

Notes & Outlines

**ECCLESIASTES
SONG OF SOLOMON**

J. Vernon McGee

ECCLESIASTES

WRITER: Solomon

The book is the “dramatic autobiography of his life when he got away from God.”

TITLE: *Ecclesiastes* means “preacher” or “philosopher.”

PURPOSE:

The purpose of any book of the Bible is important to the correct understanding of it; this is no more evident than here. Human philosophy, apart from God, must inevitably reach the conclusions in this book; therefore, there are many statements which seem to contradict the remainder of Scripture. It almost frightens us to know that this book has been the favorite of atheists, and they (e.g., Volney and Voltaire) have quoted from it profusely. Man has tried to be happy without God, and this book shows the absurdity of the attempt. Solomon, the wisest of men, tried every field of endeavor and pleasure known to man; his conclusion was, “All is vanity.”

God showed Job, a righteous man, that he was a sinner in God’s sight. In Ecclesiastes God showed Solomon, the wisest man, that he was a fool in God’s sight.

ESTIMATIONS:

In Ecclesiastes, we learn that without Christ we cannot be satisfied, even if we possess the whole world — the heart is too large for the object. In the Song of Solomon, we learn that if we turn from the world and set our affections on Christ, we cannot fathom the infinite preciousness of His love — the Object is too large for the heart.

Dr. A. T. Pierson said, “There is a danger in pressing the words in the Bible into a positive announcement of scientific fact, so marvelous are some of these correspondencies. But it is certainly a curious fact that Solomon should use language entirely consistent with discoveries such as evaporation and storm currents (1:6, 7). Some have boldly said that Redfield’s theory of storms is here explicitly stated. Without taking such ground, we ask, who taught Solomon to use terms that readily accommodate facts? Who taught him that the movement of the winds, which seem to be so lawless and uncertain, is ruled by laws as positive as those which rule the growth of the plant; and that by evaporation, the waters that fall on the earth are continually rising again, so that the sea never overflows? Ecclesiastes 12:6 is a poetic description of death. The ‘silver cord’ describes the spinal marrow, the ‘golden bowl’ the basin which holds the brain, the ‘pitcher’ the lungs, and the ‘wheel’ the heart. Without claiming that Solomon was inspired to foretell the circulation of the blood, 26 centuries before

Harvey announced it, is it not remarkable that the language he uses exactly suits the facts — a wheel pumping up through one pipe to discharge through another?”

KEY WORD:

“Vanity” occurs 37 times. Most Bible teachers would give the phrase “under the sun,” which occurs 29 times.

OUTLINE:

- I. Problem stated: “All is vanity,”** Chapter 1:1-3
- II. Experiment made,** Chapters 1:4 — 12:12
Seeking satisfaction in the following:
 - A.** Science (the laws of nature), Chapter 1:4-11
 - B.** Wisdom and philosophy, Chapter 1:12-18
 - C.** Pleasure, Chapter 2:1-11
 - D.** Materialism (living for the “now”), Chapter 2:12-26
 - E.** Fatalism, Chapter 3:1-15
 - F.** Egoism, Chapters 3:16 — 4:16
 - G.** Religion, Chapter 5:1-8
 - H.** Wealth, Chapters 5:9 — 6:12
 - I.** Morality (the “good life”), Chapters 7:1 — 12:12
- III. Result of experiment,** Chapter 12:13, 14
All things under the sun are vanity.

A right relationship with God, in any age, through the way He has made, brings the only abiding satisfaction. *What a difference between the man “under the sun” and the man “in Christ” seated in the heavens far above all suns!*

COMMENT:

I. Problem stated: “All is vanity,” Chapter 1:1-3
Solomon pursued in this book every avenue, experience, and interest of man in this life to find satisfaction and fulfillment. Solomon as king had full freedom to carry on this experiment, and he was not hindered by financial or power limitations. He could go the limit in every direction. The result is “vanity” — emptiness. Frustration and dissatisfaction met him in every experiment. The conclusions are human, apart from the divine, made by the man *under* the sun. This is the ultimate end of man’s efforts apart from God.

