

**The Bonfire of the Vanities**  
**“The Unnatural Phenomenon of Death”**  
**Ecclesiastes 9:1-12**

**Introduction**

- [Slide #1] Two friends, Bill and Tom, are at an all-night café. They get into a discussion about the differences between irritation, anger, and rage. At about 1 A.M., Bill says, "Look, Tom, I'll show you an example of irritation."
- He grabs his cell phone and dials a random number. The phone rings and rings and rings. Finally a sleepy voice answers and Bill says, "I'd like to speak to Jones."
- "There's no one here named Jones," the sleepy man replies and hangs up.
- "That," Bill says to Tom, "is a man who is irritated."
- An hour later, at 2 A.M., Bill says, "Now I'll show you a man who is angry." He picks up his cell phone again, redials the random number, and lets it ring. The same sleepy voice answers.
- Bill says, "May I please speak with Jones?"
- "There's no one here named Jones," the sleepy man says in anger and then slams the receiver down.
- An hour later, at 3 A.M., Bill says to Tom, "Now I'll show you an example of rage." He picks up his cell phone, dials the sleepy man's number a third time and lets it ring. The sleepy man answers and Bill says to him, "Hi, this is Jones. Have there been any calls for me?"<sup>1</sup>

**Transition**

The subject of **Ecclesiastes 9:1-12** is the common destiny of death for everyone.

- Death is not an easy subject to talk about, is it? Listen to me. Our first reaction when someone, anyone broaches the subject of death is to do what the sleepy man in the story does. We stop listening and hang up. Please don't do that this morning. The Teacher's point in **Ecclesiastes 9:1-12** is that...[Slide #2]

**Proposition**

- **The day of death, whether ours or someone else's, is meant to drive us to God**
- Frequently, our reaction to the event of death is just like the third response of sleepy man in my opening illustration. Rage. Because just like the calls to the sleepy man, death's call is random. It is unexpected. And despite all we do, all the medical advances we come up with, it keeps on calling. It's more than just an irritation in this life under the sun. It is more than something that angers us. The experience of death is enraging.
- Have you ever listened to heavy metal music? In my day it was Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth. My guess is that a third of the guys in my high-school class owned a Metallica t-shirt. I wasn't one of them. The whole metal genre has even developed sub-genres. Thrash metal.

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted to [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com) by David Holdaway, Scotland

Speed metal. Death metal. Forgive me. I'm not sure I could sense the nuances between speed metal and thrash metal.

- Withhold judgment for a second about the kind of music bands like this produce and answer a more philosophical question for me. Why do these bands exist? Let me answer the question by asking another. What's the predominant emotion expressed by the sound and the lyrics of most metal bands? I would say it's the feeling, the emotion of rage.
- It's interesting; the vocalists in metal bands even use a special vocal technique called the death growl or cookie monster vocals to express this underlying feeling of rage. The bands rage at life. They rage at death. They rage at everything. For many people metal bands have given a voice, they have put into words and into music the darker side of what we all feel as we observe and think about all the meaninglessness and all the absurdities we face in this life under the sun—especially this absurdly outrageous thing called death.
- The problem with the rage of most metal bands is that it's a rage that leads nowhere. It is a rage without hope. In contrast, the rage we feel as we read and think about what the Teacher says about death here in Ecclesiastes 9 is a rage that is meant to lead us somewhere. It's meant to lead us to God.
- Look at the text. **Ecclesiastes 9:1**. *So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.* In other words, no one knows the future. Love or hate may await any of us. Who's to say? The future is uncertain. It's in God's hands. Only he knows. But what is certain from the Teacher's perspective, from our perspective, is that death is inevitable for everyone.
- **Verse 2**. *All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. 3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.*
- The Teacher, I think, is enraged by what he sees, by what he has observed about life. It doesn't matter, *the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not*. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. Everybody dies. Everyone shares a common destiny. *The same destiny overtakes all*. We all die. Or as **Tremper Longman** puts it, "Acting righteously or religiously does not save anyone from death."<sup>2</sup> If you listen closely you can almost hear the faint sounds of a heavy metal riff in the background.
- I think we, like the Teacher, are supposed to be enraged at the absurdity of this thing called death. In fact, death is the absurdity of all absurdities. It is the vanity of all vanities in the book of Ecclesiastes. Why? Because, if you'll remember, we were made for eternity. **Ecclesiastes 3:11**. *God has set eternity in the hearts of men.* We aren't meant to die. Death, for us, is an unnatural phenomenon.
- But more than that. From our vantage point, in this life under the sun, and with God removed from the picture, death appears as this invincible evil. **Verse 3**. *This is the evil in*

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<sup>2</sup> Longman, p. 224.

*everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.* I love how the TEV, the [Today's English Version](#), captures the raw emotion of [verse 3](#) by translating it like this, *this is as wrong as anything that happens in the world.*

- The wrongness of this aspect of death can be overwhelming. And if you're not careful, the irony of all ironies ends up taking place. The event of death, which is meant to drive us to God, ends up driving us away from him.

### Transition

In fact, there are in [Ecclesiastes 9:1-12](#)...

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two opposite reactions to the unnatural phenomenon of death**
- I think this text forces us to answer the following question. In the face of death, are you being driven to God or away from him?

### Transition

The [first reaction](#) to this unnatural phenomenon called death propels us away from God and is found in latter half of [verse 3](#). Verses 3-6. It's **the reaction of unrestrained evil**.

### Main Points

- Look at the second half of [verse 3](#). The Teacher says, *The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.* The picture here is of people doing whatever they want, whenever they want it, with no restraint. And the reason? Because of their response to death.
- I think the Teacher's line of thought goes like this. If death is the final "reward" that God gives to good and bad persons alike, [verse 2](#), it almost seems as though God doesn't care whether people are good or bad. If the end is only death and good people die just like everybody else, [verse 3](#), why be good? If evil pays in this life, in the sense that both the good and evil get death in the end, why should we not fling ourselves into whatever we want to do?<sup>3</sup> Do you see how the line of thought goes? Have you ever slipped into this line of thought?
- I can almost guarantee you this is how most of your friends and neighbors and family members react to death. When confronted with what appears to be this invincible evil and a God who, for all intents and purposes seems to be absent, people rage against wrongness of death, reason God must not care, and then without hope are thrown into unrestrained living. Or as the Teacher puts it, *there is madness in their hearts while they live.*
- The problem with this is that this kind of reaction to the event of death is a reaction without hope. It's no different than the raging, hopeless madness of a death metal song. Not all reactions to death are the same. When confronted with the day of death there are two categories of people. Those who *have nothing to look forward to* in the face of death and then live without hope and with madness in their hearts and then the other category of people. [Verse 4](#). Those who live with hope. And we are meant to live in this life with hope.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Stafford Wright, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, note on Ecclesiastes 9:2-4.

**Verse 4.** *Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!*

- In the ancient world dogs were miserable, dirty, horrible animals and totally unlike the loving, man’s best friend pets of today. In the ancient world dogs were wild and scavenged on garbage.<sup>4</sup> The Teacher says it’s better to be a live, miserable, pathetic dog than a noble and stately but dead lion. Why? Because at least while you’re alive there’s the potentiality of hope. The dead can’t hope. *The dead know nothing.* **Verse 5.** *Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.*
- But the living on the other hand, *the living know*, **verse 5**, *that they will die.* The day of death is meant to drive us to God because only God can give hope in the face of death. And even though the Teacher writes without the knowledge of Christ his understanding of life on this earth under the sun is that it is full of meaninglessness apart from God. This experience of meaninglessness is at its greatest in the event of death. There is nothing more absurd than death. Of all the meaningless vain things in this life, more than anything else, we are meant to find God in the meaninglessness of death.
- I think it’s appropriate, just for a minute, to fast forward to the New Testament in order to be reminded that God has spoken; he has done something about death. When the story in Ecclesiastes is fast forwarded God says in the New Testament that the only way to have hope in the face of death is through Jesus. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. There is neither resurrection nor life apart from Jesus.
- The words of **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** tell us why. Listen. *And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don't want you in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.*<sup>5</sup>
- The story plays out in such a way that death has no hold on Jesus. The day of death had no effect on him. Jesus defeats death by rising from the grave. He *died and rose again.* He broke loose from the grave. He plunders death itself and robs it of its meaninglessness.<sup>6</sup>
- The reason death exists as part of this thing called life is because all of us have been stung by sin. Without sin there would be no such thing as death. But we all sin. And so death gets us all in the end. But Christ never sinned. He always lived a life that pleased God. He lived the kind of life you and I want to live and need to live but are unable to live. So death couldn’t hold him. *He broke loose from the grave* as **1 Thessalonians** says. So because of what Jesus has done the Bible says *God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus*; which is why death is not the end for the follower of Christ. If a person dies *in Jesus* death doesn’t get the last word. Can you say that about yourself? That if you were to die today your death would be *in Jesus*?

