# Commentary on Ecclesiastes

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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# Introduction

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**PREFACE**

I remember just five years ago when I was still at Rome and studying virtuous Blesilla's book of Ecclesiastes that I taught her to think lightly of her generation and to esteem futile everything that she saw in the world. I remember too being asked by her to examine individually all the difficult passages in a short treatise so that she might be able to understand what she was reading without me always being present. Accordingly, since she was taken from us by her sudden death while I was still doing the preparation for my work, and since we, it seems, dear Paula and Eustochium, did not deserve to have such a companion in our lives, I then ceased from my work, silenced by the terrible grief of such a misfortune. Now though, situated in Bethlehem, clearly a more holy city, I can fulfil that promise to the memory of Blesilla and to you, and remind you briefly that I have used no authority in this work, but have rather translated directly from the Hebrew itself and have adapted it to the traditional language of the Septuagint in those passages which do not differ greatly from the Hebrew. Occasionally I have taken account of the Greek versions, those of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion so that I do not deter the reader's enthusiasm with too much novelty. I have also not pursued those streams of conjecture, which lack a factual basis, for I do not believe this to be sensible.

# CHAPTER 1

1:1. The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David, King in Jerusalem. The Scriptures state very clearly that Solomon was known by three names: 'Peace-making', that is 'Solomon'; 'Yedidia', that is 'beloved of Yahweh'; and the name used here 'Qoheleth', that is Ecclesiastes. He is called Ecclesiastes in Greek because he gathered together a crowd of people, a congregation, which we can call a demagogue because he spoke to the people and his sermon was not addressed specifically to one man but more usually to all men. Moreover he is called 'peace-making' and 'beloved of Yahweh' because there was peace during his reign and the Lord loved him. For also Psalms 44, and 71, are known by titles connected with love and peace-making. Although these psalms pertain to Christ and the Church they exhibit Solomon's joy and strength, and according to tradition were composed concerning Solomon.

He also produced an equal number of titles to the three volumes: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. He teaches for children in Proverbs and gives instruction in the form of maxims almost with a sense of duty, and his sermons here are repeated continually to his son. In Ecclesiastes he teaches a man of mature age that he should not think anything in the world to be perpetual, but that all things that we perceive are in fact vain and fleeting. In Song of Songs he embraces an elderly man in the covenant, who has already been prepared in spurning his times. For unless we first abandon our moral failings and renounce the pomposity of our world, and prepare ourselves so we are ready for the arrival of Christ, we will not be able to say: "let him kiss me from the kiss of his mouth". Philosophers educate their followers in a manner similar to this type of instruction: first of all they teach ethics, then explain physics, and then anyone whom they see to excel in these first two they then go on to teach theology. Moreover even this should be examined more closely because Solomon is named differently in the three books. In Proverbs for example he is thus named: The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel. But in Ecclesiastes: The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David, King of Jerusalem. 'Israel' in fact is unnecessary here because it is not found in the Greek or Latin manuscripts.

But in Song of Songs he is neither named 'son of David', not 'King of Israel' or 'King of Jerusalem', but only as The Song of Songs of Solomon. This is just as the Proverbs and the crude arrangement pertain to the twelve tribes and to the whole of Israel. And although the contempt of the world only comes to city-dwellers, these are the inhabitants of Jerusalem,

therefore Solomon intends Song of Songs particularly for those who desire spiritual enlightenment. To those readers just embarking on their education paternal honour and the authority of the king are claimed in their own merit, but to those who have completed their learning, and in the case where the disciple has been enlightened not by fear, but by love, his own name suffices. Then, he is equal to his teacher and he is unaware that he is a king. This is the case here. But in a more spiritual understanding Solomon was peace making and beloved of the Lord God, and Ecclesiastes can be seen as our Christ too, who destroying the inner wall and expelling evil from his flesh, makes each of them one, saying - ”I give you my peace, I relinquish my peace to you”, about which the Lord says to his disciples ”This is my chosen son whom I love: listen to him” , and that is he who is father of the Church.

Speaking by no means to the Synagogue of the Jews but to the crowd of people the King of Jerusalem (that which was built out of the living rocks, not that about which he says ”Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill prophets” , and ”Look, let your empty house be left for us” ), but that by which it is forbidden to swear because it is the city of a great king. This is the son of David, to whom the blind cried out in the Gospel: ”pity us, son of David”; and the whole crowd sang out in unison: ”Hosanna to the son of David”. Then there is the fact that the word of God does not come to him as is the case with Jeremiah and the other prophets, but on account of his being rich, being a king, holding power, his wisdom and his other virtues, he speaks to the men of the church himself, and he speaks words to the apostles about which Psalm 18.5 tells us: ”their sound went out to the whole world and their words went to the ends of the earth”. Some scholars think wrongly, therefore, that we are tempted into desire and luxury by this book, when it teaches quite to the contrary: everything we perceive in the world is vain; nor is it fitting for us to seek those things eagerly which perish while we possess them.

1:2. Vanity of vanities said Ecclesiastes, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. If all things that God made are truly good then how can all things be considered vanity, and not only vanity, but even vanity of vanities? Just as Song of Songs means a song that stands out from amongst all songs, so we see that in ”vanity of vanities” the degree of vanity is shown. It is also written similarly in Psalm 38.6: ”Nevertheless every living man is vanity. If living man is vanity then a dead man must be vanity of vanities. We read in Exodus that Moses’ face is glorified so much that the children of Israel are not able to see him. Paul the apostle said that his glory was not really glory when compared to the glory of righteousness: ”For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. We are therefore able to say that even we in this respect, heaven, earth, the seas and all things that are contained within its compass can be said to be good in themselves, but compared to God they are nothing. And if I look at the candle in a lamp and am content with its light, then afterwards when the sun has risen I cannot discern anymore what was once bright;

I will also see the light of the stars by the light of the setting sun, so in looking at the world and the multitudinous varieties of nature I am amazed at the greatness of the world, but

I also remember that all things will pass away and the world will grow old, and that only God is that which has always been. On account of this realisation I am compelled to say, not once but twice: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Instead of "vanity of vanities" the Hebrew text reads 'abal abalim' which all manuscripts excepting that of the Septuagint translate similarly in Greek as atmos atmidon or atmon which we are able to translate as 'a breath' and 'a light wind which is quickly dispersed'. In this way it is shown to be vain and in no way universal by this phrase. For those things which seem to be temporal, in fact are; but those which do not are eternal. Or since that which will give rise to vanity has been exposed, he groans and is anxious and awaits the revelation of the sons of God, and "now we know in part, and we prophesy in part" . All things are and will be vain, until we find that which is complete and perfect.

1:3. What profit is there for a man in exchange for all his toil, which he toils under the sun? After the general opinion that all things are vain Solomon begins to explain with regard to mankind: because men exert themselves in vain in the toil of the world, amassing wealth, teaching children, working their way towards glory, constructing buildings, and then are taken away in the midst of their work by sudden death, they hear the words: "Thou fool, this night your soul shall be required of you, then whose will be those things that you have amassed?" Just as they make nothing for themselves in exchange for all this toil, so they return naked to the earth from whence they were taken. 1:4. A generation goes, a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. While some men die, others are born, and those you had seen, are not seen anymore, and you then see those who have not been before. What is more vain than this vanity, than that the earth remains, which was made on account of mankind? And that man himself, the master of the earth, should be suddenly returned to the dust? Another meaning of this is: the first generation of Jews dies and a generation formed from all peoples takes its place; but the earth however will remain for so long as the Synagogue's influence slips away, and the Church becomes more powerful. For when it was predicted that the Gospel would be known all around the world, then, it was said, would be the end. When the end is approaching, it is true, the sky and the earth will pass away. Solomon very precisely does not say the earth remains through the ages but through that age. More precisely we praise the Lord not in one age, but throughout the ages.

1:5. The sun rises and the sun sets, then it rushes to its place, where it rises again. The sun itself, which is given as light for mankind, shows the orbit of the world by its rising and it setting every day. After the sun has soaked its burning orb in the ocean, it returns by routes unknown to me to that place whence it had come; and when the period of night is over, it again bursts out quickly from its bed. In place of "rushes to its place" though, because we are following the Vulgate version, the Hebrew reads "soeph" which Aquila interpreted as eispnei in Greek, that is pants; Symmachus and Theodotion write 'returns' because the sun clearly turns around to its original place and it aspires to return there, from whence it had come earlier. But all of this is explained so that he can teach that with the passage of time and the rising and the setting of the stars man's age slips away and perishes, yet he does not know this for certain. Another meaning of this is: the sun of righteousness, in whose wings

lies reason, rises from those who fear and sets midday in the false prophets. But when it has risen it takes us to its place. Where is that? Evidently it means to the Lord himself, for it happens that he raises us from the earth to heaven, saying, ”when the son of man is lifted up, he will lift up all things to him”.

Nor is it surprising that the son lifts up men to himself, when even the Lord himself lifts up to his son: ”for no one”, he says ”comes to me except the Father, who sent me, draw him”. That sun therefore, which we have said sets for some and rises for other, and once set for Jacob the patriarch as he was leaving the Holy Land, rose again for him when he entered the promised land from Syria. When Lot too left Sodom and came to the city, which he was commanded to hasten to, he climbed a mountain and the sun came out above Segor.

1:6. It goes to the South and rotates to the North; turning, revolving, the wind goes and returns upon its circuits. From this we are able to believe that the sun approaches the meridian quarter in the time of winter, and in the summer is near to the Great Bear, and does not commence its movements in the equinox of autumn, but when the west wind is blowing in the time of spring, when all things give birth. But he actually says ”turning, revolving, the wind goes and returns upon its circuits” as if he calls the sun itself a breath, like an animal that breathes and lives, completing its annual orbit in its course, just like the poet Vergil says: ”Meanwhile the sun flies around the great year” and elsewhere ”and the year flies through its own footsteps” or that bright sphere of the moon and Titan’s star: ”The breath nourishes within: and the intelligence stirs the whole mass infused through the limbs, and mingles itself with the mighty body”. He is not speaking about the annual course of the sun, but its daily path. For it proceeds sidelong and towards the North, and thus turns to the East. Another meaning of this verse is: when the sun moves to the South it is closer to the Earth; when it moves to the North it is raised to higher orbits. Perhaps therefore it moves to those parts, which are compressed together by the cold of atmospheric disturbances, and of winter.

Severe heat indeed blazes out from the North above the Earth, and that sun is closer to righteousness than those men who in fact live in the Northern region, and who are deprived of summer’s heat. The sun then moves far away and turns by its circuits to the place whence it set out. For when it has subdued all things to it and illuminated all things with its rays, let there be the first restoration and ”God may be all in all”. Symmachus interpreted this phrase saying, ’it goes to the meridian, and turns around to the North; turning the wind goes, and the wind returns by those routes by which it had come around’.

1:7. All torrents flow into the sea but the sea is not filled. To the place from which the torrents come, there they return to go. Some men believe that the fresh waters that flow into the sea are either dried up by the burning sun above, or are feed for the salt-thirsty sea. Here our Ecclesiastes, the creator of the very waters, says that they return to the heads of the springs by means of hidden passages, and always boil out from their deep channels into their springs. The Hebrews believed that the rivers or sea had more significance in the metaphor of man, because they return to the earth, whence they originated. They are

also called torrents not rivers because they flow that much more forcefully, yet the earth however is not filled with a great number of dead men. More precisely if we go down to the deeper parts, the turbid waters return to the sea where they used to remain. And unless I am mistaken, apart from the additions to the text, nowhere is the word 'torrent' found in a good context. For "you will drink those with the torrent of your desire" , although "of desire" is written in an addition. On the contrary the Saviour was taken to the brook Cedron, and Elisha at the time of persecution hid away in the brook of Chorat, which even dried up. But the sea is not filled up completely, in the same manner as the bloodthirsty daughters in Proverbs.

1:8. All things are full of toil, man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. It is difficult to know not just about physics but also about ethics. And discourse is not able to explain the natural causes of things, nor to see those things that are hidden, (as the scope of this work demands); nor, once you have begun to learn is it possible to arrive at the greatest understanding by listening alone. For if we now look in the mirror in mystery and in part know and in part prophesy, consequently discourse will not be able to explain what it does not know; nor is the eye able to see where it is blind; nor are the ears filled by what they do not hear. At the same time this must be noted, that all words are wearying and are learnt with great difficulty, contrary to those who idly make prayers that an acquaintance with the Scriptures will come to them.

1:9. The thing that has been, it is that which will be. And that which is done is that which shall be done. And there is no new thing under the sun. It seems to me that he now speaks generally about those things that he enumerated above: about generation after generation, the globe of the earth, the rising and setting of the sun, the course of rivers, the vastness of the ocean and all things which we learn either through thought or through sight or hearing, because there is nothing in nature that has not been before. For from the beginning of the world men have been born and have died, and the earth stood level above the waters and the sun lay in its origin. And lest I should go on to list more things, it is left to God as creator to fly with the birds, to swim with the fish, and walk with the creatures of the earth and slide with snakes. And the comic said something similar to this: "Nothing has been said, which has not been said before", about which my teacher Donatus, when he was lecturing about this verse, said: "Let them die, who have said our words before us. Then if is possible to say nothing new in discourse, how great the creation of the world must have been, which has been complete right from the start, that God was able to rest from his work on the seventh day! Read also in another book:

"If everything that is done under the sun has already been done is past centuries, and man was already made when the sun was made: then man existed before he came under the sun. But he is excluded, because by this reasoning even packhorses, gnats, and each insect and large animal is said to have been made before the sky. Unless however he should reply that talking comes from the consequences of speaking not about other animals but about the man Ecclesiastes, for he says "there is nothing new under the sun about which one can say

'look this is new!' But he does not speak of animals but of man alone, because if he means animals to be new, then he refutes his own opinion that nothing is new under the sun.

1:10. Is there anything whereof it may be said, see this is new? It has already been for ages, which were before us. Symmachus translated this more clearly: "Do you think there is a man who is able to say: look this is new, it has already been done before because it was before us." But he agrees with his predecessors that there is nothing new in the world, and that there is none that is able to live and say: 'look this is new', since everything that he thought he had shown to be new, already existed in former times. But we ought not to think that the signs, prodigies and the many deeds which are done for the first time by God's judgement in the world today, have already been done before in former ages, or that it was Epicurus who found this, asserting that these same things were done in innumerable periods and in these places and by these same men. Besides, both Judas betrayed repeatedly and Christ often suffered for us; and other things which have been done and will be done, are continually repeated in these times. But it could be said too, that those things, which will be done have already been done, decided out of foreknowledge and the predestination of God. For those who have been chosen in Christ before the constitution of the world existed already in previous times.

1:11. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. In the same way as the past is concealed for us in forgetfulness, thus it is with those things which are either done now, or will be done. And because of this those men who have yet to be born, will not be able to know these things, and will live life in silence, and will be obscured as if they never existed, and that verse will be fulfilled, which says, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity", for even the Seraphim, the first and last, cover up their feet on account of the appearance of God. The Septuagint is similar here: "There is no memory of former things, and even of things which are to come, there will be no memory for them with those who will come after." That is observed from the Gospel because those who were first in time are first before all others. And because God who is benevolent and forgiving remembers all things no matter how insignificant, he will not give as much glory to those who deserve to be first on account of their faults, as he will give to those who humbly wanted to be first. And so it says consequently: "there is no memory of the wise more than of the fool for ever."

1:12. I, Ecclesiastes, was King over Israel in Jerusalem. Until now the preface has spoken only generally about all arguments; but here he returns to the subject of himself, and reveals who he was, and how he knew and experienced all things. The Hebrews say that Solomon, who was doing repentance, wrote this book, and who, having put his trust in wisdom and riches, failed God because of his wives.

1:13. I applied my mind to seek and probe by wisdom all that happens beneath the sky - it is a sorry task that God has given to the sons of man with which to be concerned. Aquila, the Septuagint, and Theodotion have all translated the Hebrew word anian similarly as peristasmon, which the interpreter expressed as occupied in Latin, because the mind of

man is torn asunder when occupied by several anxieties. But Symmachus uses the Greek word ascholian, which means business. Since therefore in this book it is more often called either occupationem, or distentionem, or whatever else we have called it, they all refer to the higher senses. Ecclesiastes therefore set his mind first of all to the acquisition of wisdom, and pursuing this beyond what is allowed, wanted to know the causes and reasoning why children are easily snatched by the Devil; why the righteous and the wicked are equally punished in shipwrecks; and whether these events happen as a result of fate, or by the decree of God. And if by fate, where is providence? If by decree, where is God's justice? With such desire to know these things, he said, I understand the great care and torturing anxiety experienced in many things, which was given to man by God, in order that he might desire to know that which he is not allowed to know. But the cause is inborn first, and God then gives vexation. For it is written similarly in the epistles to the Romans: "On account of what did God give them up to the suffering of dishonour?"

then again he says: "On account of what did He give them up to uncleanness, so that they did what was not allowed". And then: "On account of which God gave them up to desire for their uncleanness". And to the Thessalonians: "And for this cause God will send them strong delusion." But the causes why they succumb were revealed earlier: either by the suffering of dishonour, or by vile affections, or by the longing in their heart, or whatever it is they do to receive strong delusion. In this way and because of their effectiveness God gave this wicked 'occupation' to man, with which to be concerned, because he did these things first voluntarily and entirely of his own will.

1:14. I have seen all the deeds done underneath the sun, and behold all is futile and a vexation of the spirit. We are compelled here by necessity to examine the Hebrew words more closely than we wish. It is also not possible to know the real meaning of the text, unless we learn it through studying the original Hebrew words. Aquila and Theodotion translate routh as the Greek nomen, Symmachus has boskesin. The Septuagint does not express the Hebrew meaning, but the Syriac, as shown in the Greek word proairesin. Therefore either nome, or boskesis, is the noun coming from vexation. Proairesis sounds more like 'will' than 'vexation'. Every single man however is said to do what he wishes, and what seems right to him; and men are borne with different dispositions (i.e. good and wicked) of their own free will. And all things under the sun are vain, when we displease each other by doing what is the greatest good and greatest evil. A Hebrew, who was instructing me as I read the Holy Scriptures, said to me that above the word routh was written "it means rather suffering and wickedness in this place than vexation and will", and the meaning does not come from the evil which is contrary to good, but from that which is written in the Gospel: "Sufficient to the day is its wickedness." The Greeks call this more significantly kakouchian, so the verse essentially means: "I have considered all things, which are done in the world, and I discovered nothing except vanity and wickedness, that is distress of the soul, by which the spirit is afflicted in contrary thoughts.

1:15. A twisted thing cannot be made straight, and what is not there cannot be numbered. Whoever is wicked cannot be corrected, unless he was corrected beforehand. Anything that is already correct will receive embellishment; and that which is deviated will receive correction. A man is not called wrong unless he has been diverted from the correct path. This is contrary to the heretics, who entertained certain characteristics, which do not seem to be sane. And since what is missing is lacking, it cannot be numbered. Besides, only the firstborn of Israel were counted. The women, slaves, children and the people from Egypt, although of a great number, were largely overlooked, being referred to as a reduction from the army, without a number. The meaning of this can also be: such wickedness is done in the sphere of the world that the world is scarcely able to return to its completely good condition; nor is it able to regain easily its order and complete state, in which it was first created. Another meaning of this is: when all men have been restored to goodness through repentance, only the devil will remain in his wickedness. For all things which are done under the sun are done by his will and in the spirit of malevolence, while sins are piled on sins at his instigation. Then it can also mean: so great is the number of deviants and of those who have been taken away from God's flock by the devil that it is impossible to count them.

1:16. I said to myself: here I have acquired great wisdom, more than any of my predecessors over Jerusalem, and my mind has had much experience with wisdom and knowledge. Solomon was not greater than Abraham and Moses, and other saints, but than those who were before him in Jerusalem. We read in the book of Kings that Solomon was very wise, and he claimed this wisdom to have been given by God before all others. It was then the eye of his heart that saw great wisdom and knowledge in the world, since he does not say I spoke much wisdom and knowledge but my heart saw much wisdom and knowledge. For indeed we are not able to speak out all those things which we feel. 1:17. I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this, too, is a vexation of the spirit. Contrary abstract ideas are understood by looking at contrary facts; and " wisdom is the first to be lacking in foolishness" , but it is not possible to be lacking in foolishness, unless one has understood it. Many dangerous things are also created from foolishness, so that while we try to avoid them, we are actually instructed in wisdom. Solomon wanted to know wisdom and knowledge with equal enthusiasm, and equally madness and folly, so that whilst seeking some things and shunning others, his true wisdom might be proved. But in this too, as in other things, he said he found great difficulties and was not able to grasp the exact truth of matters. What I have said above about vexation of the spirit or suffering of the soul, as it is more often written in this book, should be sufficient to understand the rest of this verse.

1:18. For with much wisdom comes much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases pain. The more a man seeks wisdom, the more he finds himself in vice and far from those virtues, which he is seeking. For those who are powerful suffer torments more gravely, and more is demanded of the man, to whom more is entrusted. Because of this he increases his pain who increases his knowledge, and is saddened by grief according to God, and suffers

beyond his offences. The apostle said concerning this: ”and who is there, who gladdens me, unless he is saddened by me?” Unless perchance, and this must be understood, that a wise man would suffer so much for his wisdom, in secret and deep in his flank, nor would he show himself to prosper in intelligence, as light is to seeing; but rather through certain torments and intolerable toil, and through perpetual meditation and enthusiasm.

# CHAPTER 2

2:1. I said to myself: Come, I will experiment with joy and enjoy pleasure. That, too, turned out to be futile. After I detected that pain and labour were in the essence of wisdom and the accumulation of knowledge, and nothing else except vain and endless struggle, I felt joyful that I would overflow with excess, accrue riches, amass great wealth, and take temporary pleasures before I die. But even in this I saw my vanity, for past pleasures do not help the present, and do not fill up what is empty. It is not just the pleasures of the flesh however, but also spiritual joys that are a temptation for one who possesses them. Hence I desired greatly, because I had been grabbed by this incentive and the angel of Satan too, who had knocked me down with such force that I could not recover. Solomon says about this ”Don't give me riches and poverty” , and immediately writes underneath ”lest I be full and a liar”, and lest I should ask, ”who is looking at me?”, for the devil strikes down in abundance righteous men. In the apostles it is also written, ”lest enraptured by his pride, he should fall into the judgement of the devil ”, that is 'into such a judgement, as the Devil himself falls ”. But having said this, spiritual joy, just as the other kinds, is claimed to be vanity, because we see it through a mirror and in mystery. But when it has been seen for what it is, then it is called vanity for no reason, but rather truth.

2:2. I said of laughter, It is madness! And of joy, What does it accomplish? Wherever we read madness the Hebrew text has molal, which Aquila took to be planesin, that is 'delusion', Symmachus has thorubon, 'commotions'. But the Septuagint and Theodotion as in many places, so too in this, also agree and translate it as periphoran, which we, expressing word for word, can call 'revolution'. Those men therefore, who are carried around on the 'breeze' of all doctrines, are unstable and fluctuate between interpretations. Thus those who guffaw with that laugh, which the Lord says must be muted in holy weeping, are seized by the delusion of time and its whirlwind, not understanding the disaster that their sins will cause, nor bewailing their former faults, but thinking that brief joys are going to be perpetual. Then they exult in these, which are more worthy of lamentation than joy. Heretics also believe this, who agree with false doctrines and promise themselves happiness and prosperity.

