

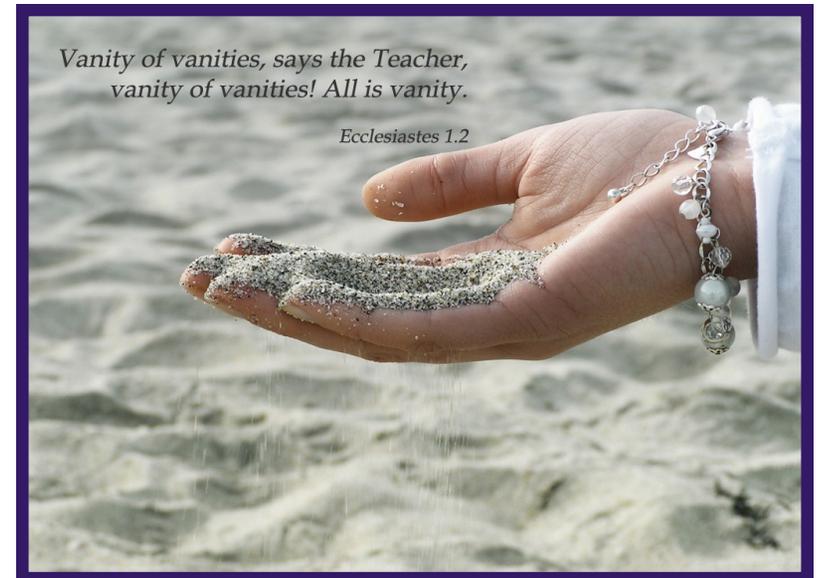


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The Book of Ecclesiastes

*(The search for the ultimate maxim
to explain the nature of life).*



Chapter 6

The book of Ecclesiastes occupies a unique position in the Bible due to its prevalent sense of pessimism and absence of God's intervention in our world. In fact, the all-prevailing mood of a God remote from our human condition sets the tone for Ecclesiastes which seems incongruent with the other books of the Old Testament. It contains reflections, more philosophical in nature, rather than a testimony of belief, which we would normally associate with the Hebrew scriptural tradition. For the traditional author, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, God is the inscrutable originator of the world who determines the fate of humankind. Just as the natural is in constant movement minus the presence of real change, so the human expenditure of energy comes to nought, despite the fact that reason leaves us baffled, the author affirms that life is worth living with all its limitations. The following metaphor (literal) interpretation, on the chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes, are by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, an early Father of the Church.

Chapter 6

Moreover, I shall exhibit in discourse the ill-fortune that most of all prevails among men. While God may supply a man with all that is according to his mind, and deprive him of no object which may in any manner appeal to his desires, whether it be wealth, or honour, or any other of those things for which men distract themselves; yet the man, while thus prospered in all things, as though the only ill inflicted on him from heaven were just the inability to enjoy them, may but manage them for his fellow, and fall without profit either to himself or to his neighbours. This I reckon to be a strong proof and clear sign of surpassing evil. The man who has borne without blame the name of father of very many children, and spent a long life, and has not had his soul filled with good for so long time, and has had no experience of death meanwhile, — this man I should not envy either his numerous offspring or his length of days; nay, I should say that the untimely birth that falls from a woman's womb is better than he. For as that came in with vanity, so it also departs secretly in oblivion, without having tasted the ills of life or looked on the sun. And this is a lighter evil than for the wicked man not to know what is good, even though he measure his life by thousands of years. And the end of both is death. The fool is proved above all things by his finding no satisfaction in any lust. But the discreet man is not held captive by these passions. Yet, for the most part, righteousness of life leads a man to poverty. And the sight of curious eyes deranges many, inflaming their mind, and drawing them on to vain pursuits by the empty desire of show. Moreover, the things which are now known already; are apparent and that they are unable to contend with those that are above him. And, verily, inanities have their course among men, which only increase the folly of those who occupy themselves with them.