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<sup>4</sup> Longman, p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Thessalonian Epistles*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971, p. 188.

- Not all reactions to death are the same. Some see in death this invincible evil and are robbed of hope; they *have nothing to look forward to* in the face of death. And then there are those who hope and because of hope lead remarkably different lives.

### Transition

Which is what verses 7-10 are all about. **Verses 7-10** contain a **second** and remarkably different reaction to the unnatural phenomenon of death. Listen. *Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. 8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun-- all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.* It's the reaction of **contented joy**.

- **Verses 7-10** are filled with images and pictures of unbridled joy and contentment, aren't they? You've got the joy of a good meal. And you've got this recommendation to *always* dress in white and *always* anoint your head with oil—two acts of celebration. You've got the enjoyment of marriage, a contented joyful love life with a spouse, **verse 9**.
- Please hear what the Teacher is not saying with these words. He is not saying "Armageddon's coming so *carpe diem*, live it up, get yours while you still can before you die." That's not what he's saying. That kind of *carpe diem* mentality is the first reaction we already looked at from **verse 3**. *The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.*
- What the Teacher is trying to say is that in spite of the reality of death we need not adopt a pessimistic, cynical, fatalistic, or hopeless view of life. With God there's hope. And with God all of life, even the humdrum, the mundane can be sources of great contentment and joy.
- Primary among God's plan for us in the life under the sun is our enjoyment of what He has provided.<sup>7</sup> Each of these things listed in 7-10 is meaningless without God. You seek meaning in food and drink alone, dead end. Vanity. You seek meaning through love and relationships without God, dead end. Vanity. "The message of Ecclesiastes is that the course of life to be pursued is a God-centered life."<sup>8</sup> That's where meaning is found. With God there hope in the face of death and there is contented joy on the journey.
- The application for followers of Jesus is pretty clear. Are you enjoying life? Not in an arrogant and godless way like the rich fool of **Luke 12:19** who stores up treasures for himself and looks at all he has and says to himself, "*You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*" But in a grateful way recognizing that God is a gracious and merciful God and he gives good gifts to be enjoyed.
- It is a bad witness when followers of Jesus can't enjoy life. When we live without joy, without contentment what we're really saying is that our God has provided nothing good and that he is not worth following. In light of your imminent death are you enjoying life?

<sup>7</sup> Bullock, p. 182.

<sup>8</sup> *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 369.

## Conclusion

- The enjoyment of life is all the more important for us because of the unpredictability of things. The Teacher concludes with this focus in [verses 11-12](#). *I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. 12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.*
- Things that seem predictable really aren't. In other words, things never turn out as planned. Five things are highlighted in verse 11, none of which have the outcome we expect. The swift are supposed to win the race. But they often don't. The battle is supposed to be won by the strong. But frequently that's not the case. Wisdom is no guarantee of a earning a livelihood. Brilliance may be accompanied by poverty of all things. And great learning is no predictor of a charmed, favored life.
- Life is so unpredictable. And so is death. [Verse 12](#). Like a fish caught in a net or a bird in a snare *so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them*. No one knows when his or her hour will come. We never has as much time as we think we have. We never know when the hour glass is up. We don't know when death will randomly call; which means that clearing things up between you and God is the absolute top priority of your life.
- The day of death is meant to drive you to God not from him. As we near the end of Ecclesiastes the question remains. Has it? Are you any nearer to God now than when we first started this journey with the Teacher?

