

## Ecclesiastes Chapter Nine

The Uncertainty of the Future (9:1-10:20)

One Fate for All (vv. 1-12)

**VERSE 1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men,**

**wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God** (וְעִבְרֵיהֶם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים)

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי וְלָבוֹר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה אֲשֶׁר הֵצְדִיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים [part ki +

d.o. + noun m.s.constr. kol + adj.m.s.abs. zeth this + Qal perf.1s. nathan give; “taken” + prep el

to + noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart + waw w/prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. bur explain +

d.o. + noun m.s.constr. kol + adj.m.s.abs. zeh “it” + rel.pro. asher “that” + d.a.w/qdj.m.p.abs.

tsedeq righteous; “righteous men” + waw w/d.a.w/adj.m.p. chakam “wise men” + waw w/noun

m.p.constr.w/3m.p.suff. abad deed + prep beth w/noun f.s.constr. yad hand + d.a.w/noun

m.p.abs. Elohim]).

**Man does not know whether *it will be* love or hatred; anything awaits him** (לְפָנֵיהֶם)

גַּם־אֶהְבָּה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל [conj gam also + noun f.s.abs. shin-ah hate +

part. ayin not + Qal part.m.s.abs. yada know + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam “Man” + d.a.w/noun

m.s.abs. kol “anything” + prep lamed w/noun m.p.constr.w/3m.p.suff. panim face “awaits”]).

**VERSE 2 It is the same for all** (הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר לְכֹל) [d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol + perp kaph w/rel.pro. asher]).

**There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean** [מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְצַדִּיק וְלִרָשָׁע לְטוֹב וְלִטְהוֹר וְלִטְמֵאָה] [noun m.s.abs. miqreh event, happening; “fate” + adj.m.s.abs. echad one + prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. tsedek righteous + waw w/prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. rasha wicked + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. tob good + waw w/d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. tahor clean + waw w/d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. tame unclean]); **for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice** [וְלִזְבַּח וְלֹאֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ זֹבַח] [waw w/d.a.w/prep lamed w/Qal part.m.s.abs. zebach sacrifice + waw w/prep lamed w/rel.pro. asher who + part. ayin not + Qal part.m.s.abs. zabach sacrifice]).

**As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear** (כְּטוֹב כַּחֲטָא הַנִּשְׁבַּע כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׂבוּעָה יִרָא) [d.a.w/prep kaph w/adj.m.s.abs. tob + d.a.w/prep kaph w/Qal part.m.s.abs. chata sin; “sinner” + d.a.w/Niphal part.m.s.abs. sheba swear; based on the number 7 + prep kaph w/rel.pro. asher who + noun f.s.abs. shebu-ah oath + adj.m.s.abs. yare afraid]).

**VERSE 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men** (זֶה רָע בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְכֹל) [adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil, bad + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + rel.pro. asher + Niphal perf.3m.s. ashah do + part tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun + part ki that + noun m.s.abs. miqreh “fate”; see v.1 + adj.m.s.abs. echad one + prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. kol all]).

**Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives** (לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם מִלְּא־רָע וְהוֹלִלּוֹת בְּלִבָּם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם)

וְגַם [waw w/conj gam “Furthermore” + noun m.s.abs. leb heart; “hearts” + noun m.p.constr. ben son + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam + Qal perf.3m.s. male full + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil + waw w/noun f.p.abs. holeluth madness; “insanity” + prep beth w/noun m.s.constrw/3m.p.suff. leb + prep beth w/noun m.p.constr.w/3m.p.suff. chayyim life].

**Afterwards they go to the dead** (וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל־הַמָּוֹת) [waw w/adv. achray afterwards + prep el to + d.a.w/Qal part.m.p.abs. muth die].

**VERSE 4 For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog**

**is better than a dead lion** (יֵשׁ בְּטָחוֹן כִּי־לְכָל־בְּחַיִּים הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמּוֹת)

יֵשׁ בְּטָחוֹן כִּי־לְכָל־בְּחַיִּים הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמּוֹת [part. ki for + interrog. mi who + rel.pro. asher + Pual impf.3m.s. bachar to choose; “joined” + prep el to + noun m.s.constr. kol all + d.a.w/adj.m.p.abs. chay living + part yesh “there is” + noun m.s.abs. bittachon confidence; “hope” + part ki + prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. keleb dog + adj.m.s.abs. chay living + pro.3m.s.s hu it + adj.m.s.abs. tob “better” + prep min “than” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. aryeh lion + d.a.w/Qal part.m.s.abs. muth die].

