, continually circling. To what end? Nothing advances. The rivers empty into the sea, but fill up again and keep flowing. All this activity, but in the end the river is the river and the sea is the sea. What's it all for? What's it all about?

We use words till they are worn out with usage. They are all so wearisome. We keep wanting to hear, but we are never satisfied, for words never really express what we want to say or satisfy our inquiring minds. Qohelet appears to be warning us to be wary of those who claim to be 'wise' and to be able to offer sound advice: 'no one is able to speak'(verse 8).

We are always looking for something new and seeking new insights. There are people who claim to know what is going to happen in the future. Be wary of this. All we are doing is going round and round in circles (like the sun, the wind and the running water of verses 5-7). Things give the appearance of routine, but (as the example of the wind best illustrates) we can't control and can't predict the future.

The author reminds us (see 1:1) to reflect on the life (and ultimate failure) of Solomon, the exemplar of traditional wisdom, as we listen to Qohelet's words.

The Hebrew for 'applied by mind' is 'gave my heart'. The 'heart' represents one's inner self from where thoughts and decisions come. It is central to Ecclesiastes (and occurs 12 times in the section 1:12 – 2:26). It fits with the author's insistence that we check so-called 'wisdom' by experience.

All kings claimed wisdom – it went with the role. Solomon is claiming to have used his wisdom to get a comprehensive understanding of everything that is going on in the world. Qohelet sees this as a human impulse that we cannot escape. It is given by God (עֲלֹהִים, 'elōhîm – mentioned here for the first time), but it brings no joy for it is doomed to disappointment. If this is true of the wisest of the kings, how much more true is it for the rest of us!

The word translated in verse 14 as 'observe' [רָאָה, rā'āh] appears 47 times in the book. The result of careful observation of the reality of human experience is to see that 'all is vanity' (verse 14; see verse 2). Qohelet adds: 'a chasing after wind' – the first of 9 times in which this expression recurs. It emphasises the absurdity of the futile ways in which we attempt to satisfy our deepest longings.

Verse 15 is proverbial. Trying to make sense of things is like trying to straighten something that is crooked, or trying to count something that isn't there. In verse 16, Qohelet has Solomon consult with his heart. His claim is typical of royal propaganda (compare 1 Kings 10:23), but is so much hot air. 'Prudence' [שִׁכְלֹות, śiklūt] is a practical virtue that guides us in what we do. In Hebrew if you replace the śin of śiklūt with a sāmek [סִכְלֹות, siklūt] the sound is to all intents and purposes identical, but you get the word 'folly'. In line with his central theme, Qohelet may be hinting that seeking to know what is prudent is folly, 'a chasing after wind'.

Verse 18 introduces another proverb: to pursue learning demands effort. Furthermore, the more you know the more you open yourself to sorrow.

**12 I am Qohelet. I have been a king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

**13 I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to busy themselves with.**

**14 I observed all the deeds that have been done under the sun; and look, all is vanity, a chasing after wind.**

**15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.**

**16 I said to my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." 17 And yet, when I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly, I perceived that this too is but a chasing after wind.**

**18 For in the abundance of wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.**

His accomplishments were futile

**<sup>1</sup>I said to my heart, “Come now, I will get you to experience pleasure. Enjoy yourself!” But again, this also was in vain. <sup>2</sup>I said of laughter, “What’s the point?,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”**

**<sup>3</sup>I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine. My heart was still guiding me with wisdom – I was not led along by folly. I wanted to see what was good for human beings to do under heaven during the few days of their life.**

**<sup>4</sup>I achieved great deeds; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself;**

**<sup>5</sup>I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.**

**<sup>6</sup>I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.**

**<sup>7</sup>I acquired male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also possessed great herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup>I also accumulated for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, with many concubines.**

**<sup>9</sup>So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; and my wisdom aided me.**

**<sup>10</sup>Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I did not keep my heart from any pleasure, and so my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my portion for all my toil.**

**<sup>11</sup>Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity, a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.**

One thinks of the parable of Jesus recorded in Luke 12:13-21.

Enjoying pleasure is not the answer to one’s search for meaning, for that, too, is very fleeting and unsubstantial. It fails to fulfil the need that drives our seeking.

Being careful not to get carried away by youthful bravado, Solomon allowed his heart to guide him ‘wisely’ (or so he claims). He thought wine might help him see things more positively (verse 3)!!

Verse 4-11 spell out the accomplishments of the king.

In verse 5 the word translated as ‘parks’ [פַּרְדֵּס, pardēs] is a loan word from Persian – from which the English ‘paradise’ derives: a walled garden with fruit trees and fountains.