Grammatical/Syntactical/Semantic Observations

1. R

Historical/Cultural/Generic Observations

1. What

Theological/Structural/Text Critical Observations

1. What



**Ecclesiastes 9:1-12**

*Hebrew Translation*

## 1. A Survey of the Old Testament

- Contains a number of literary genres. Made up of allegories, sayings, metaphors, proverbs.
- Frustrations are unavoidable. Answers to the hard questions are not forthcoming. Pleasures of life are not intrinsically fulfilling and cannot offer lasting satisfaction. "The message of Ecclesiastes is that the course of life to be pursued is a God-centered life."<sup>9</sup>
- "In life under the sun, God is far removed and not a factor. Once Qoheleth has considered the potential sources of fulfillment and has rejected them, he offers an alternate perspective on life. In 2:28-3:15 he advises a moderate course of action. Though nothing can offer fulfillment, one need not adopt a pessimistic, cynical, or fatalistic view toward life. Enjoy life for what it is: a gift from the hand of God. If God is in the center of one's worldview, the pursuits of life can be put in their proper place, not offering meaning for life, but offering enjoyment."<sup>10</sup>
- Chapter 7 suggests not to avoid frustration and adversity. "A God-centered worldview is willing to accept both prosperity and adversity as coming from the divine hand."<sup>11</sup>
- The last section starting in chapter 8 gives guidelines for plotting a course through life.
- "The philosophy expressed is not simply 'enjoy life,' but 'enjoy life and fear God. Enjoyment of life comes not in the quest for personal fulfillment, but in the recognition that everything comes from the hand of God.'"<sup>12</sup>

## 2. BDB

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## 3. Notes from DBI

- C

## 4. DTIB

- "A crucial question is whether or not Ecclesiastes itself gives us clues as to how to bridge the gaps between these perspectives (joy and vanity). Understanding the irony of Qoheleth's epistemology is one major clue, telling us that if one starts with reason and experience alone in difficult situations, one will always end up with vanity."<sup>13</sup>
- "Qoheleth's affirmation of joy is an expression of the doctrine of creation. In line with the goodness of creation, Qoheleth celebrates life under the motifs of eating and drinking, working, and enjoying marriage. This is not hedonism in the context of despair, but an affirmation of life as God has made it."<sup>14</sup>

## 5. NDBT

- Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 offers the reader a hermeneutical guide to the book, summarizing the author's approach and procedure.
- Theological themes: creation and all, God as the giver of good gifts and sovereign judge, human responsibilities, living gainfully.
- "The activity most frequently ascribed to God in Ecclesiastes is 'giving.:' he is the giver of everything, both toil and enjoyment in life, wisdom and knowledge, wealth, honor, and the very days of one's life."<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Bullock *Old Testament Poetic Books*

- The meaning of Qoheleth may be grasped in part by three trademarks of thought: 1) the search for happiness and enduring substance 2) divine sovereignty and providence 3) the golden mean of human conduct.
- First, sought after is the one activity or principle that would give happiness and the enduring quality of life. He comes to a skeptical conclusion. It's all vanity.
- Second, life and destiny of man had been predetermined by God, who directs earthly affairs. "Primary among His plans for man in the universe was the enjoyment of what He had provided."<sup>16</sup>
- See 2:24, 3:12, 22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:7-10

## 7. Alistair Begg *Chasing After the Wind*

- P

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<sup>9</sup> *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 369.

<sup>10</sup> *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 369.

<sup>11</sup> *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 370.

<sup>12</sup> *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 371.

<sup>13</sup> *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 184.

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 184.

<sup>15</sup> *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Bullock, p. 182.

## 8. Notes from Fox

- Nothing.

## 9. Delitzsch

- Did not check.

## 10. Notes from Swindoll *Living on the Edge*

- Nothing.

## 11. Notes from Kidner

- <sup>17</sup>Everybody's deeds are in the hands of god. Whether he responds with love or hate, who knows? What is certain from the Teacher's perspective is that death is inevitable for everyone.
- "Everything that confronts man is empty, the oint twill be tha that while oursurroundings give no clue to what God thinks of us, our prospects make it all too clear. Too all appearances, God is just not interested." p. 81-82.
- Verse 3 is translated by the TEV as such, "this is as wrong as anything that happens in the world."
- "Death is the universal obliterator and evil runs riot." p. 82.
- Is death the final recipe for despair? I THINK OF WHAT ABOUT BOB AND THE LITTLE BOY WHO TALKS ABOUT DEATH. As it is life with death is better than nothing.
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## 12. Notes from Eaton

