

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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The New Creature and the Flax Plant

"Who can find a virtuous woman? ... She seeketh ... flax, and worketh willingly with her hands" (Proverbs 31:11, 13).

Linen is so interesting that it made us pause and ask whether the processing of flax into linen has symbolic implications for the New Creature. When considering the coverings of the tabernacle, the outer covering was of seal or dugong skin, then the ram skin dyed red, next a woven curtain of goat's hair, and finally the linen curtain — the only covering not made from an animal.

Did the Heavenly Father create the flax plant, a plant that would be a source of food, used as medicine, for lighting lamps, even as a measuring tape and clothing as a type of the church? Is it possible that he desired to show that those he loved, those who would be living a life of consecration, a life of sacrifice, doing all this for the opportunity to be part of the church, the bride, the Christ, were embodied by the flax plant? We will let you decide.

FLAXSEED

There appears to be symbolism in the flaxseed. The seeds are developed over 40 days after pollination in a sack called the boll. They contain a healthy oil, antioxidants, and they are full of fiber. A person can eat flaxseed to boost their health. The seeds are copper in color, and can be ground into powder to make bread or pressed for their oil. Flaxseed oil is good for moisturizing the skin, for preserving wood, or even for lighting lamps, lighting the way for the world. An oil of gladness, a healing balm and replenishing food for all mankind.

The seeds are a copper color, which in the tabernacle represents justified humanity. The seeds represent the fruits of the Spirit developed while in the flesh, for this is the acceptable time. We are in the flesh for 40 days of seed germination — the New Creature's time of testing and proving while in the flesh on this side of the veil.

The healing oil is symbolic of the kingdom cures. The benefits to the heart make us think of turning the people's

stony hearts to flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). The oil prevents an aging condition called "dry eye." In the kingdom, every eye shall see him (Revelation 1:7), that is, everyone will have understanding.

Flaxseed has also been known to help prevent some cancers and arthritis, and helps one to maintain hormonal balances. Isaiah 35:6 points to a healthy and strong world on the highway of holiness as they "leap as an hart."

We are at the end of the age, and can see how wily the adversary is. With all the confusion going on, wouldn't it be a blessing to wake up in the morning and see a pillar of fire out of the window as a sign that the Lord is watching over us and no one has anything to fear!

For now, we have the precious promises to reflect on, "Casting all your care upon him. For he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). "He knows our weaknesses, that we are dust" (Psalms 103:14). "He who touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8). Because we are his children, God has sent His Spirit into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." We are no longer servants, but sons, and heirs through Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:6, 7).

FLAX FLOWER

The flax flower has five petals of blue, but towards the interior, some purple, and then finally we see gold at the center. We see the blue suggesting faithfulness, the purple indicating royalty, and finally the gold of crowning life.

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In many instances the number five is an indication towards the New Creation. The entrance to the holy of the tabernacle has five pillars. The boards that surround the tabernacle are kept in place by five rods, two on each side and one in the back. Before confronting Goliath, David, went to a brook and took out five stones. There we see running water smoothing out those stones, making them a significant weapon. This suggests that the church will be a weapon used by our Lord Jesus to smite evil and sin.

“For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall never be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). “Only as we cultivate the various graces of the spirit — meekness, patience, gentleness, brotherly kindness, love — can we hope to be specially helpful to others in putting on these adornments of character and purities of life, and to get rid of defilements of the world, and the flesh” (R2201:6, R2202:4).

THE TABERNACLE’S LINEN CURTAIN

In making the linen curtains, women skilled in sewing and spinning prepared blue, purple, and scarlet threads and fine linen cloth (Exodus 35:25). Even so, the bride of Christ has been given the pattern of our Lord to follow. We use it to create this beautiful embroidery and to develop the character likeness of our Lord Jesus, the one who brought immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:9, 10).

The bride has to be proven, tested, and made ready. “She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework” (Psalm 45:14, 15). The symbolic pattern is shown in the tabernacle’s linen curtain; “Thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains, fine twined linen of blue and purple and scarlet, with cherubim, the work of the skillful workman shalt thou make them” (Exodus 26:1).