Do not misunderstand what is meant by “inspiration” when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the words of Scripture, not always the thought that is expressed. The

context should be considered and attention paid to the person who made the statement, and under what circumstances (e.g., in the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the *record* of the event is inspired, but the *act* of Judas was not God-inspired, but was satanic).

Keep in mind that the conclusions in each experiment are human, not God's truth. This is man *under* the sun, entirely separated from the "Sun of righteousness" who is the Son of God.

II. Experiment made, Chapters 1:4 — 12:12

Seeking satisfaction in the following:

A. Science (the laws of nature), Chapter 1:4-11

v. 4 — Earth is permanent; man is temporary. Continuity of mankind is maintained through births.

vv. 5-7 — The laws of nature are as fixed as the material universe itself. Some remarkable scientific statements are made here.

v. 8 — This is a good verse to hang on the TV set. Man cannot exhaust the exploration of the universe. The more he learns reveals that there is still more to learn. This is frustrating. The physical universe is too big for little man.

vv. 9-11 — The statement that there is no new thing under the sun seems to be untrue in this age of "gadgetry," but it is true. It is said that the atom bomb is new, but the atom has been around a long time. Actually, the atom is older than man, although man did not know it existed for a long time. All man has accomplished is to make the little atom a very difficult neighbor. The nosy human should have let sleeping dogs lie.

A computer brain and electronic nervous system can bring to man no deep and abiding satisfactions.

B. Wisdom and philosophy, Chapter 1:12-18

v. 13 — The experiment.

v. 14 — All systems of philosophy lead up a blind alley.

v. 15 — Philosophy and psychology cannot change human nature, nor can they correct the old nature of man. As the twig is bent, so the tree grows.

v. 18 — Joy and satisfaction do not increase in ratio to the increase of knowledge.

C. Pleasure, Chapter 2:1-11

vv. 1-3 — This is the philosophy of hedonism, teaching that pleasure is the chief goal of life and that the gratification of all the appetites of the body is the fulfillment of moral obligation. Notice that he tries comedy — anything for a laugh.

vv. 4-7 — He builds around himself all the comforts of this life.

v. 8 — He has plenty of spending money and goes in for entertainment.

v. 10 — Solomon tries everything a man can try for pleasure.

v. 11 — When he adds it all up, it equals zero. The man under the sun finds no satisfaction permanently — only “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25).

D. Materialism (living for the “now”), Chapter 2:12-26

vv. 12-16 — He sees that actually there is no permanent difference between the man with the high IQ and low IQ, educated and uneducated. They both come to the same end.

vv. 17-20 — If he accumulates great wealth, he will leave it to an offspring who will be either wise or a fool.

vv. 21-23 — Even the wise man cannot avoid sorrow, sickness, and death.

vv. 24-26 — The best thing to do is to eat and drink, concentrate on the here and now, and get all he can out of this life. Live for the now and forget tomorrow. However, even this does not satisfy, although it is better than LSD.

E. Fatalism, Chapter 3:1-15

vv. 1-8 — Too often men attempt to draw some Christian truth from these verses. However, this is the rawest kind of pagan fatalism. If this were true, man would be no better than a robot, zombie, computer, machine or any other push-button gadget. This type of thinking allows no room for the free will of man and the operation of the grace and mercy of God. Even the time of death can be changed (see Exodus 32:10 and Isaiah 38).

v. 11 — God has let man put the world in his heart so that he might see that the world does not satisfy — his heart is still empty.

v. 14 — Although God’s will is primary, fatalism leaves no place for His mercy and grace. God answers prayer.

F. Egoism, Chapters 3:16 — 4:16

(Excessive love of self. Individual self-interest is the *sum-mum bonum* of life.)