2:3. I thought to stimulate my body with wine while my heart is involved with wisdom, and to grasp folly, until I can discern which is best for mankind to do under the heavens during the brief span of their lives. I wanted to stimulate my life with enjoyment, and to

lull my body, as if freed from all worries by wine, in the same way with desire; but my deep consideration and inborn reasoning, which God the creator mingled even into my sins, drew me away from the idea and led me back to seek wisdom and to spurn foolishness, so that I was able to see what was good, that men can do in the span of their lives. But he has compared desire eloquently with intoxication. Since he intoxicates and destroys the vitality of his spirit, which he was able to change into wisdom and obtains spiritual happiness, (as it is written in certain manuscripts), he is able to discern which things ought to be sought out in this life, and which avoided.

2:4. I acted in grand style: I built myself houses, I planted vineyards; and others such until the point where he says: The wise man has his eyes in his head, whereas the fool walks in darkness. Before I discuss each of these in turn it seems useful to me to encompass all of them in a short paragraph, and to reduce their meanings to just one explanation, so that it is easier to understand what is being said. I had all things that have been considered good through the ages. I built myself a palace on high, and covered the hills and mountains with vines. And lest anything be lacking from my excess I planted gardens and orchards of different kinds of trees, which were watered from above by water stored in pools, so that the growth was fed for longer periods with continual moisture. I also had an uncountable number of slaves, buyers and natives, and many flocks of animals, cows of course, and sheep- no king before me in Jerusalem had such a number. I also amassed a huge number of treasure houses of gold and of silver, which I obtained as gifts from various kings and as tributes from conquered races. And because of this it happened that I was prompted by having too much wealth to even more pleasures, and they called to me in choirs of music, flutes, lyres and in songs, and each sex served in entertainment. Those temptations grew in such quantity as I was lacking in wisdom.

For desire had dragged me to each and every pleasure and I was being carried along unbridled and headlong, and I thought that that was the fruit of my labours, if I myself was consumed with lust and luxury. Having then at last returned to my senses, and as if waking from a deep sleep, I looked at my hands and saw that my work was full of vanity, full of squalor, and full of the character of my folly. For I found nothing to be good that was considered good in the world. Considering therefore those things which were good for wisdom and which were bad for foolishness I rushed to praise any man, who then refrained from his sins and was able to pursue true virtues. Certainly there is a great diversity between wisdom and foolishness, and virtues are as much separated from vices as day differs from night. It seems to me then that he that follows that path of wisdom always lifts his eyes to heaven and raises his face aloft, and considers those things which are above his head; but he that gives in to foolishness and vices fumbles in the darkness and flounders in his ignorance of the world. I acted in grand style: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards. He, who is raised up equal to the face of God in the heavens, makes his work great; and he builds houses so that the Father and the Son will come, and will live in them.

And he plants vineyards to which Jesus will tie up his ass.

2:5. I made for myself gardens and orchards and planted in them every kind of fruit tree. In my treasure house are not only gold and silver dishes but even some that are made from wood and pottery. And even the gardens therefore are made on account of certain weaker and sick men, for anyone who is sick will eat vegetables. Trees are planted, not all of them fruit-bearing as we have in the Latin manuscripts, but of all fruits, that is of varied fruits and fruit-trees, because the grace of the Church is also varied. Thus one type of tree is the eye, one the hand and another the foot, and on those things which are most prized we bestow our greatest glory. And amongst those fruit-trees I esteem the wood itself to be primal in life because it is wisdom, for unless that is planted in their midst the other trees will dry up.

2:6. I constructed pools from which to irrigate a grove of young trees. The wood in glades and in forests, which is not fruit-bearing, are not nourished by rain from the sky, not by such rain waters but by water which is collected in pools from rivers. Even low-lying Egypt is situated low in the land like a vegetable patch, and is irrigated by waters, which come from Ethiopia. But the Promised Land which is mountainous and raised up waits for timely or late-coming rain from the sky.

2:7. I bought slaves, male and female, and natives too; I also owned more possessions, both cattle and sheep, than all of my predecessors in Jerusalem. If we want Ecclesiastes, as we have said before, to refer to the person of Christ here too, then we are able to say his slaves who have the spirit of fear in servitude and desire more spiritual things in life than they already have. But we can also call the slave-girls hearts that till now have been bestowed upon the body and upon the earth. They surpass also those natives, who are certain of the Church, both slaves and slave-girls, about whom I have spoken. And the Lord has not yet bestowed upon them freedom or noble-birth. But there are others in the estate of Ecclesiastes like oxen and sheep, who are kept on account of work and their innocence, and who work even in the church without reason and knowledge of the Scriptures. But they have not yet attained such an understanding, that they deserve to be men and return to the appearance of their creator. If you look more diligently too, you will notice that the number is not added in the case of slaves, slave-girls and natives, but in the case of cows and sheep it is said: ”I owned more possessions of cattle and sheep”. There is more silver in fact in the Church than men: more sheep than slaves, slave-girls and natives. But that which is said at the end- ”more than all those who were before me in Jerusalem” does not pertain to the glory of Solomon, or that he was richer than his father the King, since Saul did not rule in Jerusalem, and the city was held by the Jebusites who had themselves occupied the city at that time. Ecclesiastes however was richer at a younger age than were all men, who had preceded him as kings in Jerusalem.

2:8. I amassed even silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and the provinces; I provided myself with various singers and musical instruments, and with every human luxury- chests and chests of them. Divine scripture always places silver and gold above speech and meaning. The dove in the sixty-seventh Psalm represents this too, which is

interpreted as a spirit, and is more noticeable because of its silver wings, so that it hides the underlying significance of the pallor of gold. But he gathers the treasures of kings and of the provinces or kingdoms into the Church of believers. He refers to those kings about whom the psalmist writes ”the kings of the earth were there and the chiefs gathered together”. And he refers to those kingdoms to which the Saviour orders us to raise our eyes, since now they burn with fear. The treasures of kings can be called both the doctrines of philosophers and also secular knowledge, which Ecclesiastes understands well: he takes hold of the wise men in their wisdom, and squanders the wisdom of the wise, and reproves the discretion of the prudent. The choirboys and girls are those who sing with vitality and with intelligence. A male singer sings like a man who is both strong and spiritual about heavenly matters. But a girl flits about the matter, which the Greeks call hulen. Nor is she able to raise her voice loudly into the air.

Therefore wherever a woman is mentioned in the Scriptures and the weaker sex, we are to translate it according to an understanding of the context. Pharaoh does not want the male children to be allowed to live for example, but only the females in this matter. And another point is that none of the saints is said to have had a daughter, and it is only Salphaat, who died for his sins, that had all girls. Jacob is the father of one daughter amongst the twelve patriarchs, but is endangered by her. The pleasures also of mankind over wisdom must be understood, which have many fruits and desires like paradise. We are admonished against them, saying, ”take delight in the Lord and he will give you the request of your heart”, and in another place, ”you will drink them as the torrent of your desire”. (I had wanted to shun reference to the female sex, and even now use the distinction of the male, because the Latin language does not take readily to this. Aquila explains about the wine-pourers, male and female, in a manner very different to the fashion written here. For Solomon is not naming the sexes of man, clearly either male or female, but types of dish, and he calls them kulikion and kulikia, which is written in Hebrew as sadda and saddoth. Then Symmachus, who was not able to express the idea word for word, translates this in a similar way: types of table and equipment.

Therefore Solomon is believed to have had either pitchers, wine goblets, or bowls arranged in chests, and which were ornate with gold and with jewels. And he drank from a kulikio in one, (that is, a bowl) and from kilikiois in other places, which are clearly smaller dishes; and the crowd of drinkers received wine at the hands of his servants. Because we explain Ecclesiastes as being Christ, therefore wisdom, having mingled her wine (as it says in Proverbs) calls out to those who wander to come to her. Now we must see the body of the Lord as a very great bowl, in which is not pure divinity as there is in heaven, but there God is blended with humanity on account of us, and wisdom is then poured out by the apostles to smaller kulikia, small goblets and bowls held by believers throughout the world.

2:9. Thus I grew and surpassed any of my predecessors in Jerusalem; still, my wisdom stayed with me. It seems to me that Ecclesiastes, acting grandly, agrees less with the Lord, unless by chance we adapt this to him: ”He [Jesus] increased in wisdom and age and grace”.

And, ”on account of which God took him on high”. He also says ”those who were before me in Jerusalem” and is referring to those who, before he arrived, steered the congregation of holy men and the Church. If we explain the text in a spiritual way then Christ is richer than all men; and he only perceives the Synagogue better in bodily form than the Church. Therefore he wears a veil, because it was placed over the face of Moses and he let us see his face in daylight. More precisely ”wisdom has stayed with me”, means even in respect to the temptations of the body wisdom stayed with him. For he who receives a profit from his wisdom will not keep wisdom long, but he who does not receive a gain, nor grows through change, but always has plenty- he is able to say, ”and wisdom has stayed with me”.

2:10. Whatever my eyes desired I did not deny them; I did not deprive myself of any joy. Indeed my heart drew joy from all my activities, and this was my reward for all my endeavours. The eyes of the heart and the sight of the mind desire to gaze on spiritual matters, which the sinner does not see, so forbids his heart from true happiness. Therefore Ecclesiastes gave himself completely over to this cause and balanced eternal glory lightly in an world of discord. This is our lot, and our continual reward if we work for our virtues. 2:11. Then I looked at all things that I had done and the energy I had expended in doing them. He who does all things with diligence and wariness is able to say this. It was clear that it was all futile and a vexation of the spirit, [and there is no profit under the sun.] As if he considers that in comparison with other things, all things are cheap which are under the sun, and are different according to the variety of desires. And there is no profit under the sun. Christ placed his tabernacle in the sun. So Christ will not be able to live, nor be plentiful in whoever has not yet obtained the lucidity of the sun, its regularity and constancy.

2:12. Then I turned my attention to appraising wisdom with madness and folly - for what can man who comes after the king do? This seems to discuss heavenly matters until the place where he says, ”the eyes of a wise man are in his head”. I had summed up all things in one explanation, intending to show the meaning briefly, and because of that, again according to anagoge, I had only touched lightly on some things, but now I ought to explain in a manner similar to that in which I began. For the meaning is quite different here from the interpretation found in the Septuagint. But he says he had returned to seeking wisdom after pleasures and those desires he had condemned, in which he found more foolishness and stupidity than true and recognised knowledge. For man, he said, is not able to know so clearly and truly the wisdom of his creator and of his king, as his creator knows it himself. And so he says that those things that we know, we only think we have grasped and value more than know what is true.

2:13. And I perceived that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. I am allowed, he says, to see through that very wisdom of mankind, which is mixed with uncertainty. Nor is it possible, he adds, for it to flow into our minds so clearly as it does into the king and our creator. I know however that the difference between wisdom and folly is great even as much as one can differentiate between day and night, between light and dark. 2:14. The wise man has his eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks in darkness. But I also realised

that the same fate awaits them all. Whoever attains complete wisdom and has deserved Christ to be his aim always raises his eyes to the heavens and will therefore never think about terrestrial matters. When these things are considered in this way and there is such a distinction between a wise man and a fool, one being compared with day and the other with darkness, the former raises his eyes to heaven, the latter looks on the ground. Suddenly this thought occurred to me, why both the wise man and the fool are constrained by a common mortality - why the same wounds, the same fate, the same death and equal troubles confine each one.

2:15-16. So I said to myself: the fate of the fool will befall me also; to what advantage then have I become wise? But I concluded that this, too, was vanity. For there is no comparison between the remembrance of the wise and of the fool at all, for as the succeeding days roll by, is all forgotten? How can the wise man's death be like the fool's? I have stated that the wise man and the fool, the righteous and wicked are destined to die by the same fate and all wicked things in this world will suffer a similar fate; what profit is there for me then, that I have sought wisdom and worked more than others? On reconsidering the matter and applying myself to it diligently I saw that my opinion was unfounded. For the wise and foolish will not have similar remembrance in the future when the end of the world comes; and they will be confined for no reason by equal death because the wise man will continue to the joys of heaven and the fool to his punishment. The Septuagint translates the meaning of the Hebrew here more clearly, for it doesn't necessarily follow the Hebrew word order: "and to what purpose have I become wise?" Then I said to myself copiously, (for the fool is he, who speaks too much), 'for this is also vanity, because there is no remembrance of the wise with the fool for ever, and so on.' Since he tried to convince us that his prior thoughts were foolish, he bore witness that he had spoken foolishly, and that he had erred, and it was by doing this that he realised his folly.

2:17. So I hated life, for I was depressed by all that goes on under the sun, because everything is vain and a vexation of the spirit. The world has been given over to unkindness and the apostle moans about the tabernacle saying "I am a wretched man, who will free me from the body of this death?", and he hates quite rightly everything that is done under the sun. That is however only in comparison with paradise and the beatitude of that life, in which we would enjoy the fruits of wisdom and the pleasures of virtues. But now as if we are in a prison camp or cell, and with a wall of tears, we eat our bread in the sweat of our brow.

2:18-19. Thus I hated all my achievements labouring under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who succeeds me. And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? - And he will control all my possessions which I toiled and have shown myself wise under the sun. This, too, is vanity. He seems to be reconsidering wealth and riches, because according to the Gospel, being snatched by sudden death, we do not know with which kind of heir we die - whether he will be a fool or wise who will enjoy the fruits of our toil. This was also the case with Solomon: for he did not regard his son Roboam as similar to himself. We learn from this that a son is not worthy of his father's heredity if he is foolish. But to me studying

the work it seems that he is speaking more about spiritual labour, because a wise man will work on the Scriptures for days and nights, and will compose books and will hand down his memory to his descendants, and nonetheless all this will come into the hands of fools, who repeatedly find in them the seeds of heresy, according to the perversity of their own mind, and waste other men's efforts. For if the text now refers to Ecclesiastes' personal wealth, it was necessary to say about toil and wealth: "and he will control all my possessions which I toiled and have shown myself wise under the sun." For what is wise in the pursuit of earthly riches?

2:20-23. So I turned my heart to despair of all that I had achieved by toiling under the sun. For there is a man who laboured with wisdom, knowledge and skill, yet he must hand on his portion to one who has not toiled for it. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what has a man in return for all his toil and his stress, which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are painful, and his business is a vexation; even at night his mind has no rest. This, too, is vanity! Previously he has spoken about the uncertainty of an heir and not knowing whether he will be foolish or wise, the master of the works of another. But even now he seeks the same things but this time the meaning is different, because he might leave his wealth and labours perhaps to his son, to a neighbour, or someone he knows. Nevertheless it happens time and time again that one man enjoys in the work of another, and sweet toil is to the dead while pleasures are for the living. He thinks of himself as every single one and he will see with how much toil he composes his books, how "often he turns his pen, again he will write those things which are worthy of law", and for the man who does not work he will give him his own share. For what good to the wealth of the earth, as I have said clearly, are wisdom, knowledge and virtue, in which he said he had laboured? For although he may be virtuous, wise and knowledgeable he spurns worldly things.

2:24-26. Is it not good for man that he eats and drinks and shows his soul satisfaction in his labour? And even that, I perceived, is from the hand of God. For who should eat and who should make haste except me? To the man who pleases Him He has given wisdom, knowledge and joy; but to the sinner He has given the urge to gather and amass - that he may hand it on to one who is pleasing to God. That, too, is vanity and a vexation of the spirit. After I examined all things and saw that nothing was more unjust than one man enjoying the work of another, then this work seemed to me to be the most righteous, and like a gift of God, seeing that a man may enjoy his own labour, drinking and eating, and for a time refraining from amassed wealth. And sometimes it is a gift of God, that such a mind as is bestowed upon righteous men, that they squander those things, which they have sought with great attention and vigilance. In fact on the other hand, it is the character of the anger of God, which is set against the sinner, so he amasses wealth day and night and uses if for no purpose, then he bequeaths it to those men who are righteous in the sight of God.

But, he says, looking at this more closely and noticing that all things come to a common end with death, I have judged it to be the most vain of all. These readings are very close to

the text though, so that I do not seem to completely miss the plain meaning of the words, and while I follow spiritual riches, disdain the poverty of history. For what is good then, or what kind of gift of God is it, either to covet his wealth and like a man in flight gather desire prematurely, or to turn someone else's work to ones own pleasures, and then to think that this is a gift of God, if we take pleasure in others' discomfort and toil? It is good though, to take our own food and drink, which we have found by divine will, from the flesh and blood of a Lamb. For who is either able to eat or when there is need to spare in the absence of God? He warned that sacred food must not be given to the dogs, and he teaches how rations ought on occasion to be given to slaves, and similar to another meaning, that is we ought to eat only honey that has been found, and only as much as is needed. But God gives wisdom and knowledge and happiness to the man who is good.

For unless he was good and corrected his ways beforehand by his own judgement, he will not be worthy of that wisdom, knowledge and happiness, according to that which is said in another place: "Plant for yourselves in justice, make a vintage of the fruit of life, enlighten for yourselves the light of knowledge. In fact, righteousness ought to be planted first, and the fruit of life must be reaped, only then, afterwards the light of knowledge will be able to appear. Therefore just as God gave the good man wisdom and other gifts, in the same way he has forsaken the sinner according to his own judgement, and made him amass riches and contrive false doctrines therefrom. When a saintly man who is pleasing to God sees these things, he understands them, since they are vain and composed of the conceit of the spirit. Nor should we admire what he has said: "he gave vexation to the sinner" and so on. For this must be seen in concordance with that meaning which I have often explained: that for this reason anxiety or vexation has been given to him, since he was a sinner, and the cause of vexation was not in God, but in himself, who had sinned previously by his own volition.

# CHAPTER 3

3:1. Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under the heavens. He has taught in the previous verses the doubtful and changeable state of humanity; now he wants to show that all things are opposed to each other in the world, and that nothing remains forever of those things, which are under the heavens and beyond time, since the other spiritual substances are contained neither in the heavens nor in time.

3:2. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot that which has been planted. No one doubts that men are born and die, and God knows that what he has planted will grow full and well; for to pull out what has been planted is to die. But since we read in Isaiah ”we have conceived, laboured with and given birth out of a fear for You”, this must be said, because when a man is ready, that man in particular, who was born from fear, will die as soon as he has begun to love God. Since indeed ”perfect love sends fear outside”. The Hebrews understand all that he has written about the contradiction of times, (until it says ” a time for war and a time for peace”) as concerning Israel. Because it is not necessary to go through each verse in turn here, commenting on how they are to be interpreted and what they mean, I will list them briefly, leaving a more detailed study to the reader’s discretion. There was a time for growing and planting in Israel, a time for dying and leading it into bondage. A time for killing them in Egypt, and a time for freeing them from Egypt. A time for destroying the Temple under Nebuchadnezer, and a time for rebuilding under Darius. A time for bewailing the plundering of the city and a time for laughing and dancing under Zorobabel, Esdra, and Nehemiah.

A time for dissemination from Israel and a time for gathering them together again. A time like a belt or harness put around the Jews by God, and a time for leading them into bondage in Babylon and there for them to rot across the Euphrates. Read perizoma of Jeremiah. A time for seeking them out and rescuing, a time for losing and a time for forsaking. A time for schism in Israel and a time for reunification. A time for hushing the prophets, now when in Roman bondage and a time for proclaiming them aloud, when even in enemy lands they weren’t lacking in God’s presence or comfort. A time for loving, in which He loved those men before our fathers, a time for hating, since they threw their hands up against Christ. A time for war, only not for those who are doing repentance for themselves and a time for peace in the future, when all the tribes return, and all Israel will be safe.

3:3. A time for killing and a time for healing. It is both the time for killing and the time for healing, he says: ”I will kill, and I will revive”. He cures, provoking one to repentance. ’I killed’ has the same meaning as ”in the morning I murdered all the sinners of the Earth.” A time for destroying and a time for building. We are not able to build anything good unless we have first destroyed what is bad. Just as the word of Jeremiah came from God so that he first rooted out, undermined and killed; then he built and planted. 3:4. A time for weeping and a time for laughter. Now is the time for weeping and in the future it will be the time for laughter: for ”the blessed weep, since they themselves will laugh.” A time for bewailing and a time for dancing. For this reason they are seized in the Gospel, those to whom God says ” I have lamented for you and you have not moaned; I sang and you did not dance.” We must moan at present so that afterwards we can dance that dance, which David danced before the arc of the covenant, and displeasing to the daughter of Saul he was more pleasing to God.

3:5. A time for dispersing stones and a time for collecting stones. I marvel how an learned man could have said this ridiculous note about this passage: ”this passage speaks about the destruction and killing of Solomon’s houses, because men first destroy, then build”. Some amass stones to construct buildings, others destroy those buildings which have been erected, according to Horace’s lines ”he demolished, he builds, exchanges squares with wheels, he fluctuates and disagrees with the whole order of life itself. Whether he is correct in saying this or not I leave up to the reader to decide. Nonetheless we should follow the sequence of the prior explanation-they say it is a time for scattering and collecting stones, similar to what is written in the Gospel: ”God is powerful enough to raise up the sons of Abraham from these stones”. For there was a time for dispersing the nation and a time for gathering them again into the Church. I have read in a certain book, (like the Septuagint however, which says ”there was a time for throwing stones and a time for collecting them”) that the harshness of the ancient law of the Gospel was tempered by grace. In fact the stern law, unkind and unforgiving, murders the sinner, he pities with the grace of the Gospel and provokes men to repentance. And there is a time for throwing stones, or collecting them, because stones are thrown in law and are collected in the Gospel. Whether this is true fact or not is credited to the author.

A time for embracing and a time for being far from embrace. The meaning of this is seemingly the simplest understanding- the apostle agrees with the same words: ”do not cheat each other, unless by chance it is agreed for a time that you give yourselves to fasting and to prayer. Attention must be given to children, and again to self-control. Or perhaps it was the time for embrace when the opinion was flourishing that we ought to ”grow and multiply, and fill up the Earth”. And the time became far from one of embracing when it passed away: ”the times are hard; it remains that both they that have wives be as though they had none”. But if we wanted to climb to the higher parts, we would see wisdom embracing its lovers: for he says ”honour it and it will embrace you”, and hold them in its arms and lap in a tighter embrace. More precisely, it is not always possible to stretch the human mind to heaven and think about the divine and higher things, or continually consider celestial

matters, but meanwhile to indulge in the necessities of the flesh. On account of this there is a time for embracing wisdom, and holding it more tightly, and a time for relaxing the mind from the study and embrace of wisdom, just as of the care of the body, and we have those things that our life needs in the absence of sin.