- <sup>18</sup>"the righteous are not visibly favored by providence, nor the unrighteous visibly rebuked by providence. Death itself comes indiscriminately to all." eaton, p. 125.
- V.3 death is not a natural phenomenon it is an invincible evil.
- V.4-5. "the hope of verse 4 is explained by the opportunity this present life affords to consider the fact of death, a the preacher has constantly been urging, and to evaluate life accordingly." eaton, p. 126.
- V.7-10 addresses the remedy of faith. The remedy is a contented life and a joyful life.
- "V.9 marriage is of further help in the midst of frustrations of life." eaton, p. 128.
- V.11-12 five accomplishments are listed, none of which guarantee success or prosperity: the swift footed may find himself a loser, military strength is no guarantee of success in battle, wisdom is ot guarantee of a livelihood, understanding may be accompanied by poverty, and five, favor may be delayed for the innocent.
- Time limits us and chance is the unexpected event which may throw the most accomplished off course.
- The seasons of life are unpredictable.

## 13. Notes from Longman

- <sup>19202122232425262728</sup>Clearly some of the most pessimistic words in the book.

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<sup>17</sup> Kidner, p. 76-7.

<sup>18</sup> Kidner, p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> Longman, p. 209.

<sup>20</sup> Longman, p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> Longman, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> Longman, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Longman, p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> Longman, p. 210.

- "Acting righteously or religiously does not save anyone from death." longman, p. 224.
- Five pairs are cited. It is hard to tell which is the good one in th pair. 1 righteous adn wicked. 2 good person and sinner 3. The clean the unclean. 4 the one who swears, the one who doesn't swear. 5 the one who sacrifices the one who doesn't.
- "everyone, regardless of merit, will die!" longman, p. 227.
- But the living have hope because to be alive is better than being dead.
- In the ancient world dogs were dirty horrible animals. "They are wild, live on garbabe, adn will eat cadavers if given the opportunity." longman, p. 228. Lions on the other hand are noble.
- "Thus, life may be preferred to death, but it is a miserable buwiness, and those who are living also know that they too will die." Longman, p. 228.
- V.5. Conciousness is another reason living is better than death. The living are at leasty self-aware.
- Joy is the reason for the white clothes.
- Enjoy life with a woman you love.
- V.10. Act now becaue death brings everything to a stop.
- But even as you do that, know v.11-12, that things may not turn out as planned.
- All of th things we expect make us winners assure us of absolutely nothing.
- V.12 "the issues surrounding chance, the unpredictability of life are brought into explicit connection with death. No one knows when they are going to die." longman, p. 233.
- Two illustrations: fish swim and birds fly but they are cuat and their lives come to an end. "no one is aware when his end will come." *THEREFORE GET RIGHT WITH GOD*
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#### 14. J. Stafford Wright (Expositors)

- **2-4** When people try to estimate the quantity of God's love by what happens to them, they have to face the final fact of death and its significance. Death is the final "reward" that God gives to good and bad persons alike. It almost seems as though God does not care whether people are good or bad (v.2). So why be good? If evil pays in this life, why should they not fling themselves into whatever they want to do? The end is only death, after all, and good people die just as others do (v.3).
- To fully understand this passage, it is important to realize that our knowledge of the hereafter depends on how much God reveals to us. Attempts to discover the state of the departed through mediums is forbidden in Scripture (e.g., Isa 8:19-20). The OT speaks of the patriarchs being "gathered to [their] people" (Gen 25:8; 49:33). The significance of this expression is shown in Christ's answer to the Sadducees concerning God as the continuing God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt 22:32). The spirits in Sheol can be roused to address the king of Babylon when he dies and joins them (Isa 14:9). Yet they clearly have not the capacities that they once had on earth. There is nothing corresponding to the temple worship in which they can join in singing the praises of God (Ps 115:17). Occasionally God speaks of a future resurrection, but this is linked to the

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<sup>25</sup> Longman, p. 219.

<sup>26</sup> Longman, p. 219.

<sup>27</sup> Longman, p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> Longman, p. 221.

coming of the Messiah (e.g., Ps 16:9-11; cf. Isa 25:7-8; 26:19; Dan 12:2-3; Acts 2:24-35).

- So the dead at that time did not know what future they could expect. They had

**15. Constable**

- Nothing.

## Scripture

Deuteronomy 28:20 “The Lord

## Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

(NIV)

### Ecclesiastes 9

A Common Destiny for All 1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. 2 All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, [a] the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good man,  
so with the sinner;  
as it is with those who take oaths,  
so with those who are afraid to take them.