Chapter 3

v. 16 — All men are wicked. You can't trust anyone. This is a cynical view of the human race, but it is reasonably accurate.

vv. 18, 19 — This view does not accept the optimist's conclusions. Evolution says that man *was* a beast. Egoism says that man *is* a beast. This view causes the individual to despise others. It has produced the caste and class systems in all the countries of the world.

v. 20 — He is speaking only of the body. Even Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the soul *sleeps*, not that it turns to dust.

v. 21 — Man is different from the beast.

v. 22 — The only thing worthwhile is for man to identify himself with his own works. This is the ancient version of the hippy and yippy philosophy.

Chapter 4

v. 1 — The egoist rebels against the establishment.

v. 6 — This man wants to do his own thing.

vv. 9-11 — This is the only reason for teaming up with another.

v. 16 — This philosophy leads to a meaningless existence.

G. Religion, Chapter 5:1-8

Religion has damned the world more than any other thing. Look what the pagan religions did for peoples in the past. Look at India, China, and the Muslim world. Look at the Roman Catholic world. Look at liberal Protestantism. Multitudes have joined churches since World War II to get away from God and from establishing a personal relationship to Christ.

v. 1 — Be religious and go to church, but have as little to do with it as possible.

v. 2 — Do not make any decision under stress of emotion. Cry at the movies, but not in church. Don't sign a pledge; don't agree to accept an office.

vv. 4-6 — God has a great deal to say about the importance He attaches to vows (see author's book, *Learning Through Leviticus*,

chapter 27).

v. 7 — Dreams and words are no substitute for a personal relationship with God.

v. 8 — A Christian should be involved in a poverty program.

H. Wealth, Chapters 5:9 — 6:12

Chapter 5

v. 10 — Wealth is not wrong in itself. It is the *love* of money that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). To accumulate wealth for wealth's sake is wrong. The miser thinks dollars are flat so they can be stacked; the spendthrift thinks they are round so they can be rolled.

v. 12 — The poor man is often happier than the rich man.

Chapter 6

vv. 1-12 — The rich man can eat only three meals a day, sleep on one bed at a time, and cannot live longer than the poor man. The rich man's life is but a shadow. There is no pocket in a shroud. Job, a rich man, said that he came here with nothing and he was leaving the same way. It is rather empty to give one's life to the pursuit of that which does not bring happiness here and has no value hereafter.

I. Morality (the "good life"), Chapters 7:1 — 12:12

The do-gooder, going down the middle of the road on the freeway of life. Babbit on Main Street in the Big City, doing business under a neon sign, but living in suburbia in a sedate, secluded, and exclusive neighborhood, taking it easy.

Chapter 7

v. 1 — A good reputation and a long eulogy at the funeral is the *summum bonum* of life.

v. 2 — From the knife and fork club to the funeral service, all is done in a dignified manner.

v. 3 — Laughing all the way to the cemetery.

v. 4 — Living in the presence of death.

vv. 5-29 — Take it easy; walk softly; don't be extreme; avoid the left and the right; go down the middle; compromise; don't fight — switch.

Chapter 8 — Neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. He observes

that there does not seem to be too much difference between the wicked and the righteous (vv. 14, 15).

vv. 2-5 — Obey the law. Keep out of trouble. Do not become involved.

v. 8 — All men are equal at death. Although they may not be born equal, they die equal.

v. 9 — Notice “under the sun.” This is man’s view apart and contrary to the viewpoint of God.

v. 11 — You can’t get by with it. Men are deceived when they sin because of the fact that God does not judge immediately.

Chapter 9 — Man’s wrong conclusions and pseudo-philosophy due to his ignorance, prejudice, and false premises. “Under the sun” occurs four times in this chapter.

vv. 1, 2 — All will arrive at the same place. All will eventually be saved.

v. 3 — Death brings about total integration. All are equal.

v. 4 — While there is life, there is hope.

v. 5 — This does not teach soul sleep. He is speaking only of the body (see v. 10).

v. 9 — They lived happily ever after.

v. 10 — This is a clear reference to the body. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” do it now, for it cannot be done in the grave. The hand belongs to the body, not to the soul. It is the body that is put to sleep in the grave; it is the body that is raised (see notes on 1 Thesalonians 4:13-18). The spirit or soul goes to God (see Ecclesiastes 12:7).

vv. 11, 12 — Life is a matter of luck or a game of chance.