3:6-7. A time to acquire and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to throw away. As is in many verses before the meaning is the same here too, which is apparent before and following this verse, in that he says: A time to destroy and a time to build. And then A time to rend and a time to mend. Just as the Synagogue is destroyed so that the Church can be built and schism is only brought about by the law so that the Gospels are unified, because each preacher has carried it out one by one, unifying from the law and the prophets the testimonies of the arrival of the Lord. And thus there was a time for seeking and guarding Israel, a time for losing and discarding it. Or perhaps in fact a time for seeking a nation in the tribes and a time for losing the people of the Jews. A time for guarding the believers of the nations and a time for dismissing the faithless from Israel. A time for silence and a time for speaking. I think that the Pythagoreans, whose discipline is to remain silent for five years and afterwards to speak to learned men, took the origin of their decree from this. Let us learn therefore and so remain silent first, so that afterwards we open our mouths only to speak. Let us be silent for a set period and depend on the utterances of our teacher.

Nothing seems right to us unless we learn that after much silence we are made into teachers by our pupils. Now though instead of the world slipping day by day into a far worse situation, we teach in churches what we do not know. And if by composing words or at the bidding of the devil, who is the patron of madness, we have aroused the applause of the common people, then we think we understand, (contrary to our conscience), what it is we were able to dissuade others from. We do not learn all the arts without a teacher, only those which are so common and easy that they don't require a tutor.

3:8. A time for loving and a time for hating. The time for loving God, children, wife, and relatives is afterwards, and the time for hating those in martyrdom since hostile piety attacks those steadfast men for the sake of the confession of Christ. Or maybe there is a time for loving the law, and those things that the law decrees- that is circumcision, sacrifices, the Sabbath, Neumania, and a time for hating them when the grace of the Gospel has been lost. But we cannot say this, since now we look through the mirror in mystery, the time for loving is the present, and in the future there will come a time when we will see face to face and then, more accomplished, we will begin to hate and despise what we love. A time for war and a time for peace. Although we are in the present world, it is the time for war: when we have left this world the time for peace will come. For the place of God is in peace and so too is our city of Jerusalem, for it is called 'chosen in peace'. Therefore no one now thinks he is safe: you must prepare yourselves in the time of war and put on the apostles arms, so that we may rest in peace at last victorious.

3:9-11. What gain, then, has the worker in exchange for all his toil? I have observed the task which God has given the sons of man to be concerned with: He made everything beautiful in

its time; He has also put an enigma into their minds so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from the beginning to end. The opinion of many other scholars on this passage does not escape me, because in this world God conceded to the teachers of perverse doctrines their true occupation, lest man's idle mind should become slow and while thinking that God's creations are good, yet nonetheless not be able to see them as the natural knowledge of the world. But the Hebrew who taught me the Scriptures explained it in this way: when all things are placed in their own time and there is a time for destroying or building, weeping and laughing, silence and speaking, and others things which are said about time, why do we try to survive in vain and believe the labours of this short life to be perpetual? And according to the Gospel we are not even happy, and it is called wickedness since we think nothing of tomorrow. For what more are we able to have in this world than continual striving in that toil, which God has given to man, so that one man may gain more by following others, in a situation where he is able to learn and exercise himself? For all that God does is good, but good in his world.

It is good to wake and to sleep, but it is not good to be always awake or asleep, since in turn each and every thing can be considered good, when there is need, according to God's plan. Moreover God also created the world to be inhabited by men, so that they should enjoy the variation of time, and not seek the causes nature, how all things are made, why He made this or that grow or change from the beginning of the world until now.

3:12-13. Thus I perceived that there is nothing good for each of them than to rejoice and do what is good in his life. Indeed every man who eats and drinks and finds satisfaction in all his labour- it is a gift from God. Therefore the settler and the foreigner of the world has been charged that he should enjoy the time of his short life, and when the hope of a longer life has been removed, he sees everything that he has as if he is about leave this life, and he sees also what he can do well in his life. And his thoughts are not in vain thus twisted, on account of his amassed wealth. And he doesn't think that he is able to acquire more from his toil than his food and drink and if he expends anything from his wealth into good work, then only this is a gift of God. We are not provoked, as some scholars think, by such words into luxury, pleasures, and desperation as are animals, according to that phrase of Isaiah: "let us gorge ourselves and drink, for tomorrow we will die. But according to the apostle: "having sustenance and clothing, we are content with these. And whatever we have that is more than this, we use in feeding the poor and our need for charity.

More to the point, since the true food is the flesh of the Lord, and his blood is the true drink, according to anagoge, we only regard this as good in the present world, if we actually do feed from his flesh and drink from his blood, not only in secret but even in reading the Scriptures. For true food and drink, which is taken from the word of God, is knowledge of the Scriptures. But no one believes the word of Balaam of the prophets, who says "there will be no toil against Jacob, no suffering in Israel". It is in fact contrary to this, because it is said to be a gift of God: "If anyone eats and drinks and shows he is good in all of his work". In fact these are the many troubles of the righteous. And the apostle complains about these,

saying he has sweated in toil and suffering. But the Lord freed us for our future in toil and suffering also: ”there will be no toil against Jacob, no suffering in Israel”. And we read how ” the blessed weep, since they will laugh”, and our laughter follows the words of Job the prophet: for the ”mouth will be filled with the joy of truths”. Thus now we enjoy our toil in good work, by which we restrict and restrain ourselves so that afterwards we may cease from working.

3:14. I realised that whatever God does will endure forever: nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away, and God has acted so that man should fear Him. There is nothing in the world that is new. The course of the sun and moon in turn and the dryness and verdure of the earth and trees are born and take shape with the world itself. And therefore God governed all things by a defined plan and commanded the elements to be at the disposal of man, for his use, so that when men see these things they know that there is providence and fear the appearance of God; while from the equality of the world, the natural season, order, and constancy they understand their creator. ”For his invisible work in the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal virtue and power”. If we want we can read this as if from the beginning, with the meaning of the first part already understood: ”and God has acted so that man should fear Him” then this is the meaning: God made all these things, so that men fear him, and reject for another what God once created for man. But he governed perfectly, saying: ”so that they should fear his appearance”. The image of the Lord, indeed, is powerful over those who are wicked.

3:15. What has been, already exists, and what is still to be, has already been, and God seeks him that suffers persecution. All things we perceive in the past, present or future, they themselves have been, are, and will be. That same sun which now rises, existed before we were in this world, and after we die, it will rise again. But we have mentioned the sun, so that we understand other things to be the same as they have been before. Because if they are seen to die by what we call death, they do not really die, but grow again given a second life, and nothing dies forever but is reborn and relives as if with a certain new seed. For this is what he says: ”and God seeks him that suffers persecution”, which is said better in Greek kai ho theos zetesei to diokomenon that is what dies, what has perished, and has ceased to be. But if that speaks about all that are in the world there is no doubt about man, that having died he will be reborn. But if anyone likes to choose a beginning as if his own, ”and God seeks him that suffers persecution”, he uses this evidence in the persecution of certain people: to comfort him, who had persevered in martyrdom. And since all in this world, who want to live religiously, follow the apostle, they suffer persecution and take consolation in the fact that God seeks him that suffers persecution, just as he seeks out the blood of a man who has been murdered, and comes to seek what has perished, and carry the wandering sheep back to the flock on his shoulders.

3:16-17. Furthermore, I have observed beneath the sun: in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. I mused: God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for everything and for every deed, there.

The meaning of this is clear but is cloaked by the cloud of interpretation. He says: I sought truth and righteousness under the sun and I saw that even among the benches of judges truth is not valued, but gifts. Or differently: I thought some kind of justice present in this world and either took the pious man on his own merit, or punished the impious for his crimes; and I found the opposite to that which I had been thinking. For I saw a righteous man here suffer much injustice and an impious man made to rule instead of being punished for his crime. But thinking to myself afterwards and considering it carefully I understood that they judge not in respect of God and treating each case one by one, but rather reserve judgement for the future, so that all are judged equally and receive there according to their will and effort. For this is what he says: ”and there is a time for everything and for every deed, there”, that is, in judgement when God will have begun to judge, then there will be truth, now injustice prevails in the world. Such as when we read in Wisdom, Sirach wrote: ”lest you say, what is this or what is that? For all things are sought in their own time”.

3:18-21. Then I said to myself concerning men: God has chosen them out, but only to see that they themselves are as beasts. For the fate of men and the fate of beast - they have one and the same fate: as one dies so the other dies, and they all have the same spirit. Man has no superiority over beast, for all is futile. All go to the same place; all originate from dust and return to dust. Who perceives that the spirit of man is the one that ascends on high while the spirit of the beast is the one that descends down into the earth? It is not surprising that there is no distinction in this life between righteous and wicked, nor that none values virtues, but all things occur with uncertain outcome, where nothing seems to differ according to the worthlessness of the body between sheep and men: there is the same birth, common end in death; we proceed similarly towards the light and are equally dissolved into the dust. But there seems to be this difference, that the spirit of man ascends to the heavens, and the spirit of animals goes down into the earth, but from where do we know this for certain? Who can know whether what is hoped is true or false?

But he says this, not because he thinks the spirit dies with the body, or that there’s one place set aside for beasts and for man, but because before the arrival of Christ all were led equally to the nether regions. Jacob said that he was about to go down to those regions. And Job complains that the pious and impious are held back in the lower world. And the Gospel says that with an abyss blocking the way even Abraham and Lazarus were rich in prayers in the underworld. And in fact before Christ accompanied by a robber opened the wheel of flames, and the fiery rumpias and the gates of paradise, the heavens were closed and the equal unworthiness of the spirits of sheep and of men was abridged. One also seems to be dispersed and the other saved; but there is not much of a difference between dying with the body or being held in the darkness of the underworld. Let us look over these things one by one in paragraphs, and discuss them briefly. I considered the eloquence of the sons of man, whom God chose. Only this eloquence, he says, God wanted to be between men and beasts, since we speak, they are mute; we possess the will for conversation, they are stupefied with silence. And though we only differ from beasts in language, though it is shown to us, how we are like the beasts - weak in body.

Just as a beast dies, thus man dies, and one breath is for all, and that is the air that we breathe. For he says this: ”and one spirit is for both, and there is nothing more for man than for beast. Since lest we think the text refers to the soul he adds: ”all are made from earth and return to the earth. But nothing else except the body is made from earth, and quite relevant, regarding the body he continues: ”you are earth and to the earth you will return. But this seems to be blasphemy: for who knows if the spirit of the sons of man ascends upwards, or if the spirit of beasts goes downwards into the earth? He does not contend that there is no difference between animals and men in reference to the dignity of the soul, but in adding ”who? he wants to show the difficulty of the matter. For the pronoun ”who” is used in the Holy Scriptures not on account of impossibility, but a difficulty. So here it is said in that passage, ”who will describe that man’s generation?”, and in the psalm: ”Lord, who ascends in your tabernacle, and onto your sacred mountain?”, and other examples that follow this pattern. And in Jeremiah it can be said differently in Hebrew: ”And he is a man, and who knows him?”.

This then, is the only difference between beast and men, that the spirit of man ascends to the heaven, and the spirit of the beast descends into the earth and is dispersed with the flesh; but let any man, who is of the Church and learned in the religious disciplines, be the real champion of the matter, which is rather doubtful. Then he adds just how much it refers to a spiritual understanding: ”since the Lord will keep both men and beasts safe”, and in another place he says, ”beasts, I am among you”, and all the prophets say that both men and beasts will be saved in Jerusalem, and that the promised land will be filled with sheep and cattle. Who knows whether the saintly man, who is worthy of the name of man, will ascend to heaven, and whether the sinner, who is called beast, will go down into the earth? For it is possible in light of the uncertain and dangerous condition of his life, that the righteous man falls and the sinner rises, and it sometimes happens that man, having more reason and learned in the Scriptures, does not look about himself, and although worthy of his knowledge lives out his life and is led down to the nether world; and the simpler and unlearned man, who is said to be compared to the beasts of men, lives better and is crowned in martyrdom, and he is then to live in paradise.

3:22. I therefore observed that there is nothing better for man than to be happy in what he is doing, for that is his lot. For who can enable him to see what will be after him? Instead of that which we have as ”to see what will be after him”, Symmachus interprets it more clearly saying, ”so that he sees those things which will be after these ones”. Therefore nothing is good in life, unless a man is happy in his work, doing acts of sympathy, and obtaining his future reward in the realm of heaven. We have this one lot, which nor neither thief nor robber values, nor any tyrant has the power to take away, and which follows us after our death. And we will not be able to enjoy our toil again when this life will be over, or know what things will be afterwards in the world. Another explanation of this is: I am disturbed by the wickedness of what I have said above, that I think there is no difference between men and beasts, and I have been led into this opinion by wrong conclusions, so that I said nothing else was good, except grasping ones present desire. Nor when death has destroyed us is it

possible to enjoy these things, which we, ungrateful, leave behind. Some have referred to that understanding because it says, ”for who leads him, so that he sees those things, which will be after him”, so that they say, ”it is better for a man to enjoy his work” because it is only this that he is able to take away with him from his possessions. For when death comes he will not know what kind of heir he will die with, whether worthy or unworthy, who will enjoy his wealth.

# CHAPTER 4

4:1. And I returned and contemplated all the acts of oppression that are committed beneath the sun: Behold! Tears of the oppressed with none to comfort them, and their oppressors have the power - with none to comfort them. After considering this I turned my eyes and attention to this, so that I saw the slanderers and those sustaining chicanery. And look on those who, oppressed unjustly by more powerful men, are not able to find a comforter for their tears. For this is only permitted in disasters and in protest at the ill will of the matter. And wherever there is more distress and inconsolable suffering they see the slanderers as stronger in their difficulties. And this is the cause: because they are not worthy of consolation. He describes this idea more fully in the seventy-second psalm of David, and Jeremiah in his own book.

4:2-3. So I consider more fortunate the dead, who have already died, than the living, who are still alive. But better than either of them is he who has not yet been, and has never witnessed the evil that is committed under the sun. In comparison with the difficulties, which trouble mortal men in this world, I had judged the dead to be happier than the living according to that which Job says in his argument regarding the dead: ” there they rested with tired bodies, with those who had been in chains, now without cares, not hearing the voice of the expeller. But it is better for these two, for the living it seems and for the deceased, who has not yet been born. For one man will suffer ill, another unclothed will escape it as if from a shipwreck. Moreover he who has not yet been born is happier in that, becausehe has not yet experienced the ill of the world. But he says this, not because he who has not yet been born, exists before he has been born, and he is happier in this, since he has not yet been weighed down by his body; but better to be sure is not existing, or not having a sense of wealth, than either being unhappy or living unhappily. Just as the Lord speaks to Judas, referring to his coming anguish:

”it was better for that man never to have been born”, since it would have been better for sure for him not to have existed, than to suffer eternal torture. Some people in fact understand this passage in this way: they say they are better, who have died, than those who are living, it is permitted to them before they were sinners. For until now the living were in battle and were held back as if closed in by the prison of the body; but those who have opposed death are already without cares and have stopped sinning. Just like John, in which he was

not greater in respect to the sons of women, he is less than him, who is the lowest in the realm of heaven and is freed from the burden of the body. He does not know how to say like the apostle: ”I am a wretched man, who will free me from the body of this death?”. But he says he is better than those two, who has not yet been born, nor does not see the wickedness, by which men are oppressed in the world. For our souls mingle among the gods, before descending to these bodies and are blessed so long as the heavenly ones are held in Jerusalem and in the choir of angels.

4:4. And I saw that all labour and skilful enterprise spring from man’s rivalry with his neighbour. This, too, is futility and a vexation of the spirit! I turned my attention once again to other things and I saw the strength and honour of those men who were toiling, and I discovered the good of one man to be the evil of another, while the envious one is tortured by another’s happiness, and the boastful lies open to trickery. For what is more vain, what is for nothing like the spirit in this way, than for man to weep for misfortunes that are not his own, or to bemoan his own sins, or be envious of better men.

4:5. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. This is the man that is described as slow to comprehend in Proverbs, holding his chest in his hands. For poverty, although he is a fast runner, catches up with him and he eats his own flesh because of the extent of his hunger, but this is said in exaggeration. He is the sort of man who thinks that having one fist of corn and living idly and in a stupor is better than filling each hand by working. But he sows everything so that he can show that he that both works and acquires possessions leaves himself open in the world to envy. Conversely he that desires to live a simple life is oppressed by poverty and because of this both of these two is poor: while the one runs a risk on account of his wealth, the other is consumed by want because of his poverty. Or indeed perhaps it is to be understood in this way: he who envies the happiness of another man is seized as if by the fury of the spirit, and takes envy into his lap, and nourishes it in his heart: thus it is he eats his soul and his flesh. For as much as he sees that man whom he envies as happier, he himself more so wastes away and perishes, and little by little becomes more full of envy and jealousy. Another way of reading this is:

his hands are taken on many occasions to lead him to work, just as the passage which states, ”the act of the Lord which is done in the hand of Haggai”, or of Ecclesiastes, or of his prophet, because he has done such work, that he appears to be worthy, in whose work is the speech of the Lord. And the man, who corresponds to this man is David, ”who leads my hands in battle”. Therefore the fool embraces his hands, that is he draws them together and doesn’t want to open them, and so does not eat the toil of his hands, which he does not have, but his flesh, living by the wisdom of his flesh and eating the toil of his flesh.

4:6. Better is one handful of pleasantness than two fistfuls of labour and vexation of the spirit. It is better to have modest power, than great riches of sins. And in Proverbs it says, ”To receive a little through righteousness is better than gaining much by injustice.” Justice rightly has rest, injustice toil. And since a single number is always seen in a good context and a dual seen as wickedness, therefore one fist has rest, and two hands are full of toil.

4:7-8. Then I returned and contemplated futility beneath the sun: a lone and solitary man who has neither son nor brother, yet there is no end to his toil, nor is his eye ever sated with riches, nor does he ask himself, 'For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of goodness.' This too is futility, indeed, it is a sorry task. I turned to other people and I saw that they work more than is necessary and amass wealth by good and bad means and do not use it once accumulated; they have all things, brood over their riches, keep it for another, and do not enjoy their work. Then at the end of their life they have neither son nor brother, nor close friend so that the pious work seems reserved for necessities only. And so I discovered nothing more vain than that man, who collects riches, or to whom an ignorant man bequeaths them. We are even able to understand this in a religious interpretation, and understand it as those, who write books and leave them to fastidious readers. Some say that this passage from where it says "there is one, but there is not a second" is about the Saviour, because he came down to save the world alone and without any companion. And although there are many sons of God, they are called his brothers by adoption, though not one remains worthy, who should be joined to him in this work. There is no end to this work, for those carrying our faults and sins and suffering for us; and his eye will not be filled by riches, but always with those desiring our safety, and the more you see his sins, the more he encourages him to repent.

4:9-12. Two are better than one, for they get a greater return for their labour. For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no one to raise him! Also, if two sleep together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? Where one can be overpowered, two can resist attack; A three-ply cord is not easily severed! After the misfortunes of loneliness in which he has been seized, and he who torments himself in acquiring wealth without a definite heir, now the subject of companionship is treated. And it asks what good ther is in a tent of friends and what comfort there is in company, since one man's distress or domestic strife is lifted by another's help, (any man who has a faithful friend will sleep better all that night, than he who sleeps only with his wealth which he has amassed. And if a stronger enemy rises up against one man, the weakness of one is sustained by the comfort of friends. And just as two differ from one if they are joined in love, so the tent of three is stronger. For even true charity, which has been violated by no envy increases as much in number as it grows in strength. And this idea is conveyed in relatively few words. But since previously we have placed the discussion of the intelligence of certain men before Christ, those things which are still left must be discussed by the same order.

It is better for two to be equal, than one. For it is better for a man who lives alone to have Christ, than alone to leave himself vulnerable to ill-intentioned plots. Since the reward of the tent is shown at once in the very usefulness of society. For if one man fell, Christ would raise up his partner. Woe indeed to him who collapses, he will not have Christ rising up in him. For if one sleeps, that is, if he had been dissolved by death and had Christ with him, he will revive more quickly having been made warm and given life once again. And if the devil, being stronger in his attack, should attack a man, the man will stand, and Christ

will stand in place of this man, in place of his companion. Not because virtue is weak (the virtue of Christ alone) against the devil, but because the decision of man is left free and for us, who are dependent, but virtue itself will become stronger through fighting. And even if the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit should come, that friendship is not broken easily. But although it is not broken easily, it will be broken nonetheless at some point. And the cord from the apostle to Judas was threefold: but after the breaking of the bread Satan entered him and that cord was broken. More precisely what he says above is, ”and even if two are sleeping, then they will be warm: and how will one keep warm on his own?

We can take an example from Elisha, because he is in a pact with a lad, and slept with him and warmed his body, and in this way revived the recovering boy. Unless therefore Christ sleeps with us and rests in death, we are not able to receive the heart of eternal life.

4:13-16. Better is a poor but wise youth, than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to take care of himself; because from the prison-house he emerged to reign, while even in his reign he was born poor. I saw all the living that wander beneath the sun throng to the succeeding youth that steps into his place. There is no end to the entire nation, to all that was before them; similarly the ones that come later will not rejoice in him. For this too is futility and a vexation of the spirit. Symmachus translates this passage in this way: ”better a poor man who has wisdom, than an old and foolish king who does not know to beware of change”. For the one leaves the body to reign in heaven, and the other indeed, although he had been born a king, is restricted by poverty. I saw all men living, who grow up under the sun in propitious adolescence, which increases in them. Each and every nation that was before is unending, and those that come after do not rejoice in the previous. But this too is empty and a vexation of the spirit. My Hebrew tutor, whose teachings I often refer to, bore witness while he was reading Ecclesiastes with me, that Bar Akiba wrote these things above the present passage, and he is greatly admired by other scholars:

better is the inner part of man, which arises in us after the fourteenth year of puberty, than the outer, physical man, who is born from his mother’s womb, and he does not know how to abstain from vice because it comes to this that he rules over his vices from the house of chains, that is from his mother’s womb. For he is made poor because of his power and by carrying out all wicked deeds. I saw those men, who lived as those former men, and were changed afterwards into that second man, in him that has been born in place of the former. And I understood that all men sinned in that prior manhood, before the second is born, when they become two men. But once these men have changed for the better, and after the learning of philosophers, they leave the left path and hurry towards the right, and they follow the second man, that is the newest man, and do not rejoice in him that is the former. The apostle agrees with these two types of men and Leviticus also mentioned them: ”Man, man” who desired this or that. That saintly man Gregorius Pontus the bishop, to whom Origen preached, understands the passage in the following way in his Metaphrasis of Ecclesiastes:

”I however prefer a youth who is poor yet is growing wise, to an old king who is foolish, to whom it never occurs that it is possible for someone from those whom he has conquered, will leave the body to reign in heaven; and then he destroys himself from his unjust power. For it happens though that those who were growing wise at the time of youth are without sadness; but that they changed before the time of becoming an old king. For those that have been born afterwards, since they do not know the wickedness that has gone before, they are not able to praise youth, which arises afterwards, and are led astray by perverse ideas and by the force of the opposing arguments. Laodicenus has asserted that great matters are expressed in this short passage, and he wrote here in his accustomed fashion: ”Ecclesiastes now speaks about the change of good men into wicked, expressing the foolish man as he who tries, and who not thinking of the future, enjoys the transient and failing things as if they are great and perpetual. And after the many things which usually happen (or change) to men in their life, he asserts something of a general opinion of death, since the great number perishes and little by little is consumed and pass across, with each one leaving the other in his place, and another’s successor dying. Origines and Victorinus did not think very differently on this matter.