He surpassed everyone in what he achieved, in the number of his slaves, in his wealth and in the ‘delights of the flesh’.

Following the wisdom of his heart, he did very well indeed (verse 9). What more could a man want? He enjoyed the fruits of his toil (verse 10). He made the best of the opportunities that presented themselves to him in the time allotted to him.

However, when he considered all the above, he could see that the effort he put into it was, in the final analysis, in vain (see 1:5). ‘Under the sun’, in the only world we experience ‘there was nothing to be gained’. What does this say of his acclaimed ‘wisdom’?

The words ‘folly’ and ‘fool’ occur five times in verses 12-16. This is matched by the words ‘wisdom’ and ‘wise’. If what the king has achieved is, in the final analysis, futile, it is not going to be any better for his successor.

It’s true that it is better to be wise than to be a fool, just as light is an improvement on darkness. In verse 14 Qohelet quotes a proverb to support this point. But in the end it makes no real difference (verse 15; compare Psalm 49:10).

So what was the point of all the toil it cost Solomon to act wisely. When all is said and done, it won’t make any difference to him, for the fate of the wise and the fate of the fool is the same – death (see the reflection in the Introduction, pages 114-115). Furthermore, it won’t make any difference to anyone else either. Whether a person has worked at being wise or not, people soon forget. There is no point to anything ‘under the sun’. This goes against traditional ‘wisdom’ which claimed that a person’s reputation gave him a kind of immortality.

Verses 18-26 highlight the absurdity of human toil (see already 1:5; 2:11) when so often one person does all the hard work and another (who may have done nothing) reaps the benefit. ‘This is an absurdity (*hebel*) and a great evil’ (verse 21). The fact that the person benefiting may also be a fool adds to the pointlessness of it all.

It is clear that for Qohelet (and Psalm 49:10!) the following proverb is out of touch with the way things are in the real world:

Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous. The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.

– Proverbs 13:21-22

**<sup>12</sup>So I turned to consider wisdom and inane folly; for what can the one do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.**

**<sup>13</sup>I observed that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. <sup>14</sup>The wise have eyes in their head, but fools walk in darkness. But I know that the same fate befalls all of them.**

**<sup>15</sup>Then I said to my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also; why then have I been determined to be so very wise?” And I said to my heart that this also is in vain, <sup>16</sup>for there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise die just like fools!**

**<sup>17</sup>So I hated life, because what is done under the sun brings grief to me; for all is vanity, a chasing after wind.**

**<sup>18</sup>I hated what I had gaimned from all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – <sup>19</sup>and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.**

**<sup>20</sup>So I turned to rid my heart of illusions concerning all the toil of my labours under the sun, <sup>21</sup>because sometimes one who has toiled for wisdom, knowledge and achievement must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is an absurdity and a great evil.**

Enjoy what you can

**<sup>22</sup>What do human beings get from all their toil and the pursuit of their heart at which they toil under the sun? <sup>23</sup>For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their hearts find no rest. This also is an absurdity.**

**<sup>24</sup>There is nothing better for people to do than for them to eat and drink, and see their toil as good. I saw that this yoo is from the hand of God; <sup>25</sup>for who will eat and who will worry except as he [God] determines?**

**<sup>26</sup>For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and pleasure; while to the one who misses out he gives the work of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity, a chasing after wind.**

Compare 1:3 and 2:11, 18 and 20.

To this point Qohelet has had a lot to say about the vanity of toil, wealth and pleasure. None of it satisfies the needs of the human heart. This puts a question over everything that tradition calls 'wisdom'. Everything? No, everything 'under the sun'.

Here in verses 24-26 Qohelet speaks for the second time of God (see 1:13), the transcendent God who is not 'under the sun', and she speaks of God three times in three verses.

God gives pleasure. The only 'wisdom' worthy of the name is, when God gives pleasure, to grasp it and enjoy the moment. Get all the joy out of it that you can.

Everything comes from the hand of God and we have no say in the way things are. We have no idea why it is God's good pleasure to give wisdom, knowledge and joy to one and not to another, to withhold it one minute and give it the next in a way that appears entirely random to us. Certainly, if you don't have joy, there is no point in toiling to gather and collect for someone else who may, at God's good pleasure, be given it. It is all too random, and we have no control over it. To behave in this way 'is vanity, a chasing after wind'.

Qohelet's point is that it is wise, and it is not vanity, to enjoy the moment when God, who is not 'under the sun', chooses to give you pleasure. This theme continues to weave its way through the text.