Chapter 10 — The injustice of life suggests the adoption of a moderate course.

v. 1 — One night on the town means a lifetime in the darkness of disease or death. A mother spends twenty-one years teaching a son to be wise, and some girl comes along and makes a fool out of him in five minutes.

v. 7 — To work hard, save your money, and study late does not always mean that you will become a success. The fool next door may

inherit a million.

vv. 8, 9 — Don't try to get even.

v. 11 — See Romans 3:13, 14.

v. 19 — The one who pays the fiddler calls the tunes.

v. 20 — Little brother is watching.

Chapter 11 — This is the best course to follow for the moral man.

v. 1 — Don't be afraid of doing good, although the reward may be late in arriving.

v. 3 — Rain is predicted. Carry an umbrella. It is hard to move a redwood after it falls. It is always best to have a clear understanding in the beginning.

v. 6 — Take a chance, provided you know what you are doing.

v. 8 — Life for a senior citizen is not all that the brochures say it is.

v. 9 — Youth is the time of opportunity, joy, and decision. Youth turns to Christ more easily than old age. The time to make a decision for Christ is in one's youth.

Chapter 12

vv. 2-7 — A poetic picture of old age, but not a pretty picture.

v. 2 — Failing eyesight makes it appear that the sun, moon and stars are getting dimmer. Time flies and one sad experience follows another — clouds return after rain.

v. 3 — “Keepers of the house shall tremble” refers to the legs. The old person begins to totter.

“Strong men” are the shoulders that are no longer erect.

“Grinders” are the teeth.

“Those that look out of the windows” refers to failing eyesight.

v. 4 — “Doors...shut in the streets” refers to being hard of hearing.

“Sound of the grinding is low” refers to the tongue. The voice of old age gets thin.

“Shall rise up at the voice of the bird” — it took an alarm clock to wake him before, now the cheep of a bird disturbs his sleep.

“Daughters of music shall be brought low” indicates that he can no longer sing in the choir, cannot carry a tune.

v. 5 — “Afraid of that which is high” — things that formerly did not frighten him.

“Fears shall be in the way” — he no longer enjoys traveling.

“Almond tree shall flourish” — our senior citizen is getting grey-haired, if his hair has not fallen out.

“Grasshopper shall be a burden” — little things annoy him.

“Desire shall fail” — romance is gone.

“Man goeth to his long home” — death comes.

v. 6 — “Silver cord” is the spinal cord,

“Golden bowl” is the head,

“Pitcher” is the lungs,

“Wheel” is the heart.

v. 7 — There is no soul sleep here. The body sleeps, but the spirit or soul goes to God.

v. 12 — Writing and study are not an end in themselves.

III. **Result of experiment**, Chapter 12:13, 14

All things under the sun are vanity.

When as a child, I laughed and wept,

Time crept;

When as a youth, I dreamed and talked,

Time walked;

When I became a full-grown man,

Time ran;

When older still I daily grew,

Time flew;

Soon I shall find in traveling on

Time gone.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

v. 13 — “Fear God” is the message of Proverbs also. In view of the experiment made “under the sun,” the wise thing is to fear God, which means to reverence, worship, and obey Him.

To “keep his commandments” would mean to meet God’s conditions for salvation — in any age — grounded on faith in God.

For Cain it meant bringing a lamb;

For Abraham it meant believing God’s promises;

For the people of Israel it meant approaching God through sacrifice in the tabernacle and temple;

For us it is to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

v. 14 — God will judge every man, for every man is a sinner who is guilty before God. Christ bore a judgment death. Our sins are either on Christ by faith in Him, or else we must come before the Great White Throne for judgment.

SONG OF SOLOMON

WRITER: Solomon (1:1)

Solomon was the author of 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), but we have only one (Song of Songs); as the name would indicate, it is the best.

KEY WORDS: “Beloved,” the name for Him; “love,” the name for her.

KEY VERSES:

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; he feedeth among the lilies. (6:3)

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be rejected. (8:7)

THE MEANING:

The Song of Solomon is a parabolic poem. The *interpretation*, not the inspiration, causes the difficulty — although there are some who actually feel it should not be in the Bible. Since it is in the canon of Scripture, it is the great neglected book of the Bible. Often young preachers are counseled not to use it until they become old men. The Jews called it the Holy of Holies of Scripture. Origen and Jerome tell us that the Jews would not permit their young men to read it until they were thirty years old. Surely any fragile flower requires delicate handling. There have been four different and important meanings found in this book:

1. It sets forth the glory of wedded love; declaring the sacredness of marital relationship and that marriage is a divine institution. To our occidental minds, it borders on the vulgar, but when it is compared to other oriental poetry, it is indeed tame and lacks the splash of color and extravagant terms which characterize oriental (e.g., Persian) poetry. The Jews taught that it sets forth the heart of a satisfied husband and a devoted wife.

2. It sets forth the love of Jehovah for Israel. The prophets spoke of Israel as the wife of Jehovah.

These two interpretations have been set forth by the scribes and rabbis of Israel and have been accepted by the church. However, there are two other interpretations:

3. It is a picture of Christ and the church. The church is the bride of Christ, a familiar figure of Scripture (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 21).

4. It depicts the communion of Christ and the individual believer. The soul's communion with Christ is here set forth.

“The Song of Solomon tests the spiritual capacity of the reader.”

STORY OUTLINE:

Since this book is a series of scenes, in a drama that is not told in chronological sequence, we shall make no attempt to outline the book.

The popular interpretation, that it tells the story of a girl kidnapped by Solomon, is repugnant. The book of Dr. H. A. Ironside is especially recommended, as it contains the only adequate and satisfying interpretation that I have seen. The key to the story is found in 8:11. The story is of a poor family of Ephraim in which there is a girl who is a sort of Cinderella. The poverty of the family forces her into the vineyards where she meets the young shepherd. The story of their love is first told. Then he leaves her with the promise that he will return. He is absent for a long time, and she despairs of his return. One day, the electrifying word is shouted along the way that King Solomon is coming by. She is not interested and takes no further notice until word is brought to her that King Solomon wants to see her. She is puzzled until she is brought into his presence where she recognizes him as her shepherd lover. He takes her to his palace in Jerusalem where most of the song takes place.

COMMENT:

The setting of the drama is the palace in Jerusalem, and some of the scenes are flashbacks to a previous time. There is a reminder here of the Greek drama where a chorus talks back and forth to the protagonists of the play. The daughters of Jerusalem carry along the tempo of the story. Some of these dialogues were evidently to be sung. Several lovely scenes are introduced at Jerusalem which find a counterpart in the church.

When reading the Song of Solomon, take off the shoes from the natural man, for the ground on which you stand is spiritual ground.

Chapter 1 — The drama opens at Baal-hamon, in the hill country of Ephraim.

vv. 2-4 — The bride, in the palace in Jerusalem, reviews in her mind the meeting with the shepherd who was Solomon.

v. 5 — She was sunburned, in contrast to the ladies of the court.

v. 6 — She was forced by her brothers to keep the vineyard. Her “own vineyard” was her own beauty — she hadn’t been able to go to the beauty salon.

v. 7 — The shepherd she met did not seem to have any sheep.

v. 8 — The shepherd is evasive.

vv. 9-17 — She falls in love with the shepherd, whom she later finds to be Solomon, the king.

Chapter 2

vv. 1-7 — A love scene in the palace.

v. 1 — The bride speaks of herself. She is not boasting, but compares herself to the lowly and humble flowers of that land.

v. 2 — The bridegroom contrasts the lily with the thorns to reveal his love for her.

vv. 3-7 — The bride speaks of her love for the bridegroom. Any relationship of the believer to Christ must rest upon His love for the believer and the believer's love for Him.

vv. 8-17 — The return of the bridegroom after a trip abroad. The bride's happy anticipation of his return should be the attitude of the believer toward the return of Christ.

v. 8 — "The voice" of the bridegroom is heard first (John 5:25; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

v. 13 — "Fig tree" suggests the nation Israel.

v. 16 — This is the highest spiritual expression of any relationship with Christ. It is the high note of the Rapture, the catching up of the believer to be with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This section puts into the lovely language of poetry the meaning of the Rapture. Read it again and again, and memorize it.