**VERSE 5** For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten (שָׂכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זְכוֹרָם)

כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שְׂיָמָתוֹ וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה וְאֵין-עוֹד לָהֶם [part ki for + d.a.w/adj.m.p.abs. chay living + Qal part.m.p.abs. yada know + rel.pro. asher w/Qal impf.3m.p. muth die + waw w/d.a.w/Qal part.m.p.abs. muth die + part/adv ayin not + Qal part.m.p.abs. yada + noun m.s.abs. meumah anything + waw w/neg ayin nor + adv odh any + prep lamed 3m.p.suff. they + noun m.s.abs. shakar wage; “reward” + part ki + Niphal perf.3m.s. shakach forget + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. zekher remembrance; “memory”].

**VERSE 6** Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun (תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ)

גַּם-שִׂנְאָתָם גַּם-קִנְיָאָתָם כְּבָר אַבְרָה וְחֶלֶק אֵין-לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-נַעֲשֶׂה גַם אֶהְבֵּתָם [part gam also; “Indeed” + noun f.s.constr. w/3m.p.suff. ahab love + conj gam alwo + noun f.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. shin-ah hatred + part gam also + noun f.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. qin-ah zeal + part. kebar already + Qal perf.3m.p. abad perish + waw w/noun m.s.abs. chalaq share + neg ayin no + prep lamed w/3m.p.suff. + adv udh longer + prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. olam “longer” + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + rel.pro. asher that + Niphal perf.3m.s. ashah do + part. tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh].

**VERSE 7** Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works (הַאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעְשֵׁיךָ)

לֵךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֹךְ וּשְׂתֵה בְּלֵב־טוֹב יִינֶךָ כִּי כָּבָר רָצָה [Qal imper.m.s. halak walk; “Go” + Qal imper.m.s. akal eat + prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. shimachah happiness + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. lechem bread, food + waw w/Qal imper.m.s. shatah drink + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. leb + adj.m.s.abs. tob good; “cheerful” + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. yayin wine + part ki + adv. kebar already + Qal perf.3m.s. ratsah be pleased with; “approved” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + d.o. + noun m.p.constr.w/2m.s.suff. ma-asheh work]).

**VERSE 8** Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your

head (בְּכָל־עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים וְשֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ אַל־יִחָסֵר) [prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. kol + noun both s.abs. eth time + Qal impf.3m.s.p. jussive hayah be + noun m.p.constr.w/2m.s.suff. beged garment + adj.m.p.abs. laban white + waw w/noun m.s.abs. shemen oil + prep. al upon + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. rosh head + prep al notl + Qal impf.3m.s. jussive chaser be lacking]).

**VERSE 9** Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun (נָתַן־לְךָ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כָּל יְמֵי הַבְּלָה)

רְאֵה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבְּלָה אֲשֶׁר [Qal imper.m.s. ra-ah see; “Enjoy” + noun m.p.abs. chaya life + prep im with + noun f.s.abs. ishsha woman + rel.pro. asher + Qal perf.2m.s. aheb to love + noun m.s.constr. kol all + noun m.p.constr. yom day + noun m.p.constr. chay life + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. hebel “fleeting” + rel.pro. asher which + Qal perf.3m.s. nathan give + prep lamed w/2m.s.suff. “to you” + part. tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh + noun m.s.abs. kol all noun m.p.constr. yom];

**for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the**

**sun** **כִּי הוּא חֶלֶקְךָ בַחַיִּים וּבְעֵמֶלְךָ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** [*part ki for + pro.3m.s. hu “this” + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. cheleq “reward” + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.p.abs. chayyim life + rel.pro. asher + pro.2m.s. athah you + noun m.s.abs. amal toil; “have labored” + part tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh*]).

**VERSE 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going**

**בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחֶשְׁבֹן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֵׂאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה**  
**כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת** [*noun m.s.abs. kol + rel.pro. asher “whatever” + Qal impf.2m.s. matsa find + noun f.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. yad hand + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. ashah do + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. koach might + Qal imper.m.s. ashah do + part ki for + net ayin no + noun m.s.abs. ma-asheh work; “activity” + waw w/noun m.s.abs. cheshbon based on the verb chashab think, plan; “planning” + waw w/noun f.s.abs. de-ath knowledge + waw w/noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + prep beth w/noun both s.abs. “in Sheol” + rel.pro. asher “where” + pro.2m.s. attah you + Qal part.m.s.abs. halak; “going” + adv sham there*]).