The substitution of nouns ('war', 'peace') in verse 8 for infinitives (verses 2-8) suggests that the infinitives are better understood as gerunds ('birthing' rather than 'to give birth'; 'dying' rather than 'to die, etc).

Traditional wisdom taught the importance of being wise in choosing the right time to do things (see Proverbs 15:23; 25:11). This is not Qohelet's point. In context this poem is not about our discerning or choosing the appropriate time for the activities listed. The focus here is on the activity of God and the appropriate human response to what God is doing.

The commentary in verse 9 echoes the question just posed (2:22), and posed earlier in 1:3: 'What do human beings get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?' There are parallels with 1:3-9, and the conclusion is the same (see 3:10-15). There is no point in trying to find meaning in the activities we perform. Our activities keep cancelling each other out as we go round and round, caught up in an endless cycle, first one thing and then its opposite.

Qohelet's conclusion in this section (3:1-22) is expressed in 3:12-13 ('I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, all people should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. That is the gift of God'), and again in 3:22 ('I saw that there is nothing better than that people should take pleasure in their activities, for that is their portion').

It is the conclusion she came to in 2:24 ('There is nothing better for humans than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God').

**<sup>1</sup>There is for everything a moment, and a time for every matter under heaven:**

**<sup>2</sup>a time for giving birth,  
and a time for dying;  
a time for planting,  
and a time for uprooting  
what has been planted;**

**<sup>3</sup>a time for killing,  
and a time for healing;  
a time for knocking down,  
and a time for building up;**

**<sup>4</sup>a time for weeping,  
and a time for laughing;  
a time for mourning,  
and a time for dancing;**

**<sup>5</sup>a time for throwing stones away,  
and a time for gathering  
stones;**

**a time for embracing,  
and a time for refraining  
from embracing;**

**<sup>6</sup>a time for searching,  
and a time for giving up  
the search;**

**a time for keeping,  
and a time for throwing out;**

**<sup>7</sup>a time for tearing,  
and a time for sewing up;  
a time for being silent,  
and a time for speaking;**

**<sup>8</sup>a time for loving,  
and a time for hating;  
a time of war,  
and a time of peace.**

**<sup>9</sup>What return has a worker from his toil?**

Live now and enjoy God's gift as best you can

**<sup>10</sup>I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to occupy themselves with. <sup>11</sup>He has made everything suitable for its time; he has put the desire for eternity in human hearts, yet human beings will not discover what it is that God has done from the beginning to the end.**

**<sup>12</sup>I know that there is nothing good for them, except to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; <sup>13</sup>moreover, all people should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. That is the gift of God.**

**<sup>14</sup>I know that whatever God makes happen will always occur; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. <sup>15</sup>Whatever happens already has happened; and what is to happen, has happened already; and God will seek that which is pursued.**

**<sup>16</sup>Moreover I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there was wickedness.**

**<sup>17</sup>I said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every activity".**

In chapter 2, verses 24-26, Qohelet got us to look, not 'under the sun', but beyond it, to the realm of the transcendent. We cannot see anything. We can in no way comprehend the mystery we call 'God', but our heart longs for meaning, and our heart knows that if there is to be any meaning it is to be sought in the mystery of our relationship with the divine.

Here in verses 10-17, once again, she gets us to focus there where our faith is pointing: to the Transcendent One who alone can grant true wisdom. She makes it clear here that the one doing the activities mentioned in verses 2-8 (activities meant to comprise 'every matter under heaven') is God. Human beings have no control over what happens or when it happens (see our reflection on this in the Introduction pages 113).

God gives time. God has also placed in the human heart a consciousness of the divine and the eternal, that transcends time. In vain we attempt to comprehend 'what it is that God has done from the beginning to the end'(verse 11). Our only contact with the eternal, however, is the passing moment of time. The advice Qohelet offers is contained in verses 12-13 (and repeated later in verse 22; see 2:24).

It is for us to 'stand in awe before God' (verse 14). We are always 'chasing after wind'(1:14; 1:17; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26), getting nowhere. God is seeking what our hearts are really longing for (verse 15). We must trust that God is looking after whatever is real in all this, even though we are not in a position to discern.

Qohelet sees injustice all around (see Introduction pages 5-7), and assures us that God will sort it out in ways that are beyond human comprehension (verses 16-17).

Earlier (2:12-17) Qohelet stated that the fate of the wise is the same as that of fools. Both die and are forgotten. Here she compares humans with animals. Humans are not immortal. Our 'breath' (verse 19) is the same as that of animals. We die just as animals do. Ultimately everything is passing, unreliable, 'in vain'. There is no guarantee that the 'human spirit' has a destiny different from that of animals.