After the general statement that reveals to all that the poor yet wise youth is better than an old king who is foolish, and that it often happens that the lad leaves the prison of the king because of his wisdom, and commands in place of a cruel dictator, and as a foolish king loses all his power, which he had obtained. They saw this passage in relation to Christ and the devil, because they wished to view the poor and wise boy as Christ. The poor boy is the same as that one in ”it is great for you to be called my boy”, but the poor man, since he has been made poor, when once he was rich and wise, because ”he was proficient in age and wisdom and thankful to God and men. That man is born in the reign of an old man and therefore he says, ”if this was my rule in the world, that my servants struggle on my behalf so that I am not handed over to the Jews. But now it is not my rule. So in the reign of that foolish old man who displays all the rule of the whole world and his glory, the most excellent boy comes from the house of chains, about which Jeremiah speaks in Lamentations, saying, ”so that he lowers to the feet of that man all those who have been conquered in the world.

And that boy goes on to rule and goes away to a far off region, and as king after some time is turned against those, who do not want to rule. So with some insight Ecclesiastes saw that all men who are alive and who are able to be part of youth, say, ”I am life”, having left behind them that old foolish king, to follow Christ. At the same time the two nations of Israel are to be understood here. The first, which was before the arrival of the Lord, and the next, which will support the Antichrist in place of Christ, for the first is not deep down despondent, since the first church was formed from Jews and the apostles; and in the end the Jews, who will support the Antichrist, will not rejoice in Christ.

4:17. Guard your foot when you go to the House of God; better to draw near and hearken than to offer the sacrifices of fools, for they do not consider that they do evil. He gives some general precepts for life, and does not want to offend us, who go to church. Since it is

praiseworthy in his view, not just to enter the House of God, but to enter without offence. And if it was intended for all who are in the church of God to hear this passage, he would never have added, ”and approach so that you might hear”. But then it was only Moses who approached near to God to hear, the other men were not allowed. For the foolish commit sins, not knowing that there is a remedy; they think that they can satisfy God with the offering of gifts, and do not know that this is also evil and a sin; for they want to make correction for what they have done, not with obedience and good work, but with gifts and sacrifice. What others have said elsewhere agrees with this too: ”obedience above sacrifice”. And ”I want pity and not sacrifice”.

# CHAPTER 5

5:1-2. Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before God; for God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. For a dream comes from much concern, and foolish talk from many words. Several men think that this teaches here that we should not promise something too quickly in the presence of God, and without due consideration of our strengths we vow things, which we cannot then fulfil. God though is present in heaven, but we seem to be on earth, yet he hears what we say and accuses that our foolishness comes from our love of speech. But some men understand this better, affirming that this teaches that, either speaking or thinking more about God than we are able, we hold to our opinions; but we know our stupidity, since, as much as the heavens differ from the earth, so our thoughts are separated from His character. And therefore our words ought to be checked. Just as he that is much in thought frequently dreams about those things about which he thinks during the day; thus he, who wanted to teach more from divinity, falls into foolishness. Or indeed it could mean this: our words ought to be few therefore, since even those things, which we think we know, we see through a mirror and in mystery, and as we understand a dream, which we think we can grasp. Although we have done many things, as it appears to us, the end of our argument is foolishness. For we do not escape sin by too much speaking.

5:3-4. When you make a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for He has no liking for fools; what you vow, pay. Better that you not vow at all, than that you vow and not pay. A simple man does not need understanding by interpretation. It is better not to promise than not to keep promises, since they displease God and are numbered among fools, who do not fulfil their vows. But since he says, ”There is no will in fools” underneath we hear ”of God”, like the word of the apostle, who says, ”and just as there was no will, that I should now come to you”. For even if we want to say something more inquiring, it is taught to a Christian, that he should fulfil his faith by work, and not be like the Jews, who pledge and say, ”we will do all that God commands”, and yet worship idols. And afterwards they beat those slaves and cast stones at them, and immediately killed the very son of the father of their house. It is better therefore to hold a doubtful opinion for a while, which is easy to say in words, but difficult to put into practice. For the slave, who knows the will of his God and will not do it will be defeated by many.

5:5. Let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh, and do not tell the messenger that it was an error. Why should God be angered by your speech and destroy the work of your hands? What the Hebrew means is that if you are not able to do these things, do not promise to do them. For the words do not transgress to the spirit but are carried at once to the Lord by the angel present, who sticks to one man only as a companion. You who think to disregard God, since you have promised, you will anger Him, with the result that all your work will be destroyed. But in that place where he says: "to bring guilt upon your flesh" and he understood this, though not caring diligently, as if he had said "let not your mouth cause you not to sin." But there seems to me however another meaning, which is argued by those, who complain about the strength of the flesh and say they are compelled by the necessity of the body to do those things that they don't want to do, according to the apostle: "for I do not do what I want, but what I do not wish" and so on. And so he says, 'don't seek vain excuses and give occasion to your flesh to sin'. Then in that place where he says "and do not tell the angel that it was a madness" Aquila takes the Hebrew word segaga to mean ignorance, and translates it with the Greek word akousion, that is, not of ones will. For if you say this, he says, you provoke God, as if to say He is like the creator of evil and sin, and anger Him, so that if you seem to have anything good, He will take it from your possession. Or indeed he translates such things with the meaning of reproof, so that you do those things, which are not appropriate.

5:6. In spite of all dreams, futility and idle chatter, rather: Fear God! The Hebrews explain this passage in great detail, and in the following way: and you should not do the things detailed above, about which he has already spoken, lest you believe too readily in dreams. For when you see different things, your mind will be troubled by many fears throughout your night's rest, or aroused by promises, you despise those things that are dream-like. You should only fear God. For he, who believes in dreams, gives himself over to vanities and nonsense. Another meaning of this passage is, since I have said and admonished, "you should not let your mouth bring guilt on your flesh", and to seek this or that excuse; I introduce this now, since in the dream of that life, and in the appearance, shade, cloud in which we live, we are able to find many things, which seem true to life to us and excuse our sins. Therefore I advise that you beware that alone, lest you think God is absent, but fear Him, and know He is present in all your toil, and do not force yourself to be hidden in free will, but want whatever it is that you do.

5:7-8. If you see oppression of the poor, and the suppression of justice and right of the State, do not be astonished at the fact, for there is One higher than the high Who watches and there are high ones above them. The advantage of land is supreme; even a king is indebted to the soil. Christ's garment, woven on top, was not able to be torn by those who crucified him; and the Saviour threw him from that demon, and advised him to go away having put on the clothes of the apostles. So we believe that the clothes of our Ecclesiastes are not to be torn, nor should we sew on here and there patches in place of our free-will of opinion, but use the one text itself in dispute, and follow the same meaning and arrangement all the way through. Above this he had said: "do not tell the messenger that it was a madness, lest

God become angry over your speech", and regarding the remaining things, he had spoken against those, who do not know that providence rules over human affairs. Since therefore the question arises many times about the precept, why the righteous sustain disaster, and why the unjust become judges over all the world, but God is not vengeful:

now he introduces and finishes this argument, saying, 'if you see the calamity of a pauper, who is said to be blessed in the Gospel, and the situation is assessed according to his strength and not in justice, do not be astonished or let anything seem new to you. God, who is highest above the high, sees these things, He that placed His angels above the judges and kings of the earth, to prevent injustice and they are more important on earth, than any of man's potentates. But since he will be the Saviour at the end of the judges, and in the end of the world when the cornfield will be ripe, and the harvesters will come, he will be ordered that the wheat be separated and the darnel thrown on the fire. Therefore he now awaits and differs in opinion, although the field of the world is cultivated carefully more fully. But since that field is interpreted as the world, the Lord expounds about them in the parable of darnel and wheat.

5:9-10. A lover of money will never be satisfied with money; a lover of abundance has no wheat. This too, is futility! As goods increase, so do those who consume them; what advantage, then, has the owner except what hi eyes see? Wherever we read 'silver', according to the ambiguity of the Greek term, it can be translated as 'money', since each has the meaning of the Greek argurion. More precisely Tullius is said to have called these men 'pecuniary', who have many small savings, that is wealth in cattle. For they were called this in antiquity. But little by little the word devolved into the one used here through misuse. Therefore he is described as greedy because he is never sated by wealth, and the more he has, the more he desires. Horace also agrees with this sentiment, who says, "always the miser is wanting", and too the noble historian, since "avarice is diminished neither by possessions, nor by lack of them". Nothing therefore, says Ecclesiastes can aid a man who possesses riches, unless only this: that he sees what he possesses. For the greater his wealth, the more he will have a larger number of servants, who use up his amassed wealth. But if he will only see what he has, he will be able to take more than the food of one man.

5:11. Sweet is the sleep of the labourer, whether he eats little or much; the satiety of the rich does not let him sleep. So far the discourse has treated of riches and greed, and it is compared to a man who works and one who sleeps without worry, or eats little or a great deal. Because he eats any food obtained from the toil of work and from his sweat, he enjoys peaceful sleep. For a rich man indeed is busy with banquets and lacerated by many thoughts, is not able to sleep, and abounds in hangovers and uncooked food boils in the intestines of his stomach. More precisely, since it is called sleep, and is a common exit from life, that rest will be better for him, who is busy at present and reserves his strength for good work, than the riches of those men, about whom it is written: "woe to you, O rich, for you have received your consolation".

5:12-16. There is a sickening evil that I have seen under the sun; riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune, and he loses those riches in some bad venture. If he begets a son, he has nothing in hand. As he had come from his mother's womb, naked will he return, as he had come; he can salvage nothing from his labour to take with him. This too, is a sickening evil: Exactly as he came he must depart, and what did he gain in exchange for toiling for the wind? Indeed, all his life he eats in darkness; he is greatly grieved, and has illness and anger. Take what follows as linked to what is written above: while Ecclesiastes describes wealth, even he is not able to enjoy his riches and on many occasions endangers himself on account of them. Nor to his heir does he leave what he has amassed; but even he and his son, just as they came nude, will return nude to the earth and nothing of their toil will accompany them. Surely apathy is the worst, to be tortured by thought on account of riches, and wealth will perish. And are we able to take it with us when we die, in sadness, in mourning, in indignation, in laws or to seek it in vain toil? And all this is according to the apparent simple meaning of the text.

But as we are lifted higher, it seems to me that it speaks about the philosophers, or the heretics, who amass riches of doctrines into their wickedness, and nor are authors able to follow any usefulness, nor leave perpetual fruit for their followers. But even they and their disciples return to the earth and lose their riches, from him who said, "I will lose the wisdom of the wise men, and I will reprove the prudence of the careful. Truly in fact, just as they left their mother's womb, (apparently as from a heretical church), contrary to this about which it is written: "but Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of all. Thus they go nude to become a spirit, and work for nothing. Those who examine, lack examination, and they are carried on every wind of doctrine, nor do they have the light, but eat their sacraments in the darkness. They are always ill, and are easily moved to anger, storing up anger for themselves for the day of anger, and they do not have the favour of God.

5:17-19. So what I have seen to be good is that it is suitable to eat and drink and enjoy pleasure with all one's labour that he toils beneath the sun during the brief span of his life that God has given him, for that is his lot. Furthermore, every man to whom God has given riches and possessions and has given him the power to enjoy them, possess his share and be happy in his work: this is the gift of God. For he shall remember that the days of his life are not many, while God provides him with the joy of his heart. This is in comparison to him, who consumes his wealth in the darkness of his worries, and carries those things which are about to die throughout the great tedium of his life, and says that that man is better, who enjoys what he has. For here there is but a small desire of enjoyment, but there in the latter indeed there is a great magnitude of worries. He also gives the reasons why the gift of God is to be able to enjoy riches. Since "he will not remember much of the days of his life". For God turns him to the happiness of his heart's desire: he will not be sad, he will not be worried by thought, since he is led away by happiness and desire for present things.

But it is better understood as according to the apostle, seen as spiritual food and spiritual drink which is given by God and I understood to see goodness in all of his toil, since we are

only able to consider true good things with great toil and enthusiasm. For what is permitted to be good, though, until Christ appears in our life, is not yet openly considered good. And therefore God will not remember much of the days of our life. We should also note that here perispasmos is used in a better way, in the place of the occupation of the spirit and true happiness.

# CHAPTER 6

6:1-6. There is an evil I have observed beneath the sun, and it is prevalent among mankind; a man to whom God has given riches, wealth and honour, and he lacks nothing that his heart could desire, yet God did not give him the power to enjoy it. This is futility and an evil disease. If a man begets an hundred children and lives many years - great being the days of his life - and his soul is not content with the good - and he even is deprived of burial; I say: the stillborn is better off than he. Though its coming is futile and it departs in darkness, though its very name is enveloped in darkness, though it never saw the sun nor knew; it has more satisfaction than he. Even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but find no contentment - do not all go to the same place? He describes the riches of misers and asserts that this evil is often in men, since none of those things, which are thought to be good in the world, is lacking in him, and nonetheless he torments himself with the most inane sparing, saving those things to be devoured by others. Nor does he say this in exaggeration, for even if he produced an hundred books and lived longer than Adam, that is almost one thousand years, but lived two thousand years, he would rot his mind with desire and avarice.

He is born prematurely in a worse state that dies, as soon as he seems born. For he did not see evil things or good things; but although he used to possess good things, he was tormented by thoughts and sadness, and having been born prematurely he has more rest, than a greedy man who is old. But both however are seized by the same fate, while both the first and the last are taken away by the same death. This could also refer to Israel, because God gave Israel the law, which speaks about the prophets, the testament, the Promised Land and the Saviour: ”let the reign of God be removed from you and given to a nation that brings forth his fruit”. All these things have been given to a foreign and pilgrim people from peoples who see their good yet do not enjoy it. They say we are of much better condition, who are considered to be as new-born and premature by those, who praised themselves in antiquity, finding glory in their fathers, saying: ”our father was Abraham”, but however both we and they hasten to one place, that is to the judgement of God. But what Ecclesiastes says in the middle is this: ”but there was no tomb for him”. This either means that that rich man does not think of his death, and while he possesses all, is greedy even in building a tomb;

or that often he is killed on account of those riches, by plots against his life, and is left unburied, or, what I think is a better interpretation, he needs nothing of good deeds, from which he is able to obtain for himself memory among those who come after him. And so that he will not pass through life in silence, just as cattle, although he had a means, by which he was able to show that he had lived.

6:7-8. All man's toil is for his mouth, yet his wants are never satisfied. What advantage then has the wise man over the fool? What less has the pauper who knows how to conduct himself among the living? All that men toil at in this world is consumed by the mouth and taken to be digested in the stomach after it has been ground down by the teeth. And when a little bit has pleased the palette, it seems to create a desire, so long as it is held in the mouth. But when it has passed down to the stomach the difference between foods is no longer distinguishable. And after all these things the spirit of a man who eats is not filled up; or then he desires again what he has eaten, and is as wise as the fool without food, who does not know how to live, and the poor man asks for nothing else but for how he is to sustain the organs of his meagre body, and not die through starvation. Or because the spirit takes no gain from the food of the body, and food is of equal use to a wise man and a fool, and the pauper wanders therefrom, to where he has seen wealth to be. This is better understood regarding a man of the church, who learned in the heavenly Scriptures, holds all his toil in his mouth yet his spirit is not filled, for he always desires to learn. And in that respect the wise man has more than the fool, since when he feels himself to be poor, he presses that pauper, who is called blessed in the Gospel, to understand those things which are of life, and walks the restricted and narrow path, which leads to life, and he is poor from wicked deeds and knows where Christ, (who is life) is to be found.

6:9. Better is what the eyes see than what is imagined. That, too, is futility and a vexation of the spirit. Symmachus interpreted this clearly, he says: "it is better to make provision, than to walk about as it pleases you". That is, it is better to do all things according to what you know to be right in your mind, which is the eye of the soul, than to follow the desire of your heart. For this is to wander in spirit, just as Ezekiel says: "he who walks by the desire of his heart". For indeed he denounced that man is proud and only pleases himself and says he is better, who makes provision for all days, than he, whom nothing pleases, unless he has made it himself. Nothing is worse than him, and more vane than any breath. And again here "vexation of the spirit" has been interpreted by Theodotion and Aquila as 'suffering of the soul'. Symmachus too has "affliction of the spirit". More precisely we must remember that in Hebrew 'spirit' and 'breath' are similar in usage - that is ruha.

6:10. What has been was already named, and it is known that he is but a man. He cannot contend with one who is mightier than him. Clearly this is predicting the arrival of the Saviour, since he writes 'he will be'; before he was seen in body his name was already written in the Scriptures and was known by prophets and holy men of God, since he was a man; and similar to this, since he is a man, he is not able to walk with his Father. And in the Gospel it says: "the Father, who sent me, is greater than me." In the following passages it teaches

not to ask more than is written for us by Him, so that a man may not wish to know more than is attested in the Scriptures. For although we are ignorant of our condition and our life passes us by like a shadow, and our future is undecided, it is not useful for us to strive for more than we are able to attain. Some think that this passage means that God already knows the names of all the men, who will be in the future, and who will be enclosed within the body of mankind. Nor is a man able to reply to his creator, and ask why he has been made in this way or that. For however much more we seek, our vanity and our unnecessary words are exposed all the more. Our choice does not come free from the foreknowledge of God, but precedes the causes, why any one thing is done in a particular way.

# CHAPTER 7

7:1. How does it benefit man? For who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spends as a shadow? For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? When he says that man is ignorant of his condition, and does not actually know whatever he seems to know and discern, as if the truth of the matter is not seen, he does see however the shadow and image as if through a mirror, and he cannot know what will come, or escape his sin by talkativeness. He should silence his mouth and believe that He who is written has come, and not ask by what means, how much, or what kind of man he is that has come.

7:1-2. A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. Consider, he says, man, your short days since you will cease to be quickly when your body gives out; fast longer, so that however perfume delights your nostrils with its smell, in the same way posterity will delight in all things to your name. Symmachus interpreted this very clearly, saying, "a good name is better than a perfume that smells pleasant". We must remember that it is the custom of the Hebrews to call good perfume 'oil'. He also says, "and the day of death than the day of one's birth", this shows that it is better to die, and no longer be troubled, or be in an unsteady condition of life, than sustain all these things while being born into the world. For in our death we know what we have been like, but when we are born we cannot know what we will be like or do in life. Since birth is also linked to the freedom of the spirit in the body, it abolishes moral customs.

7:3. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to his heart. It is more useful to go to the rites of a funeral than to the house where there is a party, since at the house of mourning we are warned of our creator and of our mortality on account of seeing the dead body. But in the happiness of a party, even if we seem to have any fear, we lose it. Symmachus interpreted the last verse by saying, "and he who lives, will look back in his mind". There is proof in these verses, in that God is seen to approve food and drink, but not seen to prefer desire to all these things, with the result that many men value them wrongly. But in comparison with avarice and too much sparing, feasting is allowed in a small way, or allowed to him, who enjoys his work completely every moment. For he had never preferred the sadness of mourning to the enjoyment of a party, if he had thought at any moment to drink and eat.

7:4. Anger is better than laughter, for through a sad face the heart is improved. Laughter weakens the mind, anger reproves and corrects it. Both let us become angry with ourselves when we sin, and let us get angry with others. Through the sadness of the face, even the spirit becomes better, as Symmachus saw it. And therefore "woe now to those who laugh, since they will mourn." 7:5. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of enjoyment. "Blessed", says the Saviour, "are the mourning, since they will be consoled". And Samuel mourned King Saul all the days of his life and Paul said he had mourned over those who did not want to repent their many sins. Therefore the heart of a wise man goes to the house of such a man, who reproves himself when he is doing wrong, so that he brings forth tears and causes himself to weep for his own sins; and he does not go to the house of joy, where the learned man flatters and deceives, not changing the listeners so they are together as one, but asking for praise and applause from them. Such a teacher, who is rich in speeches and words, is mourned, and being filled by his knowledge, receives his consolation. Then the following verses agree with this explanation too, because he says:

7:6-7. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this too is vanity. For it is better to be rebuked by a wise man, than to be deceived by flattering praise. Similar to this is the passage which says, "better are the wounds of a friend, than the free kisses of an enemy". Just as the sound of sharp thorns under the pot gives out a harsh sound, so the words of a flattering teacher are not of any use, or the worries of the world, which are interpreted as 'thorns', or the sound of one who encourages his listeners, or of one who prepares them for the fire which is to come. Let us look at what Symmachus has to say about the passage that we have as "since just as the sound…fool." Understanding the meaning which we have already explained above, he says, 'for a man is bound in chains by the voice of the ignorant". This means that one listener is tied up to the word of such teachers, while the chains of his sins restrain another.

7:8. Surely oppression makes a wise man mad; and a gift destroys the heart. Now see the wise man as if regarding profit, according to that passage which says, "accuse the wise and he will love you". Wise, or even having completed his training, he knows no accusation, and is perturbed by no disaster. We should use this verse if we see disaster befall a righteous and wise man, and he is perturbed by the unlawfulness of the judgement, and in that case when God does not come to his mind readily. Instead of this though the Septuagint, and Aquila and Theodotion interpret the phrase "destroys the heart" as eutonias autou that is 'his strength', or 'his vigour'. Symmachus says, "and matthana destroys his heart' (that is 'a gift'), using the Hebrew word in his interpretation, and making the same meaning as is written elsewhere: "gifts, too, blind the eyes of the wise".

7:9. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning; Perorations are better in speaking, than just the introductory section. For worry comes to and end in the former, and commences in the latter. Or it could even mean this: he who begins to hear a speech, and goes to the

teacher, is in first place. For indeed he who listens until the last is consumed and complete in learning. But this can also be understood in this way: while we are in this world, all that we know is as a beginning; but when that age is completed, we will understand everything as newest and completed. My Hebrew tutor explained this passage together with the following verse as follows: it is better for you to ponder the end of your business, than the beginning, and be patient, rather than being seized by the frenzy of impatience. We learn too from this reading that there is no wisdom in men, although it is better to do than to only say that you will do. And since, when the talk had finished, the listener thinks over for himself what has been said, and though he begins to speak, he has not yet understood what he can learn from it. And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Since the heavenly one conceded to anger, saying, ”anger is better than laughter”, lest we think anger is to be praised in suffering, now he says that anger must be removed from deep down inside us. For there he assigns anger instead of correction in sinners, and learning in children. But here he checks impatience. But patience is not only necessary in difficult times, but also in happier times, in case we rejoice more than we should. It seems to me that he who is now called high in the spirit of the Gospel, is in contrast poor in spirit, and is even blessed.

