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A Poetic Translation of Ecclesiastes, Chapters 9 & 10

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Abstract: Chapters nine and ten of Ecclesiastes in the original Hebrew stand as the most fascinating and enjoyable chapters to read for the translators. We therefore wanted to express that pleasure by adhering to the original Hebrew, for the most part, as literally as possible. Further, we suspect that we have found a way to express the poetic prose of the Hebrew best: we have expressed our translation in relatively strict iambic pentameter. We have broken the meter where it felt fitting to the translation and where it seemed otherwise impossible to adhere to iambic. Our translation differs in a few key respects from King James and other translations; we therefore hope that the reader will examine their favorite translation and compare it with ours. Familiarity with the rest of Ecclesiastes is not necessary to enjoy our excerpt. The Hebrew is side-by-side with our translation for the reader's convenience.

Acknowledgments: To King Solomon for his extraordinary wisdom.

Chapter 9

⁸ For *all* of this I've given to mine heart, Sifting through the righteous, the wise, and their Servants by God's Hand; neither love nor hate Are known by man, though all is yet to come.

² All is alike to all, one moment for The just and for the evil, for the good And for the pure and for the impure, for He who sacrifices and for he who Doesn't sacrifice; as is the good man, So is the sinner—in awe under oath.

All is evil, for all is done beneath
The sun, and all is but one event; and
Man's heart is also filled with evil as
Debauchery fills his heart, and it stalks
Him through life and even into his death.

The living, there is safety; for a dog
Living is better than a lion dead.

For there is knowledge among the living,
Of death; and the dead know nothing; they earn
No compensation; lost is their memory.

Their love, their hate, their envy's already lost.
They have no part in *all* beneath the sun.

So go, eat your bread with joy and drink with A peaceful heart. God is pleased with your deeds.

At all times shall your clothes be pure white, and May there always be oil on your head.

All the days of your meaningless life shall You witness with a woman whom you love, For all your meaningless days that He gave You under the sun; for He is a part of You, in life, in your toil, in *all*For that which you toil under the sun.

'All that your hand shall find that it can do Within its strength, *that* you shall do. For there Is no value in all that you do, nor Is there knowledge, when you go to Sheol.

אַ כִּי אֶת כָּל זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל לְבִּי, וְלָבוּר אֶת כָּל זֶה, אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחָּכָמִים וַצְּבָדֵיהָם, בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים; גַּם אַהָבָה גַם שִׂנְאָה, אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל, לְפְנֵיהֶם.

בּ הַכּּל כַּצְשֶׁר לַכּּל, מִקְרָה אֶחָד לַצַּדִּיק וְלָרָשֶׁע לַטוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא, בַּבָּשֶׁר לַעבוּנָה וְלַצְשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זֹבֵח: כַּטוֹב, כַּחֹטֶא הַנִּשְׁכָּע, כַּצְשֶׁר שְׁבוּעָה וְלַזֹּבֵח, וְלַצְשֶׂר אֵינֶנּוּ זֹבֵח: כַּטוֹב, כַּחֹטֶא הַנִּשְׁכָּע, כַּצְשֶׁר שְׁבוּעָה יָרֵא.

ג זָה רָע, בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי מִקְרֶה אֶחָד, לַכּּל; וְגַם לֵב בְּנֵי הָאָדָם מָלֵא רָע וְהוֹלֵלוֹת בִּלְכָבָם, בְּחַיֵּיהֶם, וְאַחַרִיו, אֶל הַמֵּתִים.

דּ כִּי מִי אֲשֶׁר יבחר (יְחָבַּר), אֶל כָּל הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בִּטְּחוֹן: כִּי לְכֶלֶב חַי הוּא טוֹב, מִן הָאַרְיֵה הַמֵּת.

דֹּכִי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים, שֶׁיָּמֶתוּ; וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמֶה, וְאֵין עוֹד הַ הַּיִּים שָׁכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח, זְכָרָם.

וֹ גַּם אַהְבָתָם גַּם שִׂנְאָתָם גַּם קִנְאָתָם, כְּבָר אָבָדָה וָחֵלֵק אֵין לַהָם עוֹד לְעוֹלַם, בָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה הַחַת הַשְּׁמֵש.

ז לֵךְ אֱכֹל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחְמֶךְ, וּשְׁתֵה בְלֶב טוֹב יֵינֶךְ: כִּי כְבָר, רָצָה הַאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂרָד.

ת בְּכֶל עֵת, יִהְיוּ בְגָדֶיךּ לְבָנִים; וְשֶׁמֶן, עַל רֹאשְׁךּ אַל יֶחְסָר. ט רְאֵה חַיִּים עִם אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְּתָּ, כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי הָבְלֶּךּ, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְדְּ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, כֹּל יְמֵי הָבְלֶךּ: כִּי הוּא חֶלְקְךּ, בַּחַיִּים, וּבַעֲמָלְדּ, אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה עָמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶש

י כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְדְּ, לַעֲשׁוֹת בְּכֹחֲדְּ עֲשֵׂה: כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחָשְׁבּוֹן, וַדַעַת וְחַכְמָה, בִּשְׁאוֹל, אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֶדְ שְׁמָה. To watch: not for the swift one the race is, Nor also goes to the hero the war, Nor also is left for the wise the bread, Nor also for the bright shall there be wealth, Nor also for the knowledgeable, grace. For the death knell shall toll for everyone. Tor man's unaware of time impending: As fish are trapped in an evil net, and As birds are caught in a snare, so it is That times of evil lying in wait for Man, fall very suddenly upon him.

Chapter 10

יא שַבְתִּי וְרָאֹה תַחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, כִּי לֹא לַקַּלִּים הַמֵּרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגִּבּוֹרִים הַמִּלְחָמָה וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֹשֶׁר, וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים, חֲן: כִּי עֵת וַפָּגַע, יִקְרָה אֶת כַּלָּם.

יב כִּי גַּם לֹא זֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת עִתּוֹ, כַּדָּגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בִּמְצוֹדָה רָעָה, וְכַצִּפֵּרִים, הָאֲחֻזוֹת בַּפָּח; כָּהָם, יוּקְשִׁים כְּנֵי הָאָדָם, לְעֵת רָעָה, כְּשֶׁתִּפּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם כִּתִאֹם.

יג גַם זה רָאִיתִי חָכְמָה, תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ; וּגְדוֹלָה הִיא, אֵלָי.

יד עיר קְטַנָּה, וַאֲנָשִׁים כָּה מְעָט; וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל, וְסָבַב אֹתָה, וּבַנַה עַלֵיהַ, מִצוֹדִים גִּדֹלִים.

טו וּמָצָא בָה, אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכָם, וּמִלַּט הוּא אֶת הָעִיר, בְּחָכְמָתוֹ; וְאַדֵּם לֹא זַכַר, אֶת הָאישׁ הַמּסְכַּן הָהוּא.

טז וְאָמַרְתִּי אָנִי, טוֹבָה חָכְמָה מִגְּבוּרָה; וְחָכְמַת הַמִּסְכֵּן בְּזוּיָה, וּדְבַרִיו אֵינַם נִשְׁמַעִים.

יז דְּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים, בְּנַחַת נִשְׁמָעִים מִזַעֲקַת מוֹשֵׁל, בַּבְּסִילִים.

י**ת** טוֹבָה חָכָמָה, מִכְּלֵי קָרָב; וְחוֹטֶא אֶחָד, יִאַבֵּד טוֹבָה הַרְבָּה.

אַ זְבוּבֵי מֶנֶת, יַבְאִישׁ יַבִּיעַ שֶׁמֶן רוֹקַחַ; יָקָר מֵחָכְמָה מִכָּבוֹד, סְכְלוּת מָעֵט.

ב לֵב חָכָם לִימִינוֹ, וְלֵב כְּסִיל לְשְׁמֹאלו. גֹ וְגַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ כשהסכל (כְּשֶׁסָּכָל) הֹלֵךְ, לְבּוֹ חָסֵר; וְאָמֵר לַכֹּל, סָכָל הוֹא.

[&]quot;I also saw this wisdom while under The sun and it did seem great unto me:

The people in it, surrounding and Then building fortifications against it.

Tound in the city was a poor, wise man, Who used his wisdom to evacuate The city; but none recalled this poor man.

And so I said thus: Wisdom trumps Boldness. But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and His words are never heard by anyone.
The words of wise men are spoken in peace—More than a governor's command to fools.

[&]quot;Wisdom triumphs over weapons of war But much good is lost by one sinner's hands.

^N Dead flies bring forth a putrid scent from the Apothecary's ointment; but he who Gains his prestige from wisdom and honor Suffers from at least a little folly.

The wise heart is on one's right; the fool's, left.
And the fool's heart is absent as he walks
His path; so it is that he clarifies
To all the extent of his foolishness.

⁷ If a ruler's spirit rises against you, Stay in your place; for yielding brings great sins.

[¬] I have seen much evil under the sun— Errors stay one step ahead of rulers.

¹ Foolishness is common in positions High and the wise reside in stations low.

'I've seen servants on horseback and princes Set foot upon the earth as mere servants.

The who digs a pit finds himself in it.

And snakes are neighbors of he who intrudes.

^oHe who moves stones will be enshrined in them; He who axes trees finds danger in them.

If the iron is blunt, and its surface Is edgeless, then strengthen your soldiers; and Wisdom brings to soldiers the upper hand.

"A serpent bites with barely a whisper And a sharpened tongue holds no advantage.

² The words from the mouth of a wise man are Gracious, but may be consumed by fool's lips.

The beginning of a fool's speech, folly, And the ending, evil debauchery.
And the fool shall speak of many things; and Man shall not know what there is to be, and What shall be after him—who can tell him?

¹⁰ The labor of fools wears on them, for he Does not know how to go to the city.

Woe to you, O land, when your king's a boy And your advisors dine in the morning.

"Blessings to you, O land, when your king is Liberated and your advisors feast At the proper time, for strength and not sloth.

"Gradually the building decays; and with Uncareful hands the home will decompose.

ד אָם רוּחַ הַמּוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךּ, מְקוֹמְךּ אַל תַּנַח: כִּי מַרְכֵּא, יַנִּיחַ חָטאים גִּדוֹלִים.

. בשׁ רָעָה, רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בִּשְׁגָגָה, שֶׁיּצָא מִלְפְנֵי הַשַּׁלִּיט.

וּ נָתַן הַסֶּכֵל, בַּמָּרוֹמִים רַבִּים; וַעֲשִׁירִים, בַּשֶׁפֵל יֵשֶׁבו.

זַ רָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים, עַל סוּסִים; וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כַּעֲבָדִים, עַל הָאָרֶץ.

ת חפר גומץ, בו יפול; ופרץ גדר, ישכנו נחש.

ַט מַסִּיעַ אֲבָנִים, יֵעָצֵב בָּהֶם; בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים, יִסְּכֶן בָּם.

י אָם קֵהָה הַבַּרְזֶל, וְהוּא לֹא פָנִים קּלְקַל, וַחֲיָלִים, יְגַבֵּר; וְיִתְרוֹן הַלְשֵׁיר, חָכְמָה.

יא אָם יִשֹׁךְ הַנְּחָשׁ, בְּלוֹא לָחַשׁ; וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן, לְבַעַל הַלְּשׁוֹן.

יב דָּבָרֵי פִי חַכַם, חֵן; וְשִׂפְתוֹת כִּסִיל, תִּבַלְעֲנוּוּ.

יג תְּחִלֵּת דְּבְרֵי פִּיהוּ, סִכְלוּת; וְאַחֲרִית פִּיהוּ, הוֹלֵלוּת רָעָה. יד וְהַסָּכָל, יַרְבֶּה דְבָרִים; לֹא יֵדַע הָאָדָם, מַה שֶׁיִהְיֶה, וַאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַתָּרִיו, מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ.

טוּ צְמַל הַכְּסִילִים, הְּיַגְּעָנוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע, לְלֶכֶת אֶל עִיר.

טז אִי לַךְ אֶרֶץ, שֶׁמַּלְכֵּךְ נָעַר; וְשָׂרִיךְ, בַּבּקֵר יֹאכֵלוּ.

יז אַשְׁרֵיךְ אָרֶץ, שֶׁמַּלְכֵּךְ כֶּן חוֹרִים; וְשָׂרַיְךְ בָּעֵת יֹאכֵלוּ, בִּגְבוּרָה ולֹא בשׁתי.

יח בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם, יִמַּך הַמְּקֶרֶה; וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדִים, יִדְלֹף הַבָּיִת.

"A meal is made for laughter and wine is Made for joy, but money answers all things.

⁵Even in thought should you not curse a king, Nor in your bedchamber should you curse The rich: for the fowl will carry your voice And the winged one will speak of the matter. . יש לְשְׂחוֹק עֹשִׂים לֶחֶם, וְיִין יְשַׂמַח חַיִּים; וְהַכֶּסֶף, יַעֲנֶה אֶת הַכּּל

ֶב גַם בְּמַדָּעֲדָ, מֶלֶדְ אַל תְּקַלֵּל, וּבְחַדְרֵי מִשְׁכָּבְדּ, אַל תְּקַלֵּל עָשִׁיר: כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמֵיִם יוֹלִיךְ אֶת הַקּוֹל, וּבַעַל הכנפים (כְּנָפַיִם) יַגֵּיד דָּבָר.