Bro. Russell explains that fine linen is the symbol of righteousness (TS29, 30, 36). Blue represents faithfulness (TS30, Numbers 15:38, 39). Purple is the symbol of royalty (TS34, Mark 14:17). Scarlet is the symbol of the blood of the ransom (TS34, 109, Hebrews 9:22). Then



A field of flax

the cherubim symbolize divine love and power (TS125, Hebrews 1:14). These combined symbols form a beautiful, finished product to the glory of the Heavenly Father.

The prophets generally wore woven hairy garments. However, God clothed the priests with linen garments not of flesh but grown from the earth (Leviticus 6:10, 16:4, 32, Exodus 39:27). Archeologists have found linen dating back 4,000 years in nearly perfect condition! Linen improves with age, getting stronger and softer. What better way could the Heavenly Father have shown the clothing of those rewarded with immortality than by using linen!

These aspects of linen suggest why God used it in the consecration of the priesthood. All the clothing was supplied by Moses, who represents our heavenly Father. “No man takes this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4). “He that overcometh ... shall be clothed in white raiment” (Revelation 3:5).

The use of linen goes back to earlier times. Its use was so widespread, that it cannot be determined where it was invented for use as clothing and medicine. The Pharaohs used linen as burial cloth. While in Egypt, Joseph wore fine linen garments. During the time of Moses, flax was so important to Egypt that the Bible includes its destruction during the plague of hail, along with other essential crops. The Persian Empire used linen for decor and garments (Esther 1:6, 8:15). At the time of the Prophet Ezekiel, fine linen was exported from Egypt and Syria (Ezekiel 27:16). Flax was so significant that the prophets mention its destruction when listing other staples such as wool, bread, and oil (Isaiah 19:19, 42:3, Hosea 2:9, Matthew 12:20 quotes Isaiah 42:3).

GROWING AND PROCESSING FLAX

The flax plant grows to about 3-4ft. with beautiful blue flowers. Canada grows approximately 60% of the world’s flax crops and a flax field can cover the hills in its beauty, often resembling a lake or water. It brings to mind the kingdom promise that “the spirit and the bride will say, ‘Come’ and let him that heareth say, Come’ and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Water is a symbol of truth, and the invitation is to accept or partake of the favor of everlasting life through obedience to the truth. There is a time of making it ready for those that would wear this linen as part of the higher Melchizedek priesthood. The order of king and priest with our Lord Jesus, who will bless the earth.

When flax is processed into linen, it goes from that beautiful flowering field through the following stages:

- Harvesting and uprooting the blooming flax
- Drying the flax
- Submerging the flax in moving water
- More drying accompanied by a heckling device to break the outer stalk

- Scutching / combing
- Separating and cleaning the fibers
- Applying heat and polishing the yarn

Flax is unusual in that it needs to be uprooted. The plant must die to be useful. This appears to describe full consecration. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). We live according to a new standard for we are no longer carnal (1 Corinthians 3:3). "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Until it is uprooted the flax is of little value to the world.



Blue flax flowers suggest faith.

SCUTCHING AND COMBING

The final step that separates the remainder of the stalk uses a hard flat-edged wooden tool in a process called scutching. A bed of nails combs the fibers and the nails that are closer together separate and remove the smaller imperfect fibers. Only the strong, clean fibers remain to be made into fine linen. This may describe the final refining of character that God desires for each member of His flock. He would have them learn to trust him, to exercise faith, obedience, vigilance, and resist evil in every trying experience. We will not be tried beyond what we are able to bear (R5440:4, 962:2). It is not God's intention that trying experiences

should crush the new creature. Resisting the adversary is to make us stronger (R5902:6, 5764:1, 5440:4).

What are some of these daily hecklings and combings that we may experience? There are many combative people that we may deal with in our lives. In the workplace, it may be very difficult dealing with different personalities. There is also a lot of road rage today. I remember there was a brother riding with Bro. Bob Gray and Bro. Bob was aggressively cut-off in traffic. The brother said, "Did you see that?" But Bro. Bob replied, "Let them have it. It is their world." I thought that was a wonderful response.

Today, politics can be divisive. We may be drawn into taking sides on the fighting between Palestine and Israel. Regardless of the consequences, we should speak truth regarding God's plan to use Israel in blessing the world.

These are necessary experiences that soften the fibers of character — the processes of heckling, scutching and combing. We are expected to be those who by "patient continuance and well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:7).

Paul and Silas had been beaten and in prison. They were starved and poorly treated by the jailor. Yet, Paul and Silas sang hymns, rejoicing in hope. They were patient in tribulation, and were instant in prayer (Romans 12).

Suddenly everything shook and the doors opened. Supposing the prisoners had escaped, the jailer decided to kill himself. Paul and Silas yelled out, "Stop, we are still here."

What happened next was amazing. The jailer asked what god they worshiped. He took them home, fed them, the whole family heard the message, and the jailor consecrated to God. Br. Russell wrote, "Here is an important part of the great battle of the Christian's life. He must fight the natural tendencies of the old nature and confidently anticipate the victory in the strength of the great Captain of his Salvation. He must not succumb to the flattering and deceptive influences ... faint under ... adversity [or] allow the trials of life to sour and harden his disposition, to make him ... bitter or unkind. Nor ... allow pride ... to grow and feed upon the temporal good things which the

DRYING AND WETTING TO FREE THE FIBERS

The harvested flax has to be dried. When Rahab hid the spies, she was drying flax on her roof. It also served as a nice covering. Yet once flax is dried, the outer stalk must be softened and removed by submerging it in running water. Boards or stones are placed on the flax to keep it from washing away. Microorganisms then go to work causing the outer woody part of the stalk to rot and free the fibers. This is called retting. The microorganisms are freeing up the inside fibers that will become the golden yarn that will be spun into linen.

Water is symbolic of truth (Ephesians 5:26), but water can also represent people. Luke 21:25 describes restless masses as "the sea and waves roaring." God uses both the truth and her interaction with the world to develop his church, to make the bride ready. The purpose of the cleansing is to help the church become submissive to Christ and for her sanctification. The bride is no longer to live according to the flesh. There is a higher standard now. The bride must be free of worldly influences, recognize the importance of the truth, and of being assured by it.

HECKLING

Despite its previous handling, portions of the rotted outer stalk remain, and must be physically scraped off. To do this an instrument known as a heckling tool is used. Heckling will not break the fibers, but it removes more of the rotting stalk. It is not a very complex instrument, but it is part of the refining process. In this seemingly insignificant tool, there may be spiritual connections to refining the new creation, in this heckling. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Lord's providence has granted him to test his faithfulness as a steward" (R1759:3).

Another lesson is found respecting Stephen. He was totally devoted to the Lord, had a Christlike character, was patient before his accusers, rejoiced in the promises, and was instant in prayer. While they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell on his knees and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Having said this, he fell asleep."

God may have allowed the last stone to finish his test without more pain. But in that situation, his thoughts were for those being influenced by Satan. He totally trusted God.

Being plucked up, submerged, heckled and scutched is the symbolic process we face. "Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go,' whether to the right or to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-22 NLT).

"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!" (Psalm 46:1-3).

When facing adversity, instead of saying, "Why me?" may we say, "Why not me?" This is from the Lord and he arranges our experiences. He personalizes them for each one's individual development. This is the process represented by the preparation of the flax fibers used to make the fine linen the priests would wear.

OUR FIRM FOUNDATION

The flax plant stands tall and straight, it does not bow or bend. Reflecting on this, we see that our firm foundation is Jesus. We stand upon the ransom and restitution of all things, and at the top of the stalk is a beautiful blue flower.

"Draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). "Lay aside every weight and the sin which doth easily beset us. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to our Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We are to do "good to all men, especially to the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). If we have received the anointing, we are brought into understanding and fellowship with the Lord as joint-heirs. We have the privilege to fill up the afflictions and sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24). We will be like him, at his appearing, sharing his glory, honor, and immortality. This intimate relationship must develop the same closeness with one another, members of the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).



White linen comes from flax.

We are to use our different gifts according to the grace of God. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should use it appropriately, according to our faith. If it is to serve, we should serve with joy for the privilege. If it is to teach, we should teach with joy. If it is to encourage others, we should look for opportunities. Whoever shares with others should do so generously. Whoever has authority should work hard to be an example of godly leadership. Whoever shows kindness, should do so cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8). There is also the principle of "washing one another's feet."

These are some of the privileges we bear to make our calling and election sure. Finally, when we can share the burdens that our fellow runners carry, a great bond is formed that cannot be broken.

SECRET FAULTS AND THE FINISHING PROCESS

The finishing process finally produces the finest spiritual linen that lasts forever, associated with glory, honor, and immortality. And yet, even near the end, challenges appear. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psalm 19:12-13).

The master weaver looks for imperfections, to fix them and remove the smallest defects. With the robe of Christ's righteousness and purification accomplished, no unrighteousness will not be found in the bride. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth" (Isaiah 42:3). Jesus will fan the smoldering faith if we are beaten down. As long as our faith is there and we do not give up, the Lord will fan our faith into a roaring flame even as the fat of the bullock burned fervently.

MARRIAGE OF THE BRIDE

"The marriage of the bride is come, and his wife has made herself ready, and it was given to her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure, for fine linen is the Righteousness Acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:7, 8).

The process, starting with the flaxseed, grows into the uprooted plant. Its harvest begins a process that finally yields strands of high quality linen. These processes form a picture of the New Creature's development. Developed, Christ-like character will be proven and tested. Each one must be uprooted, dried, processed, inspected, and heated to remove all of the old man's flesh. Realizing our own powerlessness to do this, we have need of God. He is the support and shield of His children. He is our strong tower. The heavenly Father is with us always.

— Adapted from a discourse by Br. Jerry Wesol

Solomon's True Gold, Ecclesiastes

"Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed" (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

"Have you found anything?" the bookstore owner inquired of the earnest rabbinical student with a wisp of a beard. The student was sitting cross-legged on the floor searching through the Hebrew titles in a large box of used books. Looking up through his glasses and refocusing on the owner, the earnest student smiled broadly, his face shining as he replied, "True gold." The "true gold," in the commentaries he was inspecting, taught *critical thinking* in their expositions of the sacred text. More frequently than not, the sages expounding the text disagreed with one another on the sense of the word, definitions and scripture. It demanded judgment by the reader.

Such critical thinking was first modeled in Ecclesiastes when Solomon set forth his observations on life. He never claimed the prophetic inspiration of a, "thus saith the Lord." If, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," following on from this beginning, what then is the road? How are we to move with reverence in obeying the commandments and understanding the mind of the Lord? Solomon seeks to mark out this road for us.

Leaving our friend with his find of "true gold," how does the Laodicean church obtain the "true gold" that Christ counsels us to buy? "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Revelation 3:18).

We need to set aside, or "sell" earthly ambitions and earthly methods inherited through Father Adam so that we might develop the new mind of Christ (Romans 12:2). How rich is this bargain! This gold is complimented by the linen "white raiment" of Christ's righteousness, and the Laodicean "eyesalve" for guidance in these troublous times. The gold, the garment, and the eyesalve are given to us as our *present inheritance* if we are willing and faithful.

A TURNED AWAY HEART

In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon saw the laying of the foundation of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was completed in the 11th year of his reign, and he saw the installation of its priesthood, its sacrifices, its twenty-four courses of singers and its massive support staff (1 Kings 6:1, 37, 38). While in the full vigor of life, every human desire Solomon could imagine was fulfilled.

The defenses of Jerusalem were not neglected, for Solomon expanded the citadel of Mount Zion. The *Tower*

of David, named after his beloved father, was an imposing stately round fortification visible throughout the city, over which it kept watch. One thousand gold shields fastened to its outer walls blazed in the sunlight. Endued with a gift for passionate poetry, Solomon celebrated his most memorable love. He writes in the Song of Songs 4:4, "Thy neck is like the Tower of David."

With the practical duties, religious duties, and administration of the twelve tribes in orderly operation, Solomon turned his attention to planting gardens. These gardens had pools of water, certainly featuring lotus and water lilies, and garden beds where we could expect gardenias with their intoxicating evening fragrance, lilies, and roses. These were nestled among hibiscus and exotic flowers, shrubs and trees from both native and far distant zones.

Throughout his life that tradition sets forth as sixty years, Solomon exhibits a restless personality with high intelligence and keen powers of observation, but with a disposition to compromise rather than confront. Sadly, "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:4). Seemingly, the rebuke from the Lord for Solomon's covenant-breaking, and the Lord's judgement against Solomon, refocused him and brought him back onto the right path (1 Kings 11:11, 12).

As tradition relates, around the age of fifty-five Solomon forsook living as king.¹ He forsook his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Solomon forsook the long distance sea trade programs in partnership with Canaanite Sidon and Tyre (1 Kings 10:22). In the west, these routes stretched beyond the Mediterranean Sea down the West African coast starting from the now excavated Phoenician settlement of Tarshish near present day Cadiz, Spain.² Possibly, the fleet even pressed around the fearsome and frigid waters sweeping Africa's southern Cape of Good Hope during the southern summer in three years of voyaging. Certainly, the sea trade networks skirted Africa's eastern coast stretching as far south as Zimbabwe. From these trade connections, exotic trade in apes and peacocks and immense wealth — recorded in one year as 666 talents of gold — flowed back to Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:28, 10:14).



Precious gold represents developed Christian character.

THE ECCLESIASTES PROJECT

Now, at age fifty-five, Solomon became reflective about the brevity of life's short "breath." He committed his energy to his most important and singular life work. Possibly his health was in decline as a consequence of his excesses and the weight of the Lord's judgement. In his last five years of life he would be an instructor in the "true gold" of critical thinking skills, examining popular proverbs for living, some set forth as "wisdom." Solomon recorded his brutally honest reflections on life keenly observed through a character molded by experience. His daunting task was reshaping the minds of thoughtful believers, who would "assemble" to seek wisdom based on the promises of Jehovah. This effort would trickle down both to us as well as to our earnest rabbinical student.

Solomon's resulting book, Ecclesiastes, or in Hebrew *Kohelet*, like his Songs, stand apart in the Biblical canon. Modern scholars such as Robert Alter describe it as "the most peculiar book in the Hebrew Bible." The book's Hebrew name *Kohelet* (or *Qohelet*) is derived from the verb q-h-l "to assemble" (H6953). Alter further writes, "q-h-l means to assemble ... this Hebrew verb always takes people, not words or things as its object...so, it may reflect the assembling of audiences of people or disciples" (Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, Norton & Co., New York, 2010, page 337). While Luther's translation of the book as "The Preacher" has taken hold of the translation community, obviously it is not accurate. The title is rendered as Ecclesiastes ("One concerned with the assembly") in the Greek Septuagint.

We may presume his teaching post was on the outer eastern porch of the temple which was rebuilt in our Lord's day and designated as "Solomon's porch." Solomon presents us with a full account of his spiritual Odessey.

NEITHER SCIENCE, PSYCHOLOGY, MIRTH, PUBLIC PROJECTS, NOR MUSIC ARE MORE THAN "BREATH"

Ecclesiastes opens with the interpretive poetic rendering "vanity of vanities," or "futility of futilities" this comes from the allusion to the literal word "merest breath"



King Solomon, who asked for wisdom

that comprises life (H1892, following scholar Robert Alter on translation.) Emphasis throughout Ecclesiastes is placed on the brevity of "breath." The recognition that all is "merest breath" opens and closes the book, and this word "merest breath" is employed some forty times. In Solomon's confession of his searches during his thirty years of excess, he does not tell us that he sought the Lord's guidance. The consequences clearly brought no rest to his soul.

First, he sets forth a clear statement about the permission of evil, as "this sore travail that God has given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" (Ecclesiastes 1:13). While our life, indeed, the life of the beasts, are "merest breath," the physical earth abides forever (Ecclesiastes 1:4). "God created it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18), and the earth will continue to sustain "breath" for both man and beast despite the great tribulations, earthquakes, and storms predicted in the Scriptures. The elements needful for both man and beast will never be exhausted; these will be renewed through eternal cycles.

Seeking out the wisdom behind these cycles is what we today call *natural science* (Ecclesiastes 1:13). Solomon's thinking was a marked departure from the learning and science of the surrounding nations. Solomon saw the cycles of earth as natural processes operating by fixed laws, laws not requiring continued direct divine action. To explain this, Solomon does not assert that angels under divine direction were pushing the sun, planets, and heavenly bodies about in their courses, as did pious believers of the Jewish Qumran community. However, in the end, science could not provide soul-satisfying answers to meaning of life. It was "merest breath."

Restless, Solomon moved on in his quest. He sought to know more about human wisdom, madness, and folly (Ecclesiastes 1:17, 18). Today we call this *psychology*. Yet, the more he learned, the more his knowledge of the grief carried in the human heart gave him grief also. Empathy is commendable. Today's psychology practitioners recognize the very real danger of bringing grief on themselves from their efforts to counsel. They mitigate the grief by establishing "boundaries," reflecting on the counseling session by writing notes of analysis, and sharing the especially heavy burdens of heart with their peers. In the end, Solomon's early visit to psychology also proved not only to be "merest breath," but "vexation of spirit."

Abandoning the search for soul-satisfying rest in either the natural realm of science, or the deeper realm of understanding the workings of the human psyche, Solomon abandoned rationality. He embraced mirth, laughter, wine, and folly (Ecclesiastes 2:1-3). This excursion also was "merest breath."

Observing, "moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field" (Ecclesiastes 5:9). Solomon sets out his fourth and apparently final attempt. He directed his efforts towards public works and improved

housing. He worked to provide Jerusalem's populace with abundant food and clothing. Building upon the legacy of David, his musically gifted father, he saw the benefits of musical enrichment for the populace (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11). Yet, in the end, all these commendable works also proved to be "merest breath."

SO I RETURNED AND CONSIDERED

Solomon's restless spirit never gave up. After having a heart turned to a life of distraction and little focus on God (1 Kings 11:3), he now "returned and considered" (Ecclesiastes 4:1).

This was an extended process. Healing of the soul cannot begin for anyone who does not want to change and be healed. Solomon wanted answers. Eventually, he saw that *he* needed to change, *he* needed to grow, *he* needed his "vexation" healed. Step by step he shares his slow recovery. Sometimes there were setbacks. This is a real life. It is life experience in which Solomon gives us a fearless account of his journey. Ecclesiastes may even be read as what some branches of the psychology community today call *Journaling*, or writing a record of your history and your path towards healing.

While Solomon did conclude that wisdom exceeded folly (Ecclesiastes 2:13), he was confronted by a dilemma. At the conclusion of life, both the wise and fool perish. For Solomon it was now late in life. He was conscious of his own mortality. The wisdom of the wise, and all their laudable works perish. Unable to reconcile this with some higher purpose, Solomon was in "despair" with all his labors (Ecclesiastes 2:20). This also was "merest breath" and "vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

Through the seasons and "times" of life, there was much miscarriage of justice; the sons of men were not acting as moral men should. "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts" (Ecclesiastes 3:18). Abandoning hope at this stage of his life, he concluded, "there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works" (Ecclesiastes 3:22).

Solomon persisted, and the final core of his book of Proverbs appears to be the result. "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" (Ecclesiastes 12:9, 10).

The unwary attendees may have affirmed some of these popular proverbs as set forth for consideration, only then to learn better as Solomon amplifies their more correct sense. One specific example is, "money answereth all things" (Ecclesiastes 10:19). Many to our very day hold this proverb near to their hearts. But this popular proverb is closely followed with an amplification for the godly use of money, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt



A book of thoughtful observations

find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" (Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2).

BE NOT OTHERWISE OR FOOLISH — NOT OUR COUNSEL

Pastor Russell, commenting on Ecclesiastes, observes that whatever appears to be cautious and careful counsel for those concerned with getting along in this world, the New Creation has a different and higher standard. (See comments on Ecclesiastes 7:1, 7:16.) Hence we take exception with, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why ... die before thy time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16, 17).

Like those who collected around Solomon, we, with the holy spirit's guidance through study of the Bible, must weigh Solomon's words against the testimony of the Lord's faithful ones elsewhere in scripture. This requires understanding and critical thinking. Let Solomon's own words serve as our guide as he confesses his limits, "All this have I proved 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?" (Ecclesiastes 7:23,24).

In his "vexation of spirit," Solomon at first praised the dead and the unborn more than the living (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3). Among the living was envy, those who shunned work, there were those who worked beyond the demands of their own needs for life. This was "merest breath."

With the wisdom of unfulfilling life experience, after over thirty years with one thousand women, he endorses the true wisdom of the divine arrangement for monogamous marriage and family (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). He further offers much in the way of practical counsel on the pitfalls of our relationships.

PROPER CONDUCT IN THE LORD'S HOUSE, AND KEEPING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

Sanctified proper and reverent conduct, fewness of words, and the fear of the Lord, both in the Lord's house and when praying in private, must direct our lives

(Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, R5187). Though a man may have the wealth to grant himself anything his heart desires, one hundred sons, and live two thousand years, yet he will perish (Ecclesiastes 6:1-6).