#### **ANALYSIS: VERSES 1-10**

1. This section (thru 10:20) is the most pessimistic in Ecclesiastes.
2. It takes up the section question of 6:12 (“who knows what is good?”).
3. It was answered in 7:1-8:17.
4. Now the second question, “who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?” is addressed in 9:1-10:20.
5. The future brings death to all and death is like a dark cloud over human existence (vv. 1-10).
6. The second topic is the great damage that one sinner can do (9:18), which makes the future uncertain.
7. In vv. 1-6 the author establishes that death is the common fate for everyone.
8. This is followed by a lengthy call to enjoyment of life in vv. 7-10.

9. He begins by declaring his devotion to the reality of death for all in the statement, “I have taken all this to my heart.”
10. His goal is to “explain/declare all this.”
11. He begins by affirming “that the righteous and the wise, and their deeds are in the hand of God” (v. 1).
12. Elsewhere, the phrase “in the hand of God,” refers to divine protection (Ps. 10:12; Isa. 50:2).
13. But here Q. is not offering comfort, because he goes on to say that being in the hand of God does bring protection.
14. Not even the righteous or the wise ‘know’ the future, “whether love or hatred” awaits them.
15. Some argue that love and hate refers to human activities.
16. Here in verse 1 love and hate do have a suffix, whereas in verse 6, love and hate has a suffix, and refers to human activities.
17. In verse 2 the emphasis is that no matter how a person lives the same fate awaits all humans.
18. ‘Hate’ is a strong word that is used in connection with God’s wrath.
19. According to Qohelet a person who is in the hand of God cannot be sure whether God’s favor or displeasure awaits him.
20. This line of reasoning is reinforced in verse 2.
21. It does not matter how a person lives their life, the same ‘hate’ (*miqreh* at 2:14; 3:19; 9:2, 3; 10:18; vb. *qara* ‘to encounter’) happens to everyone.
22. It does not matter whether a person is ‘righteous’ or ‘wicked’, ‘clean’ or ‘unclean,’ offers sacrifices or does not offer sacrifices, is ‘good,’ or is a ‘sinner,’ ‘swears an oath,’ or ‘is afraid to swear an oath,’ the same ‘fate’ comes to each one.
23. ‘Fate’ is used in Ecclesiastes of death (2:14-17; 3:19-21), which is the common destiny of the contrasting groups of people in verse 2.
24. It is used of both humans and animals (3:19).
25. As demonstrated in 2:14-17 it is not death alone that is the problem, but the timing of death, and the finality of death are the issues Q. was struggling with.
26. The same destiny awaits everyone: it does not matter whether someone worships God or does not worship God.
27. The good and the sinner suffer the same fate.
28. Verse 3 demonstrates how “one fate for all” affects all people.
29. He describes it as “evil” suggesting that it is a moral evil since there is no distinction in God’s treatment of the righteous versus the wicked.
30. “Furthermore, he goes on to observe, that God’s treatment fosters evil among people in verse 3b.
31. The implication is that when there is no relationship between how one lives, and how one dies, this encourages people to engage in evil.
32. So when people realize that they gain nothing by being good, the result is that ‘the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.’
33. A similar sentiment is expressed at 8:11.
34. The common destiny (death) for the righteous and the wicked encourages people to engage in evil, irrational and unprincipled lives because there is no reason to live a righteous life.
35. The final clause in verse 3 shows the outcome for those who live corrupt lives.
36. Verse 3 ends abruptly, “and afterwards—to the dead’ which reflects the suddenness of death in the midst of life.
37. Those who live are full of evil are subject to an unexpected and premature death.

