

# Preface to Ecclesiastes

## The Value of a Mirror

A reflection in the mirror is so accurate, that it is now standard equipment in nearly every home, restaurant and car in the land. A quick glance and we have a nearly exact replica of what is before it. Although only looking at a piece of glass with silver placed on the back, our eyes focus on the clear image reflected within.

## The Physical Creation is a Mirror

In the same way that a mirror reflects the image placed before it, the physical creation was designed to reflect God's image for us.

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, Rom 1:20*

What none can see directly with the eye, can be "understood" by looking at the "mirror" God designed and created for that purpose. The created universe accurately reflects His eternal power into our hearts. God encourages us see in "the things that are made" "His eternal power and Godhead" in other words to see what it means to be Divine. By considering the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens.

*The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world. Ps 19:1-4*

By viewing the wonders of life under the sea, the varieties of plants, or the multitudes of animal and insects, God's intelligence, wisdom, power and magnificence are manifested.

## Mirrors with Blemishes do not Accurately Reflect the Image

A precisely formed glass with careful placement of silver creates a "mirror" image of what is placed before it. But any blemish or curvature in the glass, distorts the image it reflects. Such a mirror creates a humorous caricature of ourselves. Our face swells or narrows to a degree where we are unrecognizable. Such a mirror has a humorous use in the fun house, but has no other practical purpose. It does not create an accurate image of what we really look like. If others cannot see us except through that mirror, they will have no real idea of our true image.

## **Physical Creation is "Blemished"**

Just as there are blemishes in mirrors that distort the image, so also there are blemishes in the physical creation that can distort our image of the Godhead. These "blemishes" are not the result of any reflection on God's wisdom or power, they came into being when God cursed the earth because of sin. Such "blemishes" have often been hurled against Christians by unbelievers. They take these "inaccurate reflections" and charge God with them. If God is all powerful why doesn't He stop suffering? If God is good why did He create suffering?

Why do beautiful butterflies get caught in spider webs?	Why do lions kill both man and beast?
Why do some serpents have such deadly poison?	Why did God create spiders with poison?
Why are sharks have razor teeth and powerful jaws?	Why is gravity so dangerous?
Why is man susceptible to so many diseases?	Why is man so cruel to his fellow man?
Why do diseases create such pain and suffering?	Why are infants born with deformities?

Each of these legitimate questions leads to some deep meditation on the part of the honest and humble Christian. Yet God has answered all of these questions in a few simple passages. First, the world we live in is not the world God created. Genesis three lies between their world and our

world. This is one of the most important thing Ecclesiastes will bring to light. Genesis 1-2 gives the accurate reflection, while Ecclesiastes gives us the distorted one.

## God's Original Creation had no Blemