

*all-consuming grave, what use is wisdom, in the face of death? The author acquired much wisdom and his wisdom remained with him (2:9), although wisdom can be ephemeral even in this life, in view of senility and the effects of aging, so grimly portrayed in chapter 12. But since man cannot really extend his life or control what happens after his death, all that his wisdom attains for him may fall into the hands of some foolish oblivion as soon as he dies, so, in the final analysis, what good is wisdom? The same fate (death) befalls everyone. No man has an heir he can really trust, since even one's posterity is also subject to death, which can, and eventually will, given sufficient time, play havoc with anyone's legacy. So death destroys life's meaning. Death makes one hate life (2:17). Death makes one hate one's work (2:18). Wise men, for all the work of their minds, are no better than mad men or fools because all alike die. Indeed, man is no better than the beasts who are also subject to the same fate. And man is ignorant! Man doesn't know what G-d has done or will do (3:11). Man doesn't know what will take place after his death. Man doesn't know if his human spirit awaits a fate different than animal extinction (3:20-22). Man needs G-d to give him some answers, because if death completely swallows and obliterates man, then Mankind that G-d created to work and till the ground and have dominion over the animals (Gn 1:26; 2:15) is himself no better than an animal. This is the problem. Death. What is the answer? Is there anything that death cannot obliterate? Yes, the author of Kohelet says.*

*The work of G-d. It endures and death has no dominion over it (3:14). But what is the work of G-d? What does G-d do, in the final analysis? G-d judges everyone, and he has appointed a time to judge the world (3:17). G-d judges the sinner by bringing all things he does into judgment (11:9). The sinner's life is dispensed with not as the sinner pleases but as G-d pleases, and the wages of sin that G-d pleases to dispense is a meaningless death (2:26). But death cannot obliterate this judgment that G-d metes out. Therein is where lies the hope of the resurrection from the dead, which this book questions but does not negate. The author does not merely say, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." In fact he says just the opposite. He says, "I've tried that, and I don't recommend it." G-d will bring everything into judgment (11:9); therefore, fear G-d (5:7). Do not live for this world because this world in itself is meaningless and empty and fallen and dying. Live for G-d and enjoy everything that He gives you as a gift from Him. Otherwise, there is no pleasure in this life. Death is man's lot. To be able to accept this as a fact of life is itself a gift from G-d. G-d is a mystery and creation was created good but it is now fallen (7:29). Man has limits to his wisdom. There is no power in man that will save him from the day of death. All he can say is that death cannot take away the good that the G-d-fearer has. "It will be well with those who fear G-d, because they stand in fear before Him." The author seems to be questioning and looking for something new under the sun (1:9-10), which was what the Moshiah is when he comes walking out of*

*the tomb in his glorious resurrection body. Otherwise, "there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol (the abode of the dead), to which you are going" (9:10). The righteous and the wise and their deeds are "in the hand of G-d" Who endures and Whose judgment not even death can thwart. This is the assurance of wisdom that makes the resurrection of the dead the vibrant hope and the only answer to the riddle that death poses to the author of this book. Philosophers like David Hume may say that they are not afraid to die, but put a pistol to their breasts, then threaten to kill them, and see (with Boswell and Johnson) how the wisest philosopher will behave. The illusions of genteel philosophy will not help us face the rude indignities of death when they brutally rap at the door. The problem of evil as it churns bitterly around in our minds often tempts us to doubt the existence of G-d, especially a G-d who is safely removed from both suffering and death and waits austere in heaven to judge us [but this is not the G-d of the Bible, the G-d in Moshiah, the G-d who as Immanu-El suffers with us in this world]. But if we think of death's inescapableness, where do we have to go with the guilt of our moral failures as our years quickly arraign us into the courts of the inevitable graveyard? Facing the universal evil of the human condition and the absurd, meaningless, sniper fire of death picking off everyone around us, we begin to feel a deep inner unhappiness and anxiety. We ask ourselves, what is lurking at the bottom of our fears—is it not the fear of death?*