38. But since the same fate awaits the righteous (v. 2), this is what bothered Q.
39. In the next several verses Q. is going to make several points about life.
40. Verse 4 seems to make a positive statement about life.
41. This verse does not appear to be giving a reason for the statement in verse 3 that the common fate for all evil types is death.
42. Verse 4 is highlighting life over death (the word 'For' should be translated 'Indeed').
43. He states that "there is hope for whoever is joined to the living."
44. This sounds like a positive statement, but the following verses demonstrate that according to Q. this is a false hope.
45. At the end of verse 4 Q. offers a proverb to explain the hope that is connected to the living: "a live dog is better than a dead lion."
46. A 'lion' is a fierce and majestic animal associated with royalty.
47. But a 'dog' is a despised animal that scavenges for food among garbage.
48. It was a term of contempt in that culture.
49. This is not an unqualified endorsement of life.
50. Only that life is better than death.
51. At the beginning of verse 5 Q. gives a reason for the hope of verse 4a and why he compares life to a contemptible dog: "for the living know they will die, but the dead do not know anything."
52. The advantage the living have over the dead is consciousness.
53. But consciousness is not that great an advantage, because the living knows that they will die.
54. Verse 4a is considered to be sarcastic because the living has no real hope at all.
55. Or put another way, the one thing the living are certain about is that they will die.
56. This concept dominates their lives.
57. What this prospect means is developed in vv. 5b-6.
58. Not only do the dead lack consciousness, but "there is no longer a reward because their memory is forgotten."
59. There is a word play between the words 'reward' (*sakar*) and 'memory' (*zerker*).
60. The legacy or reputation of a person means little after they are gone because people forget about them.
61. The dead lack the one reward that could be theirs because they are no longer remembered.
62. The dead are further described in verse 6.
63. Their opportunity to participate in the experiences of life is gone because "their love, their hate, and their zeal (or envy) have already perished."
64. So, "they will no longer share in all that is done under the sun."
65. "Share" refers to the limited enjoyment that is available to people who are alive even though there is no ultimate profit to labor.
66. This anticipates Q.'s advice in verses 7-10.
67. His comments on death in these verses show that being alive is better than being dead, life is not necessarily a positive thing.
68. In these verses (7-10) there is another call to enjoyment.
69. Other calls to enjoyment include 2:24-28; 3:12, 22; 5:18; 8:15.
70. Here the call is different in that this call uses imperatives, it is also longer, more specific, and there is an emphasis on festivity.
71. This call expresses an urgency to enjoy life in light of the looming certainty of death.
72. Because where death comes all activity ceases (v. 10).

73. The opening imperative ‘go,’ which summons followed by “eat your bread and drink your wine.”
74. These two actions are to be accompanied with “happiness” and “a cheerful heart.”
75. One should follow this formula “because God has already approved your works.”
76. God approves of the activities “already” suggesting that God is not opposed to these activities, nor do people need to gain divine approval.
77. It is the portion that God has given to humanity (cf. 5:19; 9:9).
78. In verse 8-9 Q. expands upon the call to enjoyment with an exhortation to “let your clothes be always white (clean), and let not oil be lacking on your head.”
79. White garments signify celebration along with ointment.
80. “Enjoy life with the woman you love” is a call to take pleasure in the divine institution of marriage.
81. The word “woman” is used without the definite article, but here is referring to not just any woman but a wife.
82. The fact that Q. has been negative toward women does not undermine the benefits associated with marriage.
83. Marriage is part of the ‘reward’ God has given to mankind.
84. This bright, positive call to enjoyment starting at verse 7 begins to turn dark as it moves into verses 9 & 10.
85. This is seen in the phrase “all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun.”
86. Even “toil” and its benefits do not bring a lasting profit (1:3; 2:11).
87. The term “fleeting” is *hebel* which suggests meaninglessness.
88. The *hebel* phrase denotes a note of melancholy and resigned finality.
89. Finally, the march towards darkness climaxes in verse 10 with a strong statement to make the most of every opportunity: “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”
90. However bright the prospects of life are the looming certainty of death overshadows the benefits of life.
91. Death ends all activity as Q. affirms that “there is not activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.”
92. There is no mental or physical activity in the realm of the dead.
93. Thus the urgency to enjoy God’s portion on earth is the mandate for those who are outside the plan of God.
94. Cf. Ps. 31:17 “Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I call on your name. Let the wicked (unbelievers) be put to shame, let them be silent in Sheol.” 9:17 “The wicked will be turned into Sheol, all who forget God.”; 49:14-15 “As sheep they are appointed for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd. And the upright shall rule over them in the morning. And their form shall be for Sheol to consume. So that they have no habitation. But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol. For He will receive me.”; 89:48 “What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?”; 139:8 “If I ascend to heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.”