7:10. Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry: for anger rests in the lap of fools. He does not grant here that anger should be tempered, therefore he now says, ”Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry”; but that when anger is mad and new, it is more easily tempered because it is dispersed easily and can be removed. And since anger is linked to pride, and the desire for vengeance, he says it is better and above suffering, than he who is exalted in his spirit, and now shows the sign of foolishness, since however powerful or wise someone is esteemed, if he is made angry he will seem foolish in his words: ”for anger lies in the lap of fools”.

7:11. Do not ask,’ what is the cause that the former days were better than these?’ For you do not enquire wisely about this. Do not prefer the previous age to this one, since God created both one and the other. Virtues create good days for man, and vices make bad days. Do not say therefore that the days were better in the time of Moses and Christ, than now they are. For even in that time there were more disbelievers and their days were made wicked by this; now there are more believers, about whom the Saviour said, ”more blessed are they, who did not see or believe”. Or differently: thus you ought to live so that the days that you live in are always better than those passed, lest you begin to decrease little by little, it should then be said to you, ”you did run well, who hindered you that you should not have obeyed the truth?”; and again: ”you who began in spirit are now consumed by flesh”. Or another meaning of this: do not say that the times of old are better than now, those of Moses better than Christ, that they were more lawful than full of grace. For if you were to ask this, you would do it unwisely, not seeing how much the Gospel differs from the Old Testament.

7:12-13. Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the advantage of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to those that have it. A wise man with riches has more glory than just a wise man alone. For some men need wisdom, some wealth, but he who is both wise

and not rich is able to teach what is good, but meanwhile he can't show what is to be sought. Therefore he says, since the protection of wisdom is the protection of money, then just as wisdom protects, so too money also protects. And lest he seem to detract from wisdom, while he adds to it by good fortune, (for it is not in our power to obtain riches, which often the unrighteous own in greater quantity), he therefore shows wisdom to be greater, saying "but the advantage of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to those that have it. In that respect, he says, wisdom is greater than riches, because without any wealth it preserves those who think themselves rich. Certain scholars see this passage in a different way: they say that he places heredity in place of good association, by which we are the heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ.

Therefore Ecclesiastes wants to teach how much of a difference there is between those who merit seeing the sun (of justice), and have wisdom by their good association, and those in contrast, who without wisdom have only enthusiasm for vice and association. Since even David shows this, saying "the intelligent shine out by their speech, as the shining bodies of the sky", or as Theodotion interpreted this, "just as the brightness of the firmament. Indeed those who wrote my speeches are as the stars of the sky". But we ought to take that protection of silver (or money) according to anagoge from which talents and coins are collected in the parables of the Gospels, just as when we were under the protection of wisdom and under the protection of such money: "the sun does not burn us by day, nor the moon by night". But this can even be said to be true since protection is our life on the earth: "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed Christ our Lord of whom we said: under His shadow we should live among the heathen". All of our protection in this life is like a shade, or like wisdom, or as is said about money, until the day moves on and the shadows move away. Symmachus interprets this more clearly in his usual manner, saying, "just as wisdom protects, so too money protects in a similar fashion". But the following verse openly encourages the enthusiasm for knowledge.

7:14. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he has made crooked? Symmachus translates this passage in this way: "learn the word of God, because no one can correct what He has ruined". That is he supplies from the Holy Scriptures, or from thinking of the elements, to know and understand those things, which are done; but not to ask the causes and reasons why one thing is done in this way, or why it ought to have been done differently from the way in which it has been done. For the sake of this passage, if anyone should ask why God spoke to Moses in this way: "who makes the dumb and the deaf, the seeing and the blind, am I not the Lord God?", and if he should say, why are the blind, the deaf, the mute created in this way, and others similar to these? This passage must be seen in reference to Psalm 17, in which it is said to the Lord: "You will be Holy with the holy man, and with the wicked You will err". And it must be added that the Holy Lord is with him, who is holy; and the wicked are with him, who was previously wicked by his own will. This is similar also to that which is written in Leviticus: "if the wicked came to me I will go to them, wicked in my madness". Even this can explain why God hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

For just as one and the same quality of the sun melts wax and dries clay, and on account of each one's constitution, both wax melts and clay dries; so too the one quality of the portents of God in Egypt softened the heart of those who believed, and hardened that of the incredulous, who just as their hardness and impatient heart, began to store up for themselves anger for the day of anger from those portents, which they didn't believe, though yet they saw them happen.

7:15. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. I have heard from a certain man in the Church, who was thought to have a knowledge of the Scriptures, that these verses are to be explained in this way: while you remain in the present world, and while you are able to do good work, work hard so that afterwards you may be without worry in the day of wickedness, that is the day of judgement, when you will see others to be tormented. For just as God made the present world, in which we can obtain for ourselves the benefits of good work; so too he made the future age, in which no opportunity will be given for us to do good work. This man of the Church even seemed to convince those he was preaching to, but to me there seems a different meaning to this, which Symmachus has translated, saying, 'in the good day, be good; but be wary of the day of wickedness'. All the same, God made this world similar to the next, so that man should not be able to find that which he complains against Him. Suffer both the good things, he says, and the bad, as they happen to you in your life.

And do not think that there is only the nature of good or bad alone in the world, especially when the world itself consists of opposites: hot and cold, dry and wet, hard and soft, dark and light, bad and good. But God made this ambivalence so that wisdom might have a place, and it is found by choosing good and avoiding bad: man is given free will, lest he argue that he has been made unfeeling, and stupid by God. But God has made man so diverse that man is unable to complain of his manner of being. At the same time this argument is to be taken with the previous verses, in which he says 'who is able to correct what God has done?'.

7:16. I have seen all things in the days of my vanity: there is a just man, that dies in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that remains alive in his wickedness. Similar to this is what the Saviour says in the Gospel: "he who finds his soul will lose it, and he who loses it on account of me, will find it". The Maccabees are seen to die on account of their justice by the law and justice of God, and martyrs too, who shed their blood for Christ. On the other hand, those who at that time ate the flesh of pigs and sacrificed to idols after the arrival of the Lord, they are seen to live in this world and to live long lives on account of their wickedness. But it is the endurance of God in secret which causes suffering in those who are not holy, so that they have wickedness in their life, and not to visit sinners for their crimes, and it is as if he saves for the sacrifice so that he can give to the former eternal goodness, and to the latter eternal wickedness. The Hebrews suspect the righteous, who die for their righteousness, the sons of Aaron, since while they think they live righteously,

they worship a foreign fire. And they say Manasseh was impious and lived a long life on account of his wickedness, for he then lived a long time in a long reign after having been corrected in prison.

7:17. Do not be too righteous, do not make yourself too wise: why destroy yourself? If you should see a man who is harsh and wild to the extent of sinning against his brothers, so that he pardons neither the sinner in his speaking, or he who is slow on account of natural slowness, know that this man is more righteous than is good. For when the Saviour teaches, saying "Do not judge, so that you are not judged", and let none be without sin, even if it was not his life at any given day, the judgement of God is not ignorant of the weak state of man. Therefore do not be too righteous, since accursed conduct in the presence of God carries both a great and a minor burden. Philosophers have placed virtues therefore in the middle, and everything which is either too much either above or below, is thought to be at fault. But he also says, "and do not ask too much, lest you become confused", or "lest you be amazed". For he knows that our mind cannot understand complete wisdom, (or that which is to be measured), and he says that we ought to know the wisdom which must be measured in our mortality. Then even Paul asked of him that was able to know more than man, saying, "why does he yet complain? For who has resisted his will? He replies, "O man, who are you that reply to God?", and so on.

If he had heard the causes of the complaint from the apostle, he who is introduced while he is questioning, by chance he would have been stupefied by numbness and would have felt useful gratitude. Since it is a gift according to that same apostle, which is of no use to him that receives it. The command "do not be too righteous" is interpreted by the Hebrew as being about Saul, who felt pity for Agag, whom the Lord had commanded to be killed. But even that servant from the Gospel whom the Lord had pardoned, the Lord himself didn't want to pardon the servant, yet he can be used in this verse because he was too righteous.

7:18. Do not be too wicked, and do not be foolish: why should you die before your time? When God says, "I do not want the death of the dying, only let him return and live", it suffices to have sinned only once. We ought to raise ourselves up after a catastrophe. For just like those who argue about worldly matters, the swallow knows how to protect its young from poppy seeds, and wounded roes seek wild marjoram to cure themselves. Then why are we ignorant that the cure of repentance is proposed for sinners? But he says, "do not delay in an world that is not yours". We know that Chore, Dathan, and Habiron, on account of their uprising against Moses and Aaron, were suddenly eaten up by a gap in the earth, and in emendation of others, many were judged before the day of judgement even in their lifetime. Therefore he says, "do not add sins to sins, lest you cause God to punish you"

7:19. It is good that you should take hold of this, and do not withdraw your hand; for he that fears God shall come forth of them all. It is good to do good to righteous men, but also being kind to sinners is not wicked. It is good to keep slaves faithful to you, but it is advised to do this only with those who seek your employment. Even he who fears God and copies his maker, who causes rain to fall over both the righteous and the wicked, enjoys doing

good to all without distinction. Another meaning of this is, because this life changes daily with many wretched occurrences, as fortunate as unfortunate, the spirit should be prepared for righteousness and should ask for the pity of God, so that whatever happens, he suffers with a free conscience. For he who fears God is neither raised to fortune, nor crushed by misfortune.

7:20-21. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man on the earth, that does good and does not sin. Therefore wisdom strengthens the righteous, and not even the aid of all the citizens of the city can help him, for although someone may be righteous, yet while he is alive he is subject to vices and sins, and he therefore needs greater protection. Another reading of this is: the ten who hold power and are in the city are angels, who have arrived at the complete number of 'denarii' and are here to help mankind. But if anyone should consider different types of help, the aid of wisdom is better, because that is the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ. For after the angels said, "we would have protected Babylon yet it is not now protected, so let us leave it, and let each one of us go out unto his own land". Then the teacher of doctors himself came down and healed us with a touch of His finger, we who were spattered with blood, and wet with the blood of sinners, we who weigh out all our possessions against healing. But He healed in that city which is in that world, and 'strengthened in wisdom' or as the Septuagint says 'helped'. For it is given and added to everyone who possesses it. But the man who sins greatly is stuck in deep and needs more help: therefore Wisdom herself came to his aid.

Another meaning of this verse is: above he had said that one should be kind to both the good and the wicked: therefore someone was able to reply: though I want to be kind to all men, I have not the power with which to do this. And a righteous man does not have such riches, which normally come more abundantly to sinners. Therefore he now says, those whom you can't help with money, help with advice and comfort them with solace. For one is more able to excel in these ways than any of the greatest of potentates. And you would be wise to do this, for the scale of justice is great, and must decide for whom, how much, how long, and of what sort, help is given, either with monetary support or with advice.

7:22-23. And do not heed all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you. For often your own heart knows that you likewise have cursed others. Make sure to do only those things which have been taught, and strengthened by the help of wisdom, prepare yourself for either good or bad outcomes, and don't worry about what your enemies might say about you, or what kind of reputation you have. For just as a cautious man should not hear his servant complain about him, so he should not want to hear what is said about him in his absence, (for if he did this he would always be troubled and incensed to anger by the muttering of the servant). Therefore it is befitting for a wise man to walk with wisdom following him, and not to dwell upon unfounded rumours. But he teaches by another example that the righteous man ought not to worry what men say, saying, 'just as your conscience knows what you have said about others, and that you have often maligned others, so you ought to pardon others

when they think badly of you.' At the same time he teaches that it is difficult to judge for one who has a rod in his eye, not to speak about the rod of another.

7:24-25. I have proved all this by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? Just as is attested in the Book of Kings he says that he sought wisdom more than other men, and tried to reach the pinnacle, but the more he sought, the less he found, and in the midst of his confusion, he was surrounded by the darkness if ignorance. But at another time, regarding him who was learned in the Scriptures- the more he wanted to know, the more a greater obscurity arose each day for him. Another meaning of this is: he seems to mean that contemplation of wisdom in this life is like looking in a mirror or at a picture; therefore if I look at my face in the mirror in the future I'll think back to the way it used to be, and then in the liquid pool I'll recognise that I differ greatly from the way I used to be.

7:26-27. I applied my heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. And I find that woman is more bitter than death, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands are as bands: whoever pleases God shall escape her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. The Septuagint here has: "I even applied my heart that I should know". Symmachus has interpreted this saying, 'I have looked into all things with my reasoning to know, to distinguish and to find out.' Since therefore Ecclesiastes had said above that he had tried to know all wisdom and the more he sought it the more it eluded him, now he says even that he sought out another thing in his wisdom, for wickedness precedes all things in human affairs, and that affair is first and foremost in impiety, stupidity, madness, and insanity. He also says that he found woman to be the cause of all evil, since through her, death came into the world and took the most prized spirits of men. And even for all adulterers, it is like there is a coat of mail on their heart, the heart that makes the souls of adolescents soar upwards.

And when this happens to the mind of a wretched lover, it pushes him into first position, and he is not allowed to look back at his feet, but like a snare or noose it ensnares the heart of a youth. 'For he has chains around his wrists', which Aquila interpreted as being, 'for his hands are in chains'. For he can convince, but he doesn't have the strength and can't pull himself to those who are unwilling. Those things destroy him, who was righteous and good before God; but the sinner who has been captured will be led down to his death. Let us not think that Solomon held this opinion about women thoughtlessly, he speaks only those things that he has experienced. For this reason he fears God, since women have captured him. And these interpretations are very literal. But according to the spiritual understanding of this passage, either we should take every sin made in general, and call it 'woman' and 'wickedness', for example, she who sits behind the façade of woman in Zechariah above the talent of lead. Or we can take woman to be the devil metaphorically on account of effeminate men; or indeed idolatry, and so that we might proceed more closely, the church or heretics, which calls the fool to itself by reasoning, so that he receives stolen bread, and stolen water, the false sacrament, and is led to be baptised in polluted water.

7:28-30. Behold, I have found this, says the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account. Which still my soul seeks, but I have not found it. I have found one man among a thousand, but one woman among all those I have not found. Only this have I found: that God has made man righteous, but he has sought out many inventions. He says, "I found this", teaching all things diligently, that by sinning little by little, and adding one crime on top of another, we amass a great number of sins for ourselves. 'esebon' even, which all translate as logismon in Greek, according to the ambiguity of the Hebrew language can be said by us to be 'number', 'sum', 'account', and 'consideration'. But, he says, my spirit sought even this question of whether woman is rightly found to be guilty. And although I found scarcely any men to be good, thus so that only one from a thousand can be found, I couldn't even find one woman to be completely good. For all of them have led me not to virtue but to self-indulgence. And because man's heart is predisposed towards wickedness from boyhood, and almost all of us offend God in some way, in this failing of mankind, women are more prone to this fate. The famous poet says about this: "inconstant and always changeable is woman". And the apostle says, "always learning yet never arriving at the knowledge of the truth".

But he does not condemn this nature as being common to all mankind, or say that God the creator does evil things, because he is the creator of these things, but he warns subtly those who are not able to avoid evil, and says that we are created good by God; but he also says that because we are left with our own free-will to deteriorate into a worse and worse state through our own vices, while we seek greater things and contemplate many things beyond our strength. Differently: while I consider the reason behind each and every one of these verses, I have found no thought, which is not perturbed from outside by wicked thoughts. But in a thousand men I have found one man, who is made in the image of his creator; and not in a thousand of any kind, but of one thousand men. There is not a like number of women corresponding to men. In the thousand, those who have not been close to a woman have therefore remained the most pure. But all this must be taken as a metaphor. In many though, who enthuse and every day sweat in their thinking, scarcely can there be found one pure thought, that is worthy of the name of man. We can take thoughts for men though, and women for work, and say that the thoughts of man can only be seen as pure with great difficulty. But since the body does work, it is always mixed up with some fault.

But instead of that which we said above interpreting the Hebrew phrase, "one upon another, so that a great accumulation is made" we could either say 'account', or 'thought'; Symmachus interprets this more clearly, saying, "one upon another makes an amount". And we are accustomed to call this complete and neutral, which I sought and had wanted to find. The Hebrews name this in the case of females, just as in the phrase "I sought one from God, this I ask", in place of that which is one.

# CHAPTER 8

8:1. Who is like the wise man? And who knows what things mean? A man's wisdom lights up his face, and the boldness of his face is transformed. He had taught above that it is hard to find a good man, and he had answered the question to the contrary, saying that men are made good by God, but that they fall into sin because of their own free will. Now he lists what qualities God has given to a good man, to show his glory: wisdom obviously, and reason and providence, and he knows that the secrets that are hidden by God enter his heart. But he is also talking about himself here indirectly, because no one was as wise as Solomon was, and none answered the problems he set. And because his wisdom was praised by all, wisdom which he not only carried on the inside, but also wore on the surface of his skin, and which shone from his face, he moreover imbued all men with the wisdom which shone forth from his visage. Where we have, 'who is like the wise man?' the Septuagint reads: "who knows wise men? and where we read, 'the boldness of his face is transformed', the Septuagint has, "and the unwise is disliked by his face". And although in fact there are many, who engage themselves in the pursuit of wisdom, it is found with great difficulty, but he is able to tell a wise man though from those, who only seem to be wise.

Though too there are even many more, who say that they are able to let themselves tell the secrets of the Scriptures, it is not common however, that one will actually find the true answer. But what follows- "the wisdom of a man will light up his face and the wicked is hated by his face" - can be explained in the way that Paul explains it: "but we all see the glory of God with our face uncovered". The writer of the Psalms also says, "the light of your face shines down upon us, O Lord". But he says that the wisdom of man is not different from the wisdom of God. Although it is the wisdom of God, it then begins to be also a part of the human faculty, but only when it is in him who merits wisdom. Every heretic, who defends his false doctrines, shows his foolishness on his face. Then Marcion and Valentinus say that they are of a better nature than the Creator himself! This can be seen in another way, if they contend to hope for this wisdom, but do not already possess it.

8:2-4. I counsel you: Obey the king's command, and that in the manner of an oath of God. Do not hasten to leave his presence, do not persist in an evil thing; for he can do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is law, who dare say to him, 'what are you doing?' Here he seems to teach the same as the apostle - that we should obey kings and rulers, which is

set out in the Septuagint as a command: ”guard the command of the king”; but personally I think he is now talking about that king about whom David says, ”Lord, the king will be happy in your virtue”. And in another passage, where it means the one reign of the Father and of the Son, the text reads, ”God, give your judgement to the king, and your righteousness to the son of the king”. For the Father does not judge each one, but gives each judgement to the Son. Moreover, that king who is the Son of God, is the son of the Father who is the King. Therefore His precepts should be kept, His will done. And this is exactly what is written in the book of Tobit: ”it is good to hide the secret of the king”. He warns in particular why we should not ask why God has taught every single thing, but see that teaching as a commandment, and this is what an impious man hastens to fulfil. Then let his will be the same as that of God’s law.

But because the Septuagint translates this differently, saying, ”do not hasten to run away from God’s presence”, nor his judgement or his word, you must know that God’s judgement is written in the divine will. Therefore we ought not to recount to anyone or make public this judgement, which is taken to be sacred and secret from the word of God, nor should we form rash opinions from it. We should not, too, hasten like Moses, to see the face of God, but rather wait a while until He Himself passes by and then we will only see Him passing. Nor too should we do what follows: do not persist in an evil thing, and so on, especially as we understand, like one who has already come into the madness of heresy, or as he, who although having faith in the Church, is still overcome by sins, so that he is unfaithful. Do not persevere in what is wrong, or in swearing, indulgence, greed, or lust. For if you do the king of vices and devil of sins will fashion in you your end, and he will be able to do whatever he wants with you.

8:5. He who obeys the commandment will know no evil; and a wise man will know time and justice. Notice here in particular that ’he will know no evil’ has been written instead of ’he will not suffer’ or even ’evil will not be in him’. Likewise it has also been written about the Saviour, ”for he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Instead of ’evil’ too Symmachus interprets this phrase as saying, ”he who keeps the commandment will experience no wickedness”. But he teaches that we should keep the command of a king, and know why and when he orders.

8:6-7. For everything has its time and justice, for man’s evil overwhelms him. Indeed he does not know what will happen, for when it happens , who will tell him? Many good and bad things can befall a man, but even a righteous man is not able to know what will befall him, or know the causes and reasons for each thing, (for no one can know what will happen), but he does know that all things are done by God to the advantage of man, and nothing is done without His will. For this is a great sufferance for mankind, since as the poet says: ”the mind of man knows not his lot and coming fate”. If he hopes for one thing, then another happens; he expects the enemy to come from one direction and is wounded by a spear from the opposite direction. But here Theodotion and the Septuagint have said, ”since the knowledge of man overwhelms him”, the Hebrew has ’wickedness’ not ’knowledge’. But because the Hebrew

letters 'Resh' and 'Daleth' are similar without the serif, instead of raath they have read daat, that is instead of 'wickedness', 'knowledge'. This is easier to understand if you have knowledge of the language. Note too, that which is written at the end of the verse: 'since he doesn't know what has been, and what will be after him, who will tell him?' I have translated word for word here from the Hebrew text, so that we can see that there is a different meaning, since we are clearly not able to know those things which have already passed away, or those that will be, as they have yet to be done.

8:8. Man is powerless over the spirit-to restrain the spirit; nor is there authority over the day of death; nor discharge in war; and wickedness cannot save the wrong-doer. Our mind does not have the power to prevent the spirit from being taken from us, and when the spirit leaves to the realm of God, it helps nothing to shut out mouth and hold in our fleeting life. And when we are dead, the enemy of our life will come and we are not able to take any rest. Note too the kings in one age, which destroying all our things irreligiously led us by the hands to our death, but we were taken into the ashes and the earth. Therefore we must not mourn if we cannot know the future and we are often oppressed by more powerful and wicked men, for all things end in death: for the proud and the powerful the same end; he who has devastated all things does not deserve to keep his life when it is taken away. Another meaning could be that the spirit that is the source of life cannot be prevented from leaving any man, this is the rule of mortality. Above too he also spoke of this: "turning, turning goes the wind". We have no power in the day of our death, but when we are alive our enemy is easily avoided. Similarly he who is in time of war and does not have the peace of God, which overpowers all feeling, he will not have any discharge therefrom, about which it is said to a bride, "your discharge is paradise with the fruit of apples". And because piety will not save him who has it, piety will save the opposite, and impiety can be called the Devil and piety our Lord Jesus Christ.

8:9-11. All this have I seen; and I applied my mind to see every deed that is done under the sun: there is a time when one man rules over another to his detriment. And then I saw the wicked buried and newly come while those who had done right were gone from the Holy place and were forgotten in the city. This too is vanity! Because the sentence for wrong-doing is not executed quickly- that is why men are encouraged to do evil. I have dedicated my heart, he says, that I should see all that is done under the sun, and this too, that man takes up arms against man, so that he afflicts and condemns those whom he wants. And so when I began to look upon those things I saw that the impious were dead by such belief and buried, and were deemed holy in the earth, but those who were living were thought to be worthy of the Church, and the temple of God, the bombastic walking above were praised for their wickedness. "For the sinner is praised for the laxity of his soul, and he who is wicked is blessed". But this happens moreover because no one dares to confront sinners and God does not immediately give punishment for crimes, but rather postpones, so that we must await our repentance. But since those who sin are not immediately arrested and accused, they think with little regard that their judgement will be in the future, and continue in their crime.