Chapter 3

vv. 1-5 — The bride *dreams of the bridegroom* while he is away. She seeks him at night and is found by the watchman. At last, she finds the bridegroom.

vv. 6-11 — Solomon in all his glory enters Jerusalem with his bride.

Chapter 4

vv. 1-15 — *The love song of the bridegroom*. This is the expression of deep desire and strong passion. Compare v. 7 with Ephesians 5:25-27. It is impossible for the believer to know (vv. 9, 10) how much Christ loves him (Revelation 2:4).

v. 16 — The response of the bride (Isaiah 53:11).

Chapter 5

vv. 1-3 — The bride is *reluctant to open the door* to the bridegroom after she has retired.

vv. 4, 5 — A lovely custom of that day was for the lover to place sweet smelling myrrh inside the handle of the bride's door. When she rose up and placed her hand on the handle, she discovered the myrrh and knew he had been there and gone.

v. 6 — While he was out looking for lost sheep, she was sleeping. This is a fitting picture of Christ and the contemporary church.

vv. 7, 8 — The *bride goes looking for the bridegroom*. She meets the daughters of Jerusalem, inquires of them, and waxes eloquent concerning him.

v. 9 — They are skeptical and cynical. The world asks us, "Who is Christ? Is He any different from other religious leaders?"

vv. 10-16 — She knows him and knows he is different. This is a detailed and glowing description of him, which reveals that she both knows him and loves him.

Chapter 6

v. 1 — The daughters of Jerusalem are so impressed by her glowing description that they are turned from skeptics to believers.

vv. 2, 3 — The bride continues her praise of him.

vv. 4-10 — The bridegroom expresses his love and affection for the bride.

vv. 11, 12 — The bride responds.

v. 13 — The daughters of Jerusalem respond.

Chapter 7

vv. 1-5 — The daughters of Jerusalem praise the beauty of the bride. (See the description of the church as the bride of Christ in Revelation 21.)

vv. 6-13 — An antiphony of love by the bride and bridegroom.

Chapter 8 — The love song concludes.

vv. 5-7 — The bridegroom speaks of love and gives the theme of the song.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

- Darby, J. N. *Synopses of the Books of the Bible*. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.
- DeHaan, Richard W. *The Art of Staying Off Dead-End Streets*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Radio Bible Class, 1974. (A study in Ecclesiastes.)
- Gaebelein, Arno C. *The Annotated Bible*. 1917. Reprint. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1971.
- Glickman, S. Craig. *A Song for Lovers*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976. (A fine treatment of Song of Solomon.)
- Gray, James M. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1906.
- Hadley, E. C. *The Song of Solomon*. Sunbury, Pennsylvania: Believer's Bookshelf, n.d.
- Ironside, H. A. *Addresses on the Song of Solomon*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1933. (An excellent treatment.)
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- Jensen, Irving L. *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1974. (A self-study guide.)
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*. Chicago, Illinois. Moody Press, 1979.
- Kelly, William. *Lectures on the Song of Solomon*. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.
- Miller, Andrew. *The Song of Solomon*. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.
- Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Handbook*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966.
- Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. I. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1981. (The Old Testament is covered in two volumes by this eminent Hebrew scholar. Highly recommended.)

These notes, prepared by J. Vernon McGee, are for the purpose of giving assistance to the listeners of the THRU THE BIBLE RADIO program. They are to be used with the Bible and will be more meaningful as you look up all the Scripture references. Due to the necessary brevity of both notes and broadcasts, a list of recommended books is included for those wanting a more detailed study. These books may be obtained from a Christian library or bookstore or ordered from the publishers.



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