Knowing this, what is sufficient for Life? “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity (“mere breath”) and vexation of spirit” (Ecclesiastes 6:9). “A good name is better than precious ointment” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). While only our reputation will outlive us, our good name will not always be on the lips of our fellow men.

With whom do we want this good name? The consecrated want a “good name” with God. The consecrated will prefer to suffer for righteousness’ sake rather than win a good name among men by compromising (R1532, Matthew 5:11). At the same time, we should have “a good report of them that are without” (1 Timothy 3:7).

SOLOMON’S LEGACY

As Solomon closes this amazing book of Ecclesiastes, he affirms once again the “merest breath” of human life (Ecclesiastes 12:8). He then gives a confession of full dependence upon God and building a relationship with God. This best begins in youth. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Solomon shares his final conclusion, “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 judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14). He asserts this conviction while recognizing that, “because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Solomon knew that few would be holding fast to these straightforward precepts.

Following Solomon’s death, Jeroboam, the “man of valor” (1 Kings 11:28) who had been advanced by Solomon, would lead a civil war of rebellion against Solomon’s inept son and successor. The twelve tribes would be torn apart. Jeroboam would lead the people into false worship, even bringing back the worship of the golden calf (1 Kings 14:7-9). Within five years of Solomon’s death the “mere breath” of his worldly-wise policy and practice would be manifest. Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt launched a punitive expedition against Israel, and the thousand gold shields hanging on David’s Tower would be carried off as Egyptian spoil (1 Kings 14:24-26). But if the gold and the kingdom was departed, for those in the “assembly” reflecting on Solomon’s wisdom and puzzling over Ecclesiastes, the “true gold” was securely locked away in their reflective worship and critical thinking. And so it must be for us.



Pharaoh Shishak

Employing the proverb in Ecclesiastes 6:1,2, Jesus may have constructed the parable of the rich man who tore down his barn to erect a bigger barn (Luke 12:16-21). However, no direct quote from Ecclesiastes appears in the Gospels. The Apostle Paul seems to echo Solomon when he writes, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

In Jesus’ day *Solomon’s porch* on the eastern perimeter wall of the temple was rebuilt by Herod. This new construction, with its stately columns and roof, was dazzling.

It featured the finest craftsmanship of intricately worked, inset, multi-colored stone flooring. And it was from *Solomon’s porch* that both our Lord, and later the apostles, taught those who had “ears to hear” (John 10:23, Acts 3, 11). They were following the tradition that Solomon had pioneered one thousand years earlier. When Jesus spoke in parables, when he asked his disciples questions, especially those that challenged them to think deeply, he built upon Solomon’s final efforts towards instruction. Solomon now acknowledged the Lord and found meaning in life.

To this day, the parables and sayings of Jesus, our good shepherd, teach us how to think, how to extract wisdom, and how to understand; “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd” (Ecclesiastes 12:11).

— Br. Richard Doctor

(1) Apparently, while not relinquishing the crown, Solomon seemingly entrusted day-to-day government operations to the capable administration of his senior advisors called “old men” (1 Kings 12:6). Both the book of Kings and Chronicles record the Lord’s rebuke of Solomon, but then become silent about the close of his reign until his death after forty years. We are directed to sources such as *The Acts of Solomon, Nathan the Prophet, Ahijah the Shilonite*, and *Ido the Seer* (1 Kings 11:42, 2 Chronicles 9:29). We may presume that excerpts from these sources are preserved in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

(2) 1 Kings 10:22 identifies the joint trading flotilla sent forth by Hiram and Solomon as being based in *Tarshish*. This identification of Tarshish with a prosperous Phoenician settlement on the Atlantic coast of Spain near Cadiz, now is well-established (C. Lopez-Ruiz, *et al.*, “From Tyre to Tarshish, The Phoenicians in Spain,” *Biblical Archeology Review*, Summer 2025). The Spanish name for this site is “Cerro del Villar.”

Financial Report

21,465.44	Balance January 1, 2025
10,229.08	Donations
-4,444.51	Expenses
27,250.01	Balance January 1, 2026
467	Mail subscribers, Email subscribers 336