We can see how this evidence pertains to certain bishops, who come to power in the Church, and speak ill of those, which had taught and had urged them to follow better pursuits. These men are very often praised after death in the Church, and blessed for those things, which they in all likelihood did not even do, or openly are warned by their successors or the congregation. And even this is vanity, since while they live they do not heed advice and are not immediately visited for their sins, (since none dares accuse his superior), besides they act as if holy and blessed, and as if they are walking in the precepts of the Lord, and they increase their sins one on top of another. Such an accusation of a bishop is difficult. For you see, if he has sinned, it is not believed, and if he is accused, he is not punished.

8:12. Because a sinner does what is wrong an hundred times and He is patient with him, yet nevertheless I am aware that it will be well with those who fear God that they may fear Him. Because a sinner has done many wicked deeds, this is what is meant by, 'an hundred times': God gives a time for repentance, and does not punish him immediately for his crime, but he waits so that he is converted by his wickedness. I understand how good-willing and forgiving God will be to those who fear Him and tremble at His word. Symmachus translated this passage as, "For a sinner dies wicked, long-life is granted him". More precisely I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear His face, but it will not be well for the wicked, and he will not live long, for he does not fear God. And because what Symmachus translated is clear, we can say that the Hebrew word maath is what the Septuagint has translated as 'from then on', which we have here as 'an hundred times'. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion have interpreted 'he has died' as "he has sinned and done evil, and is dead", because for that which he sinned, he immediately dies. But according to the interpretation of the Septuagint, instead of 'he is dead' we read 'from then on', and according to that interpretation, the meaning is, 'a sinner does not sin at first when he seems to sin, but already even before he has sinned': "Sinners are estranged from the womb, they have erred since they were in the stomach". And they ask this that follows- "they have spoken falsity", just as he explains for a simple understanding, there seems to be no reason that child sinners speak lies as soon as they come out of the womb.

8:13. And it will not be well with the wicked, and he will not live long-like a shadow-because he does not fear God. He invokes wickedness upon those who do not fear God, and desires that they do not wait long for their punishment, but rather are crucified and immediately put to death, this punishment is for those who merit such a death. This is similar to what the apostle says: "I would that those who annoy us were put to death. And in another place "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil, may the Lord reward him according to his works. We must ask though how these things are said so mildly. This is very true to the Hebrew meaning of this verse. But we can follow the Septuagint's interpretation, which seems to take another meaning, and says, "and I know, since those who fear God will be well, that they fear his face, and the wicked will not be well, and his day will not be long in shadows, who does not fear God. He could have said this: 'let there also be those things which I considered a little earlier', but I know clearly that those fearing God will be well; "for the face of God is above those who do wickedness". And the wicked will not be well, for

he does not fear God and his days will not be longer in shadows. This is the day of his life, which is like a shadow for the living.

Not by this do those who live for a long time lengthen their days, but they make them great with the number of their good deeds. As if confessing himself to be a sinner, Jacob says about this: ”few and wicked are these days of mine”. And confessing in the Psalm he says, ”my days are inclined like shadows, and I am like the hay of the field”. Not because he has sought a long life in the present world, in which all that we live is brief and looks lie shadow: ”for man walks in His likeness”, but because he fears the future, lest the length of his life, if it is indeed life, should be short.

8:14. There is a futility that takes place on earth: sometimes there are righteous men who are treated as if they had done according to the deeds of the wicked; and there are wicked men who are treated as if they had done the deeds of the righteous. I declared, this, too, is vanity. Amongst other vanities, which are borne in the world by good and bad events, even this I have found to be vain, since those things often happen to the righteous which ought to happen to the wicked, and the wicked live happily in the world that you would think that they were the more righteous! He gives the example in the Gospel of the rich courtier and poor Lazarus. The seventy-second Psalm also talks about the matter of why bad things happen to good men and vice-versa. But where we read, ’there is a futility that takes place on earth’, Symmachus translates this fully, saying, ”it is difficult to understand what is done on earth”. The Hebrews interpret the righteous who suffer wickedness as the sons of Aaron, and Manasseh, because the former died while sacrificing, and the latter was restored to power after much wickedness and captivity.

8:15. So I praised enjoyment, for man has no other aim under the sun but to eat, drink, and be joyful; and this will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God has given him beneath the sun. I have interpreted this more fully above, and now I shall just speak cursorily. He is allowed to prefer to eat and drink, which is the enjoyment (and must be short and end quickly) in the dire-straits of his life, and in light of those things, which are seen to happen unfairly in the world, (since man seems to have only this in return for his toil), he enjoys only modest recompense. But if the interpretation is read in the way it has been written, it reproves the wretched, the fasting and the hungry, the thirsty and the mourners, whom the Lord calls blessed in the Gospel. And we regard food and drink spiritually and above this happiness, which we are scarcely able to find in the toil of our life. But because these things are expressed in this way, as I have said, the following verse shows this too, which says, ”I dedicated my heart to seeing wisdom and work”, since clearly men work on earth, and consider deeply the Scriptures day and night in this way so that sleep flees from their eyes, in return for their study.

8:16-17. When I applied my heart to see wisdom and work which takes place on earth- for even day or night its eyes see no sleep. And I perceived all the work of God. Indeed man cannot fathom the events that occur under the sun, inasmuch as man tries strenuously to search, but cannot fathom it. And even though a wise man should presume to know, he

cannot know it. He searches for the causes and understanding of the world, why this or that is done, and for what reason the world is steered by good or bad turns of events; why one is born blind and frail, another born healthy and with sight; why one is poor, another rich; why one is of high birth, another inglorious. Nothing else is of use, unless he is tortured in his search, and has an argument instead of anguish, but he does not find what he is looking for. And when he says that he knows, then he has the beginning of ignorance in him, and starts to sink into deeper madness. But he shows later that justice is the cause of all things, why things happen the way they do, but that those causes hide in secret and are not able to be understood by men.

# CHAPTER 9

9:1. For all this I noted and I sought to ascertain all this: that the righteous and the wise together with their actions are in the Hand of God; whether love or hate man does not know; all preceded them. Symmachus also interprets this more clearly, saying: I kept all these things in my heart so that I could expound all things, since the righteous and the wise, along with their works are in the hand of God. And besides neither friendship, nor hatred is known to man; yet all things are not certainin their presence, because they happen similar to all, both to the righteous and to the wicked alike. More precisely the meaning is this: I dedicated my heart even to this and wanted to know whom it is that God loves, and whom He hates. And I found too that even the work of the righteous is in the hand of God, but though, whether they are loved by God or not, now they know it cannot be and they remain undecided as to whether they should keep on doing what they are doing until it is approved, or pray. In the future therefore they will know and all will be on their faces, that is 'will precede them' when they leave this life. Knowledge of that matter then will come to them, since then is the judgement, but now the struggle. And whosoever remains confused as to whether they should keep on through the love of God, as Job, or through hate, as several sinners, will not be able to know for certain.

9:2. All things come alike to all; the same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked, the good and the clean and the unclean, the one who brings a sacrifice and the one who does not. As is the good man so is the sinner, as is the one who swears, so is the one who fears an oath. These things which in themselves are neither good nor bad but are called 'in-between' by the wise, (since equally things happen to both the righteous and the wicked), they perturb each single man, especially as to why they should happen thus, and therefore do not think they are being judged, while there will be a distinction between all things in the future when they have been done, yet now all things are confused. But he says: "there is one outcome for the just and the unjust", he means either the outcome of hardships or of death, and therefore they do not know the kingdom of God nor His hate. Those who bring sacrifice and those who do not, and others in contrast who are not listed here must be seen in a spiritual understanding, according to that verse which says, "sacrifice to God with a troubled spirit".

9:3-4. This is an evil about all things that are done under the sun: that the same fate awaits all Therefore the heart of man is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while

they live; and after that, they go to the dead. Symmachus interprets this in his usual clearer way, saying, ”but even the heart of mankind is filled with wickedness and impudence like their heart in life”. But all of them succumb to death, for who is able to continually live forever? The Scripture has the same meaning regarding this. I said a little earlier, that when both good and bad things happen equally to everyone, there is no difference between good and bad, for we are taken from this life by indiscriminate death. Nonetheless we are filled with wrongdoings and impudence and wickedness, and after all these trials in life we are suddenly taken by death and afterwards we cannot consort with the living. Or indeed it could mean this: since the same difficulties afflict both the just and the unjust, men are therefore provoked to commit sins. Then after he has tried all things, which are done in vain, while he is unknowing, he descends to the world of the dead. For he who is attached to all living has hope, a live dog is better than a dead lion.

9:5-6. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all; there is no more reward for them, their memory is forgotten. Their love, their hate, their jealousy have already perished- nor will they ever again have a share in whatever is done beneath the sun. Since he has said above that the heart of man is filled with wickedness and impudence, and after all things, his life comes to an end in death, then now he completes this by saying that he has discovered that while men live, they are able to become righteous, but after death are given no opportunity to do good work. For the sinner who lives can be better than the dead and righteous man, if he wishes to convert to his virtues. Or indeed as for him, who threw himself into wickedness, power, and impudence, then died: any poorest beggar is better than him. Why? Because the living can carry out good work in the fear of death, but the dead can do nothing to add to that which they took away from their life when they died. And all things are forgotten, just as it is written in the Psalm: ”I have been given to forget, though dead from my heart”. But even their enjoyment, hatred and jealousy, and all that they were able to hold in their time, comes to an end with their death; nor can they do anything now in their righteousness or sin, or add to their virtues, or to their vices.

Certain men though can argue against this explanation, asserting that we can even grow after death, and equally decrease, and quoting that verse which says, ”and they will not share yet in all that is done under the sun”, and they understand it in this way, so that they say that they have no communion in this world, and under this sun that we can see. But they say that they do have it in another world, about which the Saviour says, ”I am not of this world”, and under the sun of justice, but I have not excluded this theory, which contends that after we leave this earth, we are able to offend reasoning creatures, and deserve what we get. My Hebrew tutor thought differently of the verse, which says, ”a living dog is better than a dead lion”. He explained it in this way according to the beliefs of his people: an unlearned man is more useful, he who still lives and can teach, than a trained teacher who is now dead. Because of the text he understands it to mean any one dog is better than many teachers, and the lion is Moses, or any other prophet. But because I don’t like this explanation I prefer a better one; and Chananaea to whom it is said: ”your faith saves you”, we say he is a dog according to the Gospel.

But a dead lion, for the people of circumcision is just the same as for Balaam, the prophet, who says, ”behold the people shall rise up as a great lion, and shall lift up himself as a young lion”. Therefore we are a living dog amongst the other nations; but the Jewish people which has been left by God, is a dead lion. And that living dog is seen as better in God’s eyes than a dead lion. For we who are living know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The dead though can know nothing, or await any recompense and profit, since their memory is complete. They don’t remember what they ought to know, and God does not remember them. Enjoyment too, for which they often loved God, will die, and hatred as well, about which they say boldly, ”surely I hate those who hate You, O Lord, and am I not grieved with those that rise up against You?”. And there does not exist their jealousy, similar to the Phinees, and the knees of Matathia trembled. But it is very clear that a part of them is not in that world, for they are not able to say, ”my part is the Lord”.

9:7-8. Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has already approved your deeds. Let your garments always be white, and your head never lack oil. Regarding the passage until that verse where he says: ’like fish caught in a fatal net, like birds seized in a snare, so are men caught in the moment of disaster when it falls upon them suddenly’. Before I discuss them individually, it will be useful to link them together, so that it can be seen how all pertain to the same meaning. Because in a preceding chapter he had said that after men have died they are cut off from the heart of the living, and no one loves or hates them, as according to the poet, who says, ”there is no struggle from the dead, who lack breath”. And because they can do no more under the sun, now he introduces the idea of human madness and habit, whereby men of this world encourage themselves in turn to enjoy good things; and prosopopoiian, using this in the manner of rhetoricians and poets, saying: ”O man, since there is nothing for you after death, and death herself hears not my complaint, and while you live this brief life, take pleasure in enjoyment, hold feasts, suppress your worries with wine, and understand, since they are all given by God to be used by you.

Wear white clothes, and let your head smell of ointments, and whichever woman pleases you, enjoy her embrace, thus lead this empty and vain life in empty and vain pleasure. For you will not have anything more than this, which you enjoy. Whatever you like, grasp quickly, lest it disappears. You shouldn’t fear the vain things mentioned, for the reason for each individual work, either good or bad, will be given to you in the world of the dead. And there is no wisdom in death, no sense of this life after passing away. He also says that Epicurus, Aristippus, and the philosophers of Cyrene, and other of the philosophical flock hold this belief. But I prefer my own ideas, and I do not find, as some people think incorrectly, that everything happens by chance, and good and bad fate plays on human lives. I rather believe that everything happens by the order of God. For the fast runner should not think of his running when he runs, nor a strong man have faith in his strength, or a wise man think amassing great riches and wealth is prudent; the learned and well-spoken should not be able to find himself amongst a flattering crowd because of his eloquence and learning, but by attributing all things to be done by God. And unless he has ruled all things in his own

judgement, and built his own home, then they worked in vain, who built it. Except if he built a city, those, who watch over it, will stay awake in vain.

For it is not as they think it is, that there is one outcome and uncertainty in this life, since they do not think so, who are suddenly taken away by death and taken to their judgement. And just as fish are caught by a spear or in nets, and birds are ensnared in a noose whilst they fly through the air unknowing, in the same way men are led away to eternal prayer on account of their merits, when sudden death comes and judges against them, who thought all things in life happened by uncertainty. This is similar to that meaning by which we wanted to understand all things in brief. Now he speaks not as if from another person's mouth, but for himself, each phrase must be looked at on its own: "Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has already approved your deeds". Since you learned that all things end with death, and that repentance is not in the world of the dead, and that there is no recourse to virtues, while you are in that situation, then hasten, struggle, repent, while you still have the time. For God acknowledges repentance freely. Another meaning could be, that simply understanding is of use, according to that verse, which says, "whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. And in another place: drink wine with warning".

For he who uses up more than his means does not have true happiness and a good heart. But it is better to think this: the works of this man pleased God, nonetheless he had need of bread and wine, because he has been spurned from the vineyard of Sorek. Therefore this teaching has been given to us, as he says, "if you desire wisdom, then keep the commandments and the Lord shall give it to you". Let us then keep the commandments and we will be able to find bread and wine for the spirit. But he who does not keep the commandments prides himself in the abundance of his bread and wine, and Isaiah says to him, "do not even say, I know it, you do not know, or recognise, and your ears have not heard from the beginning, for I knew that you would deal very treacherously". More precisely as it is said in the interpretation given in the Septuagint: Come, eat your bread in happiness, this is the word of Ecclesiastes, who even speaks in the Gospel: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. And in Proverbs: "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine. Let your clothes be white forever and may your hair be oiled. He therefore says, have a clean body and be merciful. Or in this way: 'let there not be a time in which you do not have white clothes, beware lest you by accident put on clothes that are not clean'.

A known sinner was once described to have enjoyed dirty clothes. But you should put on the light, not the malediction, which was also written about Judah: "let a curse be worn like clothes". Wear by your skin mercy, kindness, humility, mildness and patience. And when you have been stripped, as an old man, of your work, take on new work, which is renewed each day. He also says, "and let your hair not lack oil", you must remember that this is the nature of ointment, that it reflects light and reduces the work of tiredness. It is spiritual ointment, the ointment of exultation, about which is written: "therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your friends". This oil must gladden our face.

This oil must be put on the head of a faster, for sinners cannot have it, about whom it is said, ”they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment”. But they have a different ointment, which the righteous man abhors, saying, ”the oil of a sinner will not stain my head”. Heretics have this oil and wish to pour it over the heads of their beguilers.

9:9. Enjoy life with the wife you love through all the fleeting days of your life that He has granted you under the sun, all of your futile existence; for that is your compensation in life and in your toil which you exert under the sun. Follow wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures, while you are joined in matrimony to your wife, as it is said in Proverbs: ”love her and she will serve you: embrace her and she will embrace you too”. But the day of vanity, the day of this world means nothing. The apostle mentions this too, and he says, ”live life with the woman that you love”, but this is said in ambiguity, either live or contemplate life both you yourself and your wife with you, for you will not be able to live life alone without such a wife, or consider each one and live life, and consider the woman in the days of your vanity. And he words this carefully, so that we seek the true life with our wife and wisdom in the days of our vanity. For this is our lot and the fruit of our toil, if we, retired, are able to find this true life.

9:10. Whatever you are able to do with your strength, do it. For there is neither doing, nor reckoning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you are going. Do whatever you are presently able to do, and toil at it, because when you go down to the world of the dead there will be no place for repentance. Similar to this is what is taught by the Saviour: ”work hard, while there is still day left; for night will come, when none is able to work”, but he says this: ”to the grave where you are going”, remember too that you believe Samuel was also in the grave, and before the advent of Christ, all men were retained by the law of the dead, however holy they were. More precisely, the holy were retained after the resurrection of the Lord in vain in the grave, and the apostle notes this, remarking, ”it is better to die and be with Christ”. But he is with Christ, so that he might not be held back in the grave.

9:11. Once more I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift; nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the learned; but time and death will happen to them all. He who is bound by manacles and by heavy lead chains is oppressed: ”for wickedness sits upon a talent of lead”, and in the Psalm it says, ”they weigh on me like a heavy burden”. It is not talking about that race, about which is said, ”I took up the race, and I kept my faith”. But that man is swift and his spirit is not weighed down, nonetheless even he is not able to arrive at the goal without God helping him. But when there has been a war against adverse leaders, about whom it is written, ”make war sacred”, even a strong man will not be able to win with his own strength. This is also true of the sons of man and the wise who cannot have living bread for the spirit, except through encouraging wisdom: ”Come, eat my bread”. And since there are riches, about which the apostle says, ”riches come through good deeds”, and in another place, ”you have been made rich in every utterance and knowledge”; it must be understood that a wise

man cannot amass these riches, unless he receives them from God, who possesses them. In another place these riches are mentioned too: ”redemption of the spirit for man is his own riches”.

However learned a man is, he will not be able to find grace too, unless accompanied by wisdom and given by God. Paul also knows this: ”I worked more than all men,” he says, ”yet not I but the grace of God which was with me”. Then again he says, ”His grace in me was not in vain”. And right to the end man does not know when the time will come, when the unknown fate and end of all things will come. This reading is according to anagoge. But in order to explain this more easily, I should mention that the epistle to the Romans agrees with this verse: ”So then it is not of him that wants, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. He also says this: ”there is no bread for the wise”, this example is proved every day for many people, who although they are very wise, still do not have the necessary sustenance for life. And: ”there is no grace for the knowledgeable”. For you may see in the Church that the ignorant and unskilled prosper. And this is both because they have nourished their boldness, and followed the fluency of their tongue, while they do not think about what they say, they think that they are wise and learned, and as if they have the greatest favour of the populous, which delights and is brought together more by more polished words. On the other hand a learned man lies in obscurity and suffers persecution;

and not only does he not have grace in the people’s eyes, but also fades away through poverty and hunger. But these things happen because all things occur by uncertainty, and there is no retribution of merit in this world, but in the future.

9:12. For man does not even know his time, like fish caught in a fatal net, like birds seized in a snare, so are men caught in the moment of disaster when it falls upon them suddenly. I have already said above, that while men are yet unknowing, either disaster or death befalls them. More precisely we should look at this as allegory, that the realm of the sky is similar to a net cast into the sea; and on the other hand heretics have nets, in which they capture fish, leading to their death. Their net though is affable language, flattering speeches, feigned or forced fasting, poor clothes, and an imitation of virtues. And if they begin to argue about the divine and raise their face to the heavens to seek the heights of God, then they cast a noose into the heavenly abodes. So just as fish and birds are seized of a sudden by such a net, and by such a noose, so wickedness is increased many times and the kindness of many fails; and the signs and portents are seen in such a way as to entice even the chosen of God if possible. See too those men of the Church, who are called the children of men, and are of modest faith, and who can be overcome quickly. Note too, that the term sons of men is used throughout the whole book, and the Hebrew has sons of man, this is ’the sons of Adam’. And almost all scripture is filled with this idiom that sees the sons of Adam as the sons of all men.

9:13-15. This, too, I have observed about wisdom under the sun, and it affected me profoundly: there was a small town with only a few inhabitants; and a mighty king came upon it and surrounded it, and built great siege works over it. Present in the city was a poor wise

man who by his wisdom saved the town. Yet no one remembered that poor man. While some people say that all things are uncertain, and that the righteous have no more than the wicked, I see even the greatest wisdom in this verse, because it happens repeatedly that there is a small township with only a few inhabitants, and it is surrounded by an army of a very powerful enemy, and the people inside is killed by the siege and by hunger. And suddenly and unexpectedly a poor man is found, who has more wisdom than all the rich men, than all those powerful and pompous men who are in danger, and who fear the siege. And he thinks, seeks and finds an answer as to how the town might be saved from the oppressors. But O ungrateful oblivion of men, after they were freed from bondage and released from captivity, and the freedom was given back to the fatherland, no one remembers that wise old man, no one gives thanks for their salvation, but all show honour to the rich, who were able to do nothing to help when in time of danger. My Hebrew tutor interpreted this passage differently:

the small town, he says, is man, who even amongst learned men is called less clean. And the few men in the town, are the members by which the man shields and covers himself. But when a great king comes against it, that is the devil, and he searches for a place by which he might break through, and in the town is found a poor and wise man, that is the calm thought of that man on the inside, and that is what saves the town, which is surrounded and besieged by the enemy. And the man has been saved from danger, or persecution, or disaster, or any other kind of adverse sin. But that man on the outside, who is the enemy of the wise and poor man on the inside, he does not remember the poor man, nor does he remember his promises, but yet enjoys his freedom. Differently: the small town and the few inhabitants in it is the Church in comparison to the whole world. And the great king the devil often comes against it, not because he is great, but because he thought to be great, and he surrounds the Church with a siege or persecution, or with another kind of disaster. He finds in it a poor man who is wise, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made poor for us and is wisdom itself. And that poor man frees the town with his wisdom.

How many times do we see a reclining lion in a trap with rich men, this is with the politicians and leaders of our time, who come against the Church, but fail at the wisdom of that poor man? And when this poor man has won and the town is restored to peace, scarcely anyone remembers him, scarcely any of his requests are heard, but giving in to all indulgence and pleasure, the inhabitants seek riches that are not necessary.

9:16. So I said: wisdom is better than might, although a poor man's wisdom is despised and his words go unheeded. Although no one remembers a poor wise man, and everyone is happy, and admires power and riches; I however admire this despised wisdom according to all of the interpretations given above, and the words which none thinks worthy to be heard. 9:17. The gentle words of the wise are heard above the shouts of a king over fools. Whosoever you see in the Church declaiming and arousing applause by whatever refinery or charm, he who shakes off his laughter and incites the crowd to feigned happiness, know that this is a sign of foolishness, equally of him who speaks, and of those who listen to him.