She repeats the one piece of wisdom we can live by: take life as we are given it, and enjoy our apportioned lot as best we can.

**<sup>18</sup>I said in my heart, "As regards human beings God has surely chosen to show that they are but animals".**

**<sup>19</sup>For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is in vain.**

**<sup>20</sup>All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all return to dust. <sup>21</sup>Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?**

**<sup>22</sup>I saw that there is nothing better than that people should take pleasure in their activities, for that is their portion; who can bring them to see what will be after them?**

Is one thing really better than another?

**<sup>1</sup>Moreover, I saw all the oppressions that occur under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed – with no one to comfort them! Their oppressors wield the power — but they have no one to comfort them. <sup>2</sup>I reckoned the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive; <sup>3</sup>but better than both is the one who has never existed, who has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.**

**<sup>4</sup>I saw that all toil and all achievement comes from one person's envy of another. This also is pointless, a chasing after wind. <sup>5</sup>Fools sit on their hands and consume their own flesh. <sup>6</sup>Better a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil, and a chasing after wind.**

**<sup>7</sup>I saw something else that doesn't make sense under the sun: <sup>8</sup>the case of solitary individuals, without children or siblings; There is no end to all their toil, yet their eyes are never satisfied with their possessions. "For whom am I toiling," they ask, "and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity, an unhappy business.**

In this section, Qohelet lists a number of (apparently obvious) proverbs that claim that one situation is better than another. To grasp Qohelet's intention here, we must not miss what she has just said in the previous verse:

I saw that there is nothing better than that people should take pleasure in their activities, for that is their portion; who can bring them to see what will be after them?

– Ecclesiastes 3:22

In the first sub-unit (verses 1-3), she makes the point that if anything is better than anything else, it is the lot of those who don't exist. They don't have to live with the injustices and tears that are seen everywhere one looks.

In the second sub-unit (verses 4-6), she sees ambition, greed and rivalry as driving the determination to get on. It's pointless. She is not advocating inactivity. To do nothing is folly, and those who do nothing will have nothing to eat and will end up devouring themselves. To have a small property without toil is better than to have a larger property, but with all the striving and anxiety.

The central sub-unit (verses 7-8) highlights folly by giving the example of a person who has no family, no dependants, and yet strives for more and more possessions. Such a person is never satisfied, never living in the present moment, and so is unable to enjoy the simple things of life. How stupid is that!

In the fourth sub-unit (verses 9-12) Qohelet draws on proverbs that use different examples to state that it is better not to be alone. She is alluding to Genesis:

It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helpmate suitable for him.

– Genesis 2:11

Qohelet's reflection is not limited to the man-woman relationship. What is said here applies to any partnership where two people work together, help one another when one of them falls ill, share intimacy, and withstand outside dangers together. However, the language points first and foremost to the communion of man and woman. It is in their communion that they are in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

The whole tenor of Ecclesiastes warns us not to think in absolute terms, but there is no sense in being alone.

The final sub-unit (verses 13-16) gives the impression of referring to a situation known at the time of the publication of Ecclesiastes. If so we do not have the evidence to identify the wise young person or the foolish king. Nor is it necessary. This is a rags to riches story, and a falling from grace of a fool. The old king should have acquired the wisdom that is meant to go with age. The youngster has a wisdom unexpected for his age.

Qohelet is making the same point about the pursuit of power and fame as she has already made about the pursuit of wealth. Verses 15-16 make the point that people will follow (mindlessly) whoever rules. When he appears in public, they will all be there shouting his praise. But don't expect this to last. The next generation won't be acclaiming him.

Ultimately, the whole charade is without meaning. It comes to nothing: 'vanity, a chasing after wind'.

If some things are 'better' than others, everything 'under the sun' (verse 15) is ephemeral, and ultimately empty.

**<sup>9</sup>Two are better than one, because they have a good outcome for their toil. <sup>10</sup>For if either of them should fall, the other will lift them up; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have anyone to help. <sup>11</sup>If two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?**

**<sup>12</sup>Though one might be overpowered, two together may resist.**

**A three-ply cord is not readily broken.**

**<sup>13</sup>Better is a young person who is a commoner but wise than an old but foolish king, who no longer knows how to take advice. <sup>14</sup>One can come out of prison to reign, while another, though born into kingship, is impoverished.**

**<sup>15</sup>I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king.**

**<sup>16</sup>There is no limit to the multitude, to all before whom he appears, though those who come later would not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity, a chasing after wind.**