3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. 4 Anyone who is among the living has hope [b] —even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

5 For the living know that they will die,  
but the dead know nothing;  
they have no further reward,  
and even the memory of them is forgotten.

6 Their love, their hate  
and their jealousy have long since vanished;  
never again will they have a part  
in anything that happens under the sun.

7 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. 8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun— all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, [c] where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

11 I have seen something else under the sun:  
The race is not to the swift  
or the battle to the strong,  
nor does food come to the wise  
or wealth to the brilliant  
or favor to the learned;  
but time and chance happen to them all.

12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come:  
As fish are caught in a cruel net,  
or birds are taken in a snare,  
so men are trapped by evil times  
that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Footnotes:

Ecclesiastes 9:2 Septuagint (Aquila), Vulgate and Syriac; Hebrew does not have and the bad .

Ecclesiastes 9:4 Or What then is to be chosen? With all who live, there is hope

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Hebrew Sheol

(ESV)

Death Comes to All 1 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, (A) how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are (B) in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. 2 (C) It is the same for all, since (D) the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, [a] to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who (E) swears is as he who shuns an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that (F) the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and (G) madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better

than a dead lion. 5For the living know that they will die, but(H) the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for(I) the memory of them is forgotten. 6Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

Enjoy Life with the One You Love 7Go,(J) eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

8(K) Let your garments be always white. Let not(L) oil be lacking on your head.

9Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your(M) vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your(N) portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. 10Whatever your hand finds to do,(O) do it with your might,[b](P) for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Wisdom Better than Folly 11(Q) Again I saw that under the sun(R) the race is not to the swift, nor(S) the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and(T) chance(U) happen to them all. 12For man(V) does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and(W) like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are(X) snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

## (NLT)

### Ecclesiastes 9

Death Comes to All 1 This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God's hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor. 2 The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad,[a] ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don't.

3 It seems so tragic that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. That is why people are not more careful to be good. Instead, they choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway. 4 There is hope only for the living. As they say, "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion!"

5 The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. 6 Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth. 7 So go ahead. Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this! 8 Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!

9 Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. 10 Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave,[b] there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.

11 I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time.

12 People can never predict when hard times might come. Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy.

Footnotes:

Ecclesiastes 9:2 As in Greek and Syriac versions and Latin Vulgate; Hebrew lacks or bad.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Hebrew to Sheol.

## (The Message)

### Ecclesiastes 9:1-12 (The Message)

Ecclesiastes 9 1-3 Well, I took all this in and thought it through, inside and out. Here's what I understood: The good, the wise, and all that they do are in God's hands—but, day by day, whether it's love or hate they're dealing with, they don't know.

Anything's possible. It's one fate for everybody—righteous and wicked, good people, bad people, the nice and the nasty, worshipers and non-worshipers, committed and uncommitted. I find this outrageous—the worst thing about living on this earth—that everyone's lumped together in one fate. Is it any wonder that so many people are obsessed with evil? Is it any wonder that people go crazy right and left? Life leads to death. That's it.

Seize Life! 4-6 Still, anyone selected out for life has hope, for, as they say, "A living dog is better than a dead lion." The living at least know something, even if it's only that they're going to die. But the dead know nothing and get nothing. They're a minus that no one remembers. Their loves, their hates, yes, even their dreams, are long gone. There's not a trace of them left in the affairs of this earth.

7-10 Seize life! Eat bread with gusto,  
Drink wine with a robust heart.  
Oh yes—God takes pleasure in your pleasure!  
Dress festively every morning.  
Don't skimp on colors and scarves.  
Relish life with the spouse you love  
Each and every day of your precarious life.  
Each day is God's gift. It's all you get in exchange  
For the hard work of staying alive.  
Make the most of each one!  
Whatever turns up, grab it and do it. And heartily!  
This is your last and only chance at it,  
For there's neither work to do nor thoughts to think  
In the company of the dead, where you're most certainly headed.  
11 I took another walk around the neighborhood and realized that on this earth as it is—

The race is not always to the swift,  
Nor the battle to the strong,  
Nor satisfaction to the wise,  
Nor riches to the smart,  
Nor grace to the learned.  
Sooner or later bad luck hits us all.

12 No one can predict misfortune.  
Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds in a trap,  
So men and women are caught  
By accidents evil and sudden.