For the words of the wise are heard in peace and respectful silence. He who is foolish and is powerful speaks to fools and cannot hear himself because of either the noise of his own voice or that of the applauding crowd.

9:18. And wisdom is better than weapons, but a single rogue can ruin a great deal of good. Now he also takes wisdom in preference to strength and says that it is worth more in battle than weapons. But if there is one fool, however small and worthless, he will repeatedly destroy riches and great wealth by his stupidity. But because the Hebrew can also be read as: 'and he who sins once, will lose much goodness', much righteousness will be lost in return and virtues will follow in turn, and he who has one, has all; and he who sins at one time, leaves himself open to all vices.

# CHAPTER 10

10:1. Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's oil; a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour. Here he gives an example to illustrate the idea expressed above, in which he says that many good things can be outweighed by one fool, since one evil mixed with good in this way will pollute the greater part of it, just as flies if they die in oil, make it lose its colour and smell. And since wisdom is often mixed with cleverness and prudence has wickedness, he teaches that we must search out wisdom alone, or that it be mixed with the innocence of doves. Let us then be prudent to the good, and simple in the face of the wicked. And this is the meaning: let the righteous man have little simplicity on account of his having too much suffering, and while he keeps his retribution for God, he seems foolish, and does wickedness at once in vindication under the guise of prudence. Another meaning could be those flies that according to Isaiah inhabit a part of the river of Egypt, and destroy the sweetness of oil and according to one source leave the smell of their uncleanness. The chief of these flies is called Beelzebub of the demons, and is interpreted as either 'the idol of flies' or 'the man of the flies', or 'he who has flies'.

10:2-3. A wise man's mind tends to his right; while a fool's mind tends to his left. Even on the road as the fool walks, he lacks sense, and proclaims to all that he is a fool. And in the Gospel it is taught that a wise man's left does not know what his right is doing. And when we are hit on the right side of the face, we do not show the left cheek to he who hit us, but the other one. For a wise man does not have a left side in him, but is in fact completely the right side. And when the Saviour comes to judge us, the lambs will stand on the right, and the goats on the left. It is written in the prophets that "the Lord knows the ways to the right, which are wrong, and actually lead to the left.". Therefore he who is wise always thinks about the future, because it leads him to the right. But he who is foolish always thinks of the present, because it is set in the left. What follows has also been said by the philosopher poet, who says, "the right leads to the walls of the lower world, this is our path to Elysium, but the left is for the wicked. That gives out punishments and sends people down to the nether regions". Firmianus of our time in the famous work of his Institute recalls the passage about left and right, and argues that this is about virtues and about vices.

And we shouldn't think that this is contrary to that passage, which says, "do not go to the right, nor to the left". In the first passage the right is taken to mean good; but in the second it is not just right but also the decline to the right. We should not know more than we need to know, since virtues are in the middle and all excess in a vice. In the following verse though he says, "but on the path that the fool walks, his heart is in need", and he says: "all is foolishness" or "all are fools". This is the meaning: A fool hopes that all others sin as he himself sins, and judges all others by his own standards. Then Symmachus has interpreted it in this way: but when the fool walks along the road, he supposes that all are stupid as he is. But the Septuagint has another meaning, which says, 'all things which he thinks are foolish, are the most vain'.

10:4. If the anger of a ruler flares up against you, do not leave your place, for defence appeases great offences. Now the Scripture mentions the chief of that world, the creator of the darkness and he who toils for the sons of despair, whom the apostle also recalls. For if he rises in our heart and the spirit of bad thoughts is wounded, we ought not to give way, but fight against the worst thoughts and free ourselves from the greatest sins, so that we do not fill our work with that thought, since it is one thing in thought, another in the deed of sinning. Reference to this great sin can also be found in the Psalm: "if they had not conquered me, I would be clean and purified from the greatest crime". Symmachus translates the Hebrew word marphe as all the others do: iama, that is, 'cleanliness' or 'neatness'. He has interpreted the meaning too, and he says, "if the spirit of a ruler defeats you, do not move from your place; since virtue wins over the greatest sin". That is, if the devil entices your mind and incites you to lust, do not follow the thought of sin and flattering desire, but stand firm and fast and extinguish the flame of desire with the cold of chastity. My Hebrew tutor suspected certain things about this passage for a reason I do not know. If you take any high-up position in the world, or are appointed a post higher than the other people, do not let go of your former works and start to forget your former virtues, or cease from your previous work, because the cure for sins is born out of doing good things, and not from pompous and overflowing rank.

10:5-7. There is an evil that I have observed in the world as if it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is placed on lofty heights, while rich men sit in low places. I have seen slaves on horses and nobles walking on foot like slaves. Where we read "as if it were an error proceeding from the ruler" Aquila, Theodotion and the Septuagint have interpreted this as "as if not of their own will", that is hos akousian, from the face of the ruler. Symmachus agrees with this, saying, "the fool is placed in great elevation, but humble riches remain fixed. And he remembers that he has seen this wickedness in this time, because the judgement of God seems to be unjust. And it happens either through not knowing, or without his will, that either in the rulers of the world, or in the leadership of the Church, often these men, who are rich in words and wisdom, rich too in good deeds, remain ignoble and foolish holding a position in the Church. But this happens in front of his face, he who has power in that time, while he oppresses the powerful and learned men, and he does not let them come out in public, but those whom he knows to be foolish in the Church he makes

greater, so that the blind are led by the blind into pitfalls. The following verse also has this meaning: ”I have seen slaves on horses and nobles walking on foot like slaves”.

Because these men are slaves of vices and sins, or are so humble, that they are thought to be slaves by other men, they are suddenly inflated by the devil’s pompousness, and they wear out the public roads with their ponies. And each noble or wise man that is oppressed by poverty takes the road and occupation of slaves. The Hebrew seems to say that ignorance seems to leave the face of the powerful and rulers. He explains this as God, because men think that in this inequality of matter He is not acting justly, and judging as is correct. More precisely, some men believe as their predecessors do that there must be judgement so that He himself is powerful, a topic that is mentioned before these verses: if a ruler comes up against you, do not give way. Should we not be sad therefore if we seem to be humble in this world, and know from the face of the devil, that the foolish are raised and the rich thrown down? If we know that slaves have the ranks of their masters and rulers do the work of their slaves. Remember though that this horse is seen in a good context, just as in the verse, which says, ”and riding will be your salvation”.

10:8. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who breaks down a wall will be bitten by a snake. This is partly unambiguous and partly to be understood in a more complicated way. Since elsewhere Solomon also says, ”he that sets a trap will be caught in it”. And in the seventh Psalm: ”he laid out a pond and dug it out, and then he fell into the hole he had made”. But the wall and the fence as well are the doctrines of the Church, and the institution set up by the apostles and prophets. And whoever knocks them down or wants them to come to an end is bitten by a snake where he is not looking. Amos writes about this snake: ”if he goes down into the underworld, I will order a snake to kill him”.

10:9. He who moves about stones will be hurt by them; he who splits logs will be endangered by them. In Zechariah sacred stones are moved about the earth. For they do not stay firm in their place, but revolve, and always inclining to other places, they hasten to move away. The Saviour also teaches about these living stones in the city of the Apocalypse, and the apostle doesn’t forget to mention the building of the Church. Therefore if anyone doing wrong by their heresy, should take away those stones from the building of the Church, then he will suffer torture afterwards. Aquila and Symmachus write about this man, and where we have ’he who moves about stones, will suffer from them’, both write, ”he who moves stones, will be wounded by them”. But because the Scripture says very clearly, ”he who moves about stones”, or ’moves stones’, he does not add ’good’ or ’bad’. Moreover and to the contrary it must be understood, that the man of the Church seemingly a bishop and elder, (if we are taking this according to the mandate of Leviticus), took a stone away from the house of lepers, and was obliterated in dust and ashes. And he will suffer for this himself, because he was forced to take away a stone from the Church of Christ and saying, (according to the apostle), ”to weep with the weeping, to mourn with the mourners”, and ”who is weak, and I burn not?”. Also cutting wood, he will be endangered by it.

Heretics are non-fruit-bearing wood, and copse that do not bear fruit. Pertaining to this too is that we must not plant a glade in the house of God, and leafy openings, that is arbours of such sounding words are scorned. However learned and wise a man may be therefore who chops this wood with the sword of speech, he will be endangered by it, unless he diligently pays attention. This is similar to what follows, this will happen, "if iron is shaped" and its appearance is changed. This means that if his argument is found to be weaker, or if he does not have a point, in which each argument is well balanced, then the argument of his heart is blunt. Then the strength of wickedness will come upon him and fortify him. For this is what the Septuagint interprets this passage to mean: it says, "and he is fortified by strength, and he will begin to have more wisdom than strength; his wisdom will become strong, and superfluous, but it will not help him who possesses it.

10:10. If a blade is blunt and one has not sharpened the edge, nevertheless it strengthens the warriors. Wisdom is a more powerful skill. If someone, he says, has seen himself lose knowledge of the Scriptures through negligence, and the shrewdness of his intelligence has been blunted, nonetheless he remains disturbed, and he would be just as he had been when he started. But it happens, meanwhile, that he that has a little knowledge is led into pride and stops learning and reading, and little by little takes away from that which now adds nothing to him. Thus the heart of the pupil remains empty, and a blade that has been sharpened is made blunt. For rest and laziness are like a kind of rust of wisdom. So then if anyone has suffered this, let him not despair the remedy for his health, but let him go to his teacher and be instructed again by him, and then after much toil and hard work, and a great deal of much sweat, he will be able to regain that wisdom that he had lost. And this is what is said in the Hebrew more to the point: he will be strengthened by might, that is, by toil, by sweat, by hard work, and daily reading, then wisdom will follow suit, and his toil will come to an end, so that he might be able to receive wisdom once more.

10:11. If the snake bites because it has not been charmed, then there is no advantage to the charmer's art. The meaning of this is very apparent: the serpent and the disparager are of the same ilk. For just as the hidden snake bites and injects its poison, so too the other disparages in private, and he pours out the poison of his heart against his brother, and there will be nothing between him and the serpent. For although the tongue of man was created for benediction and encouragement of others, the disparager makes it equal to that of the serpent, while he uses his virtues to bad purposes. Another meaning of this is, that if the serpent devil should bite anyone secretly, and he doesn't know it, he infects him with the poison of sin; and if he who has been struck keeps silent, and does not repent, and does not want to confess his wound to his teacher and brother, they who want to encourage him and see to it that he gets better, are not able to be of any use to him. For if an ill man is ashamed to confess his wound to a doctor, the doctor will not be able to cure what he does not know exists.

10:12. The words of a wise man win favour, but a fool's lips devour him. Foolishness, if it is happy in its rusticity, will know less evil. But now he wages war against wisdom, and

whatever prudence he sees in a learned man, he does not take to be incited by enthusiasm. For a wise man speaks words of knowledge, words of thanks, which are of use to those that hear them, but the lips of a fool do not receive what is said, as it is said; on the contrary they try to trip up a wise man and make him similar to a fool. And in fact a wise man is taught when a foolish man speaks in his ear, and you could almost say that his words are lost in the deep swell. Therefore he is blessed, who speaks in the ear of a wise man.

10:13-14. His talk begins as foolishness and ends as evil madness. The fool prates on and on, but man does not know what will be; and who can tell him what will be after him? So far the discussion has been about the fool, whose lips teach the wise man, or according to another interpretation, his lips make himself corrupt. The beginning and the end of his speech are foolishness and evil madness; or as Symmachus has translated it, confusion, or some kind of inconsistency of words. For while he doesn't keep to the one opinion, he thinks he can escape sin in the many arguments he speaks at the same time. But he does not remember all those who have gone before him, and does not know what will happen after him, and so is confused in ignorance and the darkness, promising himself false knowledge; by this he thinks that he is wise, and that he is learned, if he uses lots of words. This can be taken to refer to the heretics, who do not heed the words of wise men, but continue to argue different sides so they intertwine the beginning and end of their speech in vanity, confusion, and madness; and though they know nothing, they speak more than they know.

10:15. The toil of fools exhausts them, as one who does not know the way to town. Join these lines with the verse above; either to those verses that speak in general about fools, who know not God, or in particular to that one which argues about heretics. Read in Plato for example: unravel the tricks of Aristotle, read Zeno and Carneas more diligently, and you will prove to be true what is written here: the toil of fools exhausts them. For they seek the truth in fact with all their enthusiasm, but since they have no leader or anyone to lead the way on their journey, they are led by their human instincts to think that they can understand wisdom, and thus they do not arrive at the town; the Psalm speaks of this too: "Lord, you will scatter their image in your town". For the Lord will scatter in the town all shadows and strange appearances or characters, in which they clothe themselves in their many doctrines. In another place the Psalm says of this: "the force of a river causes the city of God to rejoice". And in the Gospel: "a town built on a mountain cannot be hidden". And in Isaiah: "I am a strong city, a city which is attacked". And all the wise men and heretics of this world are trying to attack this city of truth and wisdom, although it is strong and fortified. And that which I have said about philosophers can also be said of heretics, that they toil in vain, and are exhausted in their enthusiasm for the Scriptures, when they wander in the desert and are not able to find the town. The Psalmist also mentions their madness too, saying, "they wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in."

10:16-17. Woe to you, O land, whose king acts as an adolescent, and whose ministers dine in the morning. Happy are you, O land, whose king is a man of dignity, and whose ministers dine at the proper time- in strength and not in drunkenness. He seems in fact here to

reprove the young king and to condemn indulgent judges, which in another place has been called wisdom that is weakened by age, and even in other places mature age which is made frail by pleasure. On the other hand he seems to approve the king with good morals, who is appointed easily. He also seems to praise those judges who nonetheless prefer pleasure to the business of the town, but after much toil and the running of the township, are forced to eat as if by necessity. But I find more holy what seems to lie hidden in the text, because those who depart from old laws and despise the precepts of their ageing fathers, are called young men in the scripture; they who do not heed the commandments of God, and desire to change the laws of mankind. The Lord of Israel threatens in Isaiah, because the people did not want the waters of Shiloah that flows in silence, and averted the ancient stream, choosing for themselves the rivers of Samaria, and the surges of Damascus. ”And I will give”, he says, ”children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them”. Read also Daniel and you will find the old God of Days.

Or read the Apocalypse of John where the head of the Saviour is said to be white and snowy, and you will find it to be like white wool. Look at Jeremiah too because he was wise and his hair was purported to be white because of his wisdom, and he is forbidden to call himself a young man. Woe to the land therefore whose king is the devil, who always desirous of new things, and even rebels against its parent in the case of Abessalon, who regards as judges and leaders those, who love the pleasures of the world, and who say before the day of death comes, ”let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”. For the other part is the blessed land of the Church whose king, Christ, is the son of all peoples. He is descended from Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, also from the stock of all the prophets and saints, for whom sin was not conquered. On account of this they were indeed children. Born of these was the virgin, more freely Saint Mary, who had no offspring, no seed from her flank, but all of her fruit burst out in flower, speaking in the Song of Songs: ”I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley”. His leaders too are apostles and all are saintly, who see their king as the son of all men, the son of a free woman; not of the slave woman Agar, but born of Sara in freedom.

And they do not eat in the morning, or quickly. For they do not seek enjoyment in their time, but eat in their time, and when the time for retribution will come, they will eat in strength, and not in disorder. Every good thing of this world is a disorder, but an everlasting strength in the future. Just this is said in Isaiah: ”look at those who serve me, they will eat; but you will go hungry. And again, ”look at those who serve me, they will be happy; but you will shamed.”

10:18. Through slothfulness the ceiling sags, and through idleness of the hands the house leaks. Our house, which is held up by the condition of mankind, even that abode that we have in heaven, sags if we are lazy and slow to do good work. And every ceiling, which is supposed to hold the roof up high, falls to the ground and crushes its inhabitants. And when the help of hands and virtues has eventually gone numb a great storm of all tempests and rain clouds will fall down upon us from above. More precisely, although we have interpreted

this with regard to one man, it can be better understood with bearing to the Church, because its stature is brought down by the neglect of its principate. There in the Church we find the attractions of sins, where the roof is said to be virtue.

10:19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, but money answers everything. I think that what follows relates to the preceding verses. For with regard to the sloth and the indolence of teachers the Church is lowered, and its roof is made to fall, and its timbers leak, as we have shown above. Therefore here he is speaking of the self-same teachers. And he has been seen to accuse them, asking why they remain silent and do not make use of their duty as teacher, (that is both for bishops and elders in the Church), saying that they neither work on their speaking nor doctrine, the same that even Titus admonishes, and is taught by Timothy, so that one does not forget the grace of God, which is bestowed upon a great man. But in this respect they see themselves as elders and bishops, so that they receive an allowance, and many teachers ask for a two-fold glory, which is owed in fact to those who work on their speaking and doctrines. But now he takes the other side and accuses those who even speak in the Church and teach the congregation, but they teach the people that which they like to hear, because he flatters the sinner in his crime and incites the listeners to applaud.

For surely when such a teacher is giving a lascivious speech in the Church, does he not promise the blessing and realm of heaven to the crowd, as it will seem to you that his laughter makes bread, and he mixes wine with the happiness of those who drink? Or as those who teach and seek riches, food, and wealth through the promised delights. Or the bread of the Church, which is the bread of mourners, and not of those who laugh, because those who weep are blessed, for they will laugh, and will have joy in their happiness. He also goes on to say: money or silver answers everything, and this must be taken as two-fold: either that those learned men become rich after their praise, and take their place at the head of the people, or indeed, since money is always taken in return for a speech: for ”the words of the LORD are pure words: as silver extracted in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. He asserts this because the ignoble crowd is always moved easily by eloquence and speeches, which are composed of a great foliage of words. Differently: those who have free-will and are forbidden to mourn and fast, make bread in their laughter. Isaac gets his name from this bread as well, and in the happiness of drinking they prepare wine. And so every holy man, who is teacher of the Church, as Christ commanded, makes bread in his laughter and happiness, and hands out cups of wine in his joy.

Money also, which answers everything, is given out as five, and two and one talent for the head of the family in the Gospel. And ten coins which are thought to be for slaves in business.

10:20. Even in your thoughts do not curse a king, and in your bed-chamber do not curse the rich, for a bird of the skies may carry the sound, and some winged creature may betray the matter. This simple example teaches the listeners that we should not be overpowered by anger and fury, and curse and blame kings and leaders, since it seems to happen against one’s wish, that what we curse is made known. And we run into danger by the inability to

hold our tongue. He also says, ”a bird of the skies may carry the sound, and some winged creature may betray the matter”, this is to be understood as a exaggeration, just as we are accustomed to saying, ’walls have ears to hear those things, which we think are said in private’. But it is better to hear a teaching in this way, so that we know that we have a commandment to follow, not only that nothing should be spoken rashly against Christ, but also in the secret places of our heart, however we are troubled by our many problems, nothing should be blasphemed, nothing thought which is impious. And since we owe love, that we have for Christ, the next part says, ”love the Lord your God,” and even ” your nearest” and ”yourself”. He even orders this, so that afterwards we do not easily take the king away from the holy, and so that we do not slander by the wickedness of our tongue those who are rich in knowledge, wisdom and virtues, for they are the angels who fly around the earth and are administrators of the spirit. They say in Zechariah, ”we have traversed the earth and look all the world is inhabited and quiet”. And just like birds, our words and thoughts are carried to heaven. And whatever we think in secret, is not hidden from God’s knowledge.

# CHAPTER 11

11:1. Send your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it. He encourages to mercy since it must be given to all that seek wisdom, and work well. For just as he sows over the well-watered fields and awaits the produce of his seed, so too he who is generous to the needy does not sow the grain of his seed, but bread itself. And he waits for it to grow into his future profit; and when the day of judgement comes much more will be found to have grown than was at first sown. Differently: in each and every man you can see this water, about which is said, ”rivers flow from his stomach, the waters of life”, lest it should trouble you to display the bread of life, the bread of reasoning, and of speech. For if you do this many times you will find that you have not sown the seeds of doctrine in vain. I think that this is what is written in Isaiah too: ”blessed is he who sows across the water, where the ox and ass trample”. This is also because that teacher (about whom we have already spoken), is held to be worthy of blessing, because he sows across the well-watered hearts of his listeners, the hearts of the Jews, as those of the gentiles in the gathered congregation.

11:2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for you do not know what evil shall be upon the earth. And in Ezekiel there are found seven or eight steps leading up to the temple. And after the ’ethical’ Psalm, that is one hundred and eighteen, all the psalms are of fifteen steps by which we are first taught the law, and when the seventh is finished, we then climb to the Gospel through the ’eight steps’. Therefore it is taught that we should believe with equal respect in each, the same for the old as for the new. The Jews dedicated their seventh part, believing in the Sabbath, but did not dedicate that eighth, denying the resurrection on the day of the Lord. On the other hand, heretics, Marcion and Manichaeus and all who rip up the ancient law with their savage mouths, dedicate their eighth part, taking up the Gospel. But they do not save as holy the seventh, spurning the old law. For we are not able to understand the worthy crucifixions, the worthy punishments already in mind, which are reserved for those who are moved to wickedness on earth, that is for the Jews and the heretics, and for those denying the other of the two. The Hebrews understand this passage in this way: keep both the Sabbath and the rite of circumcision, for if you do not adhere to these wickedness will come over you unexpectedly.

11:3. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree falls toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall

be. Keep the commandments that have been taught to you above so that the clouds above you will break open in rain. For wherever you have made your home and seat for the future, whether to the east or facing the north, when you die you will remain there. Differently: as I have said above 'send your bread over the water and divide it to all who ask'. Since when the clouds are full they pour their riches down on mortals, and you are as a tree: however aged you may be, you will not live forever, but one day suddenly struck by the storm of death like a storm of winds, there where you fall you will lie forever. The time of your end will come whether you may be stiff and savage, or mild and merciful. Differently: God is addressed in the Psalms: "you are truth up to the clouds", and in Isaiah God warns the sinner of the vineyard, "I will command the clouds not to rain down".

Therefore the clouds are as prophets or holy men, who have amassed many talents in their mind, so that he can rain his teachings of doctrine down on others and say, "their speech should be awaited just as rain, and they will pour out rain across the earth", to which is replied, "let the earth hear the words of my mouth". But this follows: "and if a tree falls to the east, or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will remain. We can take the example of the book of Hebrews, in which is written, "God will come to Teyma", which some interpreters have taken to mean that God will come from the south, and when I come to think about it the south is always used in a good context. This can be seen in Song of Songs: "arise oh north" that is 'return' and 'go away'; "and come O south wind". Therefore a tree, if in this life it falls and is cut in its state of mortality, either must sin before while it stands and is then placed in the north afterwards, or if the south winds takes away all its worthy fruit, it will lie wounded in the south. The text does not mean any tree, but only if it lies to the north or south. This means the same as that which is written: "I will say to the north wind, come, and to the south wind, do not hold back".

Nowhere teaches about the south wind and the east wind together, saying that they blow, since it is fitting for them to be among those regions, because they are blown afterwards to the south and east. Therefore it blows from the north to the south and the south wind blows its inhabitants to the east. And they are not able to blow out if they remain in their ancient palaces.

11:4. He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap. He who considers what is good for him and does not give out to all who ask him, often destroys what he ought to receive. Differently: he who proclaims the word of God at the time when the people listen freely and a second wind of rumour comes, he is a negligent and lazy farmer. But favourably or not in his career he must proclaim the word of God; and he must not think of the storm of adverse clouds in his time of faith. This is written in Proverbs: "just as the rains are heavy and unyielding, so are they who leave wisdom and praise impiety". Therefore you must sow your seeds in the middle of a storm without thinking of the clouds and without fearing the winds. And you must not say, 'that time was convenient, this of no use', when we do not know which way and which will is the one spirit of giving.

11:5. As you do not know what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so you know not the works of God who makes all. Just as you do not know the way of the spirit and of the soul entering a child, and are unknowing of the types of bone and veins in the stomach of a pregnant woman. It is hard to know how the human body is formed from the simplest elements into the many varied forms and limbs, and from the very same seed, one makes soft our hair, another makes our bones hard; one connects the veins, another links the nerves together. Thus you cannot know the work of God, who has made all things. From this he teaches that the variety of things in the world must not be feared, and you must not fear the winds and the clouds, which as we have mentioned above must be judged. But although the sower ought to reap in the course of his career, he ought to save the outcome for the judgement of the Lord.

11:6-8. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: But if a man lives many years, and rejoices in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that which comes is vanity. Do not choose which good deeds you do, but once you have started doing good, never stop. The evening will reveal the justice of the morning, and the sunrise will collect the mercy of the evening. For it is uncertain which work pleases God more, and by what means you will obtain the fruit of righteousness. But it can happen that not one but each one will please God. Another meaning could be that both in childhood and in old-age you will have equal work. Do not say therefore, ”I worked while I was able, I ought to rest in old-age”, for you do not know whether you please God more in youth or in age. And the thrift of youth too is of no use if old-age is taken up by indulgence. For the righteous has erred, not even his former virtues can free him from death. And if you always do well according to each interpretation and work equal amounts in each age, you will see God the Father, the sweetest light;

you will see Christ, the sun of righteousness. More precisely if you live for many years and always have good things or do good deeds, you will still know that you are going to die, and the coming of darkness will continually surround you: you will despise the present things as if they were transient, frail and failing. Symmachus has interpreted the end of this idea in this way: if a man lives for many years and if he has been happy in all this he ought to remember the days of darkness, since they will be many, in which all will cease. Differently: in another place in the Scripture God promises, saying, ”I will give you timely rain and rain that is late”. I will irrigate you with rain: the Old and the New Testament. He warns about this here so that we may read about the ancient law, lest we hate the Gospel, and in this way ask about the spiritual understanding in the old text; lest we think that what we read in the Gospels and apostles is only to be taken at face value. For we do not know when more knowledge and grace is divested to us by God, and he who is happy, who joined both together to make it like one. For he who has followed this will see the light, will see Christ, the light of justice.

And if he lives for several years and with knowledge of the Scriptures he will know the greatest happiness and enjoyment, and he is forced more to this toil by the memory of his future judgement. Since the time of eternal darkness will come, and perpetual punishments will be in stone for those who have not sown in the morning and in the evening, and joined both in vain; they have not seen the light or the sun, whence the light itself comes.

11:9-10. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes: but know, that for all these things God will bring you into judgement. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

# CHAPTER 12

12:1. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them; In this chapter there were many explanations of all things and almost as many opinions as men themselves. It would take too long however to recount all the opinions of everyone and their arguments in which they want to prove their opinions, the matter would require a volume to itself. But it is enough for wise men to have shown what they feel, and like in a small picture, to have depicted the thirst of the earth, the waste of the whole earth, and the belt of the ocean, and to have shown them in such a small collection. The Hebrews believe the imperative here refers to Israel, to whom it is taught that she should enjoy her riches, and before the time of bondage comes should change youth to old-age. She should enjoy whatever is pleasant or fun, just as it seems to the heart so it seems to the eyes; at that time while she still has them to hand. She knows however that she will be judged in all things that she has done. And just as from bad thoughts she flees from desires, knowing that foolishness is joined to youth, and will remember always her Creator, and before the days of Babylonian and Roman captivity come, in which she will no longer be free.

And all of this passage from the point which says, ”before the sun, moon, and stars become dark”, until the place where the Scripture reminds us, ”and dust will be swirled on earth just as it used to be and the soul returned to God who gave it”, they explain their condition. And since as I have said above these things are tiresome and favourable, they should be touched by us but briefly and superficially. Therefore enjoy your youth O Israel, and do this or that, that has already been mentioned before your time of bondage comes; and your glory will leave you and pride, and judges, and your holy men who want to be interpreted as the sun, moon, and stars, and are taken away. Before Nebuchadnezzar comes, or Titus, Vespasian’s son, before the call of the prophets and their prophecies are fulfilled. In that day when the angels that protect the temple leave, and the strongest men in your army are thrown in confusion, and the speeches of the judges will be slow to come, and the prophets, who are accustomed to receiving the light of their visions from heaven, they all will become dark. When the doors of the temple are closed Jerusalem will be made humble and the Chaldeans will come as if by the song of a bird, called thus in the words of Jeremiah, and the singing girls with the lute in the temple choir will become silent.

At that time, when they will come to Jerusalem, the enemies too will fear the greatness of God, and in the way of doubt, they will fear the death of Sennacherib. For they also believe the saying, ”and from up high they will fear and tremble in the road”. In those days ”the almond tree will flourish”, that stick and staff which Jeremiah saw in his prophecy in the beginning, ”and the grasshopper will be a burden”. Nebuchadnezzar with his army, ”and desire shall fail ”, the friendship between Israel and God. But what desire wants for itself, although we have begun to speak about them individually will be explained more fully. But all this will happen to Israel, because man will go out into the house of his eternity, and having returned from the protection of God to the heavens, going to his tabernacle, the weeping and crying will wander in the street and will be hemmed in by the enemy’s siege. Be happy therefore Israel in your youth, before the silver cord is broken, (this is until your glory is with you), before the golden ribbon breaks off, (that is before the arc of the tabernacle is taken away); before the pitcher is worn away to the fountain, and the wheel is turned around over the pool.

That is until you read the most sacred teachings, for the spirit of a holy man is grace, and before you return to Babylon, from whence you left the loins of Abraham, and you will begin to be worn away in Mesopotamia, which once breathed life into you, and all is returned to He who gave it. The Jews have always taught these things and have understood this chapter to pertain to themselves. But I prefer to return to the previous argument, and try to explain each thing individually: ”rejoice O youth, in your adolescence, and let your heart be good in the days of your youth, and walk in the way of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; and know above all these things, since God will lead you into judgement”. He has said that the light of this world is the sweetest and that man ought to rejoice in the days of his life, and grasp desire with all enthusiasm. For the eternal night of death will fall when it’s not permitted to enjoy ones amassed wealth and like a shadow, all things that we possess, will die. Now therefore he encourages man and says, ”O youth, before old-age and death fall upon you, enjoy your youth, and whatever you feel is good, and seems joyful to see, take it and enjoy as it please you the things of this world.

Again so that he does not think these things say to provoke men to indulgence, and thus fall into the doctrines of Epicurus, he takes this suspicion, saying, ”and know, since above all these God will lead you to judgement”. Thus, he says, take advantage of the things of the world, so that you know you will be judged in the end. ”And force anger from your heart and take wickedness from your flesh, since youth and foolishness are vanity”. In anger he sees all the problems of the spirit. In the wickedness of the flesh he sees every desire of the body. In this way therefore, he says, enjoy the goodness of this world, lest you leave pleasure or flesh. Leave off your former vices, which you did in your youth of vanity and foolishness, since youth is joined to foolishness. ”And remember in the day of your youth Him, who created you, before the days of wickedness come and the years approach, in which you will say, ’I have no will’”. Always remember your Creator and walk the route of your youth, so that you remember your end is death, before your time comes, in which sad things will happen.

12:2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain. If we take this from the creation of the world, this chapter agrees with the words of the Lord, in which He says, ”there will be trouble and difficulty as there has not been since the beginning of creation, but this will not happen. For the sun will grow dark and the moon will not shed light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the virtues of heaven will be moved”. Those things are the guardians of the house, as we understand the ’house’ to be this world, and the strong men, deceived by wickedness and varied strengths must be dispersed. But if a particular consummation of any one person is kept to the end of his life, then the sun, the moon, and stars, clouds and rain will cease to be for him, who has died. Differently: enjoy youth, O Christian people, and enjoy the goodness which has been given to you by God, and know that God will judge you for all these. Do not think that, since the earlier branches have been broken, you will be placed in the root of a good olive tree, and therefore you will be without worry. But remove anger from your heart and desires from your body, and when you have left all other vices remember your Creator before the day of wickedness comes, the day of madness, in which punishments have been made for sinners.

This is so that when you sin the sun of righteousness will set for you at midday, and the light of knowledge will die, and the brightness of the moon, (that is of the Church) will be taken away, and the stars will die, about which is written, ”in which you shine like the lights in the world having reason of life”. And elsewhere: ”star differs from star in glory. Before the clouds return after the rain”, lest the prophets, who have watered the hearts of believers by the rain of their speech, after they have seen you to be unworthy of their rain, return to their seat, clearly to Him from whom they were sent.

12:3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves; The keepers of the house can be interpreted as either the sun and the moon, and the remaining choir of stars, or the angels who keep watch over this world. The men of great strength though, or the brave, as Symmachus has interpreted it, are those who die, or as Aquila has translated it, those who err, and are felt to be demons, for they are called those chosen by the powerful devil. The Lord overpowered him, and joining him, according to the parable of the Gospel, destroys his house. Differently: the keepers of the house, who relate all things, which are written to the body of man, think that it means ribs, because the intestines are hemmed in by them, and all of the fleshy parts of the stomach are protected in this way. They think that the strong men are to be interpreted as legs; the sun and moon and stars therefore pertain to the eyes, nose and ears, and receive all the sensations of the head. But they do not interpret this to such an extent, because they are forced deeper by necessity, not by demons, or the sun, moon, or stars, but to understand what follows according to the limbs of man. And the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened.

In the beginning of the world when the charity of most was cold and the spirits of teachers were few, who were able to offer the food of heaven to believers, and they were carried to the heaves; then those who in part see the light of knowledge in this world began to be

darkened. For it is said to Moses: ”sit yourself in this hole in the rock, and you will see me pass”. Oh how much more one spirit saw the truth through that opening and those dark caves! Differently: there are two grinders, from whom one is taken, the other is left, the Gospel is not silent in this matter. And when they are few, and have ceased, it is necessary that every light of knowledge is removed from our eyes. Differently: they think the grinders have ceased because they are few, and that it is talking about teeth. And when at last old-age comes even teeth are worn away, or they fall out, which usually grind down food to be sent to the stomach. But seeing it grow dark in the caves, they think it means eyes because sight darkens with old-age, and sight is made difficult.

12:4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low. When the voice of the grinder is weak and the teaching of a tutor has stopped, then in turn all things will stop. Even the doors are closed in the streets, as according to the unwieldy virgins of the Gospel, and each one regards her doors as closed to her in the street, so that she can not buy oil. Or even, while the virgins are wandering in the streets, husbands close each room when they have entered into it. For if the road is thin and narrow, which leads to life and that which leads to death is wide and open, justly, the charity of most being cold, the door of teachings is closed in the streets. But let us use the following verse, in which he says, ”and he rises to the sound of a bird”, (or of a sparrow), if we seem to be a sinner to the voice of the bishop or elder so to show that we are in repentance. But this could also be different again, if we do not follow the context of this chapter, it can be taken to mean the real resurrection, when the death will rise up to the voice of the arch-angel.

And it is not surprising, if we compare the trumpet of an angel to a sparrow, when all night is compared to Christ, if it is clement. And also this is not too surprising, if my memory serves me right, when I have never read of a sparrow in a bad light. In the tenth Psalm a righteous man says, ”I trust in God, just as you say to my spirit: fly to the mountain like a sparrow. And in another place: ”I woke and I was made as a sparrow alone on a roof”. Nor is it seen in a bad light in another place: ”and even the sparrow found a home for himself”. Differently: they want to see this as the closed doors in the street, as the weak steps of an old man, because he always sits and cannot walk. The weakness of the voice of the grinder is interpreted as in his jaws, because he cannot chew food, and scarcely reduced in spirit, his voice is heard only quietly. More precisely he shows him to rise to the sound of a bird, because now with cold blood and dry organs by which sleep is nourished, he wakes to a soft sound, and in the middle of the night, when the cock crows, he rises quickly; but he is not able to move his limbs from his bed.

And he becomes silent too, or as it is better put in the Hebrew, the daughters of song become deaf, (meaning ears), because it is harder for old-men to hear noises and there is less distinction between voices, or enjoy songs. Also compare what Berzellai says to David, when he does not want to go to Jordan.

12:5. Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way. That is, they will not be able to enter on difficult tasks and with tired knees and frightened footsteps, will not be able to go out in the open, and will fear the offence of steps. And the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goes to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. The speech now explains the limbs of a man of the Church through a metaphor. And when old-age comes his hair will grow white, his feet will swell, his lust will grow cold and he will be destroyed by death. Then he will be returned to the earth, and then in the house of his eternity you will remember his tomb and his ashes with reverence, and a crowd will walk before the mourners at his funeral. But the flower of the almond-tree, which we have in place of grey hairs, some interpret as the sacred thorn, because, while the flesh of the buttocks decreases, the thorn grows and flowers. More precisely, in that verse which says, "the grasshopper will be a burden", you must note that where we have in our manuscripts 'grasshopper', the Hebrew has aagab, which is rather ambiguous for us. For it can be translated as 'heel' or as 'grasshopper'.

Just as for example in the beginning of Jeremiah, the word soced if the accent is changed can mean 'a nut' or 'wakefulness'. And this is said to him: "what do you see, Jeremiah? and he replies, "a nut". And the Lord says to him, "you have seen well, for I will wake over my work so that I might complete it. Or that explanation: it also has the etymology of the word 'nut', because God is about to keep awake. And what the people has deserved it will be given, is what the text seems to say. Thus now he shows the ambiguity of the word through its etymology, showing that the legs of old men swell up and that gout weighs upon the organs. This does not happen to all men, but to most, and this is synecdoche where a part is called by the name of the whole. Indeed where we read 'desire' the Hebrew has abiona. This in itself has many meanings, and is interpreted as 'love', 'lust', 'longing', or 'desire'. And it has the meaning, as I have said above, that the lust of an old man grows cold, and the organs of intercourse sag. But this is said because these words are ambiguous, for although they mean 'almond-tree', and 'grasshopper', and 'desire' in his language, they also mean other derived words in our language, and are derived from the forms which pertain to old-age.

You must note too, that where the Septuagint has the word 'almond-tree' the word itself is soced, which is found in the beginning of Jeremiah. But there it is meant 'nut' but here it means 'almond-tree'. Symmachus has interpreted this passage in a greatly different way, (though I am unsure of what he means): for he says, 'and they will see even above these things from on high, and they will wander, and waking he will fall asleep, and the strength of his spirit will be dispersed.' For man will go to the house of his eternity, and the weeping will wander in the street. Laodicenus followed the interpretation of Symmachus, which the Hebrews do not like, nor the Christians; for while he is far from the Hebrews' view, he rejects too the interpretations of the Septuagint.

12:6-8. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to

the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities says Ecclesiastes; all is vanity. He returns to former matter and after a rather large exaggeration, -which he interposes in this place, in which he says, ”and remember your Creator, in the day of your youth; before the days of wickedness come, and before the sun, moon grow dark” and so on, ”in the day in which the keepers of the house are renewed”. - now he finishes the point he had begun in a similar way, saying, ”before the silver cord is broken”, and this or that happens. But he shows the silver cord to be this white band, and the space that divides us from heaven. It also means the gold band, which returns to the place whence it came down. more precisely the two that follow, the wearing of the jug on the fountain, and the breaking of the wheel by the pond, are metaphorical images of death. For death is just like the jug, which is worn down, stops to fill, and the wheel by which water is carried from a well or pond, if it has been broken. Thus the interpretation of the Septuagint has it that the usage of water is twisted in this rope;

thus when the silver cord is broken, and the river of the spirit flows back to the fountain, the man will die. He goes on more clearly: ”the dust will return to the earth, whence it was taken, and the spirit is returned to God, who gave it”. From which there is enough to smile at in those who think that spirits are produced with bodies, not from God, but are made from the parent’s body. For when the flesh is returned to the earth, and the spirit goes back to God, who gave it; it is obvious that God is the parent of all spirits, not man. Then after the description of man’s death, he goes back to the beginning of his book, saying, ”vanity of vanities, says Ecclesiastes, all is vanity”. For all toil of mortal men, which is argued all through the books, is pertinent here, so that dust returns to the earth, and the spirit returns to the place, whence it was taken, it is a great vanity in this world to toil and obtain nothing for the future from it.

12:9-10. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The wisdom in which Solomon judges all kinds of men he now professes at the end, because he was not happy with the use of the old law, but therefore immersed himself in trying to solve difficult problems of his own accord, and in teaching people; he composed parables and proverbs, which say one thing superficially and yet have a deeper meaning. For proverbs often have different meaning to that which is written, and this is the method used in teaching in the Gospels, since the Lord spoke to the people in parables and in proverbs, but He explained them to the apostles in secret. From this we clearly get the Book of Proverbs, and we shouldn’t think that they are but simple stories with teachings, but rather as gold still in the earth, as a seed within a nut, or as a fruit is found inside the hairy covering of its peel. Thus we must search for another meaning in them which pertains to God. Before this though he mentions that he desired to know the workings of the world and the wisdom and mind of God. He wanted to know why one thing or another should happen, as David after the death of the body and spirit hoped he would see the path to heaven, saying, ”I will see the heavens, the work of your fingers”. But now Solomon strives to find this wisdom, so that

he may know and understand with his human mind, though confined by the walls of the body, the truth only known by God.

12:11. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. The teacher should not be seen to break from the law of God and afterwards to justify teaching by himself, more hastily than Moses not so much of his own will, as first by the anger of God, took teachings therefrom with enthusiasm. He says that his words are the words of the wise, which like a goad correct the wicked and they move the slow steps of mortals with a sharp sting, thus they are hard like nails which hold things up securely and high; and they are not offered with one man's authority, but with the advice and agreement of all teachers. Let not mankind's wisdom be despised, for he says it is given from one shepherd. That is, many are allowed to teach, but there is only one originator of the teachings, who is God. He turns the passage against those who think there is one God of the Old Law, and one God of the Gospels, since one shepherd taught the advice of the wise. But the wise are just as much prophets as the apostles themselves. At the same time it should be remembered that the words of the wise are said to sting, not to flatter or encourage debauchery by a lack of discipline. But as I have said above it is to give the wound and slow pain of repentance to those who have come into wickedness.

For if his speech does not sting but it like pleasure for the listeners then that is not the speech of a wise man. For the words of the wise are like the goad, since after all they cause the conversion of the wicked, are firm, given on the advice of saints, given by the one shepherd, and are founded on a strong root. I think I have heard it said in Paul that Saul was thrown into the way of wickedness by this goad: "it is hard for you to kick against the pricks."

12:12. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. If you remove the words which are given by the one shepherd, related by the advice and agreement of the wise, do nothing and nothing will be reproved you; follow in the footsteps of the multitude and do not diverge from their command. Then too for him who seeks to know many things there is a great number of books that will lead him to wickedness and make the reader toil in vain. But he also teaches that you must have enthusiasm and follow meanings more than the words themselves, the opposite that philosophers and teachers of this world teach, who try to assert the falsities of their doctrines with flamboyant and unnecessary language. On the other hand divine scripture is restricted by the small quantity of what is written, and however much it is enlarged by people's opinions it is restricted by the text itself. This is because the Lord has made speech concise and brief all over the world, and His word is the same when it is spoken in our mouth and our heart. Differently: read often, then consider what you have read daily, there is usually more toil of the mind that that of the body.

For just as whatever you do with your hand and body is filled with the toil of the hand and the body, so that which pertains to reading is more the toil of the mind. It seems to me from this that the above points from the several books must be considered differently to the way

in which many believe them to be. It is the custom of the Scriptures that, no matter how many books there are, if they all follow the same matter are have few differences, then we can say that they are one book. In this way the Gospel and the "immaculate law of the Lord, converting spirits" are called one, although there are several books in the Gospel and there are many laws. In this way too there is one volume of Isaiah, and all of the divine Scripture has one title; Ezekiel and John are also many books in one book. The Saviour too prophesied in the holy words, saying, "in the title of the Book is written about me". According to this meaning therefore I think it is a teaching that there should not be too many books. For whatever you say, if it is told to him who was with God in the beginning, the word then is God, as one volume, and the many books are the one law, which is called the Gospel.

But if you argue that they are varied and differ too much to be in the same volume, and look at them with too much curiosity, even within each book you will see that there are many books. They say about this: "you may not escape the sin of saying too much". Therefore there is no end to such books, for all is good and the ending locks in truth, but wickedness and lying have no end. And the more they are sought, the more they come about. Study and consideration of this is toil of the body. I say of the body here and not of the spirit. But the spirit even has toil according to what the apostle says: "the more I worked for all these, not I, but the grace of God which was with me", and the Saviour says, "I worked shouting".

12:13-14. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. The Hebrews say that although it used to be among other writings of Solomon in the past, they have not persisted in memory; and this book seems as if it ought to have been omitted, because it asserts that all God's creations are vain and that he thinks everything is done for nothing, and he prefers food and drink and transient pleasures to all things; thus he takes his authority from this one title, so it is now included in the number of divine books, because he argues well and lists many things like anakephaiosei, and he said that his speeches are the easiest to hear, and to understand; let us therefore fear God and carry out his commandments. For man is born for this purpose and, understanding his Creator, he reveres Him in fear and respect, and in the work of his commandments. And when the time of judgement comes whatever we have done will stand before the judge and for a long time we will await our judgement which could go one way or the other, and we will receive our just rewards, whether they be good or bad.

But where we read, "with every secret thing", Symmachus and the Septuagint have interpreted, "from all contempt", or even "from all unknown", which even brought by reluctant words, not by will, but by ignorance, we will be returned to reason in the day of our judgement. Differently: since fear is more appropriate to slaves, and perfect love involves no fear, and fear in the divine Scripture is used to denote those embarking on and those completing education. Now I think he talks about the fear inherent in virtues, according to the passage, which says, "nothing is lacking from those who fear Him". Or even, since until now he is

a man and has not yet taken the name of God, he has this reason of his wealth, so that he fears God while he is still alive. Since every single deed is judged, that is, God leads all men into judgement about all things, either good or bad, which are done and said differently than by Him. For indeed, ”woe to those who say wicked is good, and good is wicked”.

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**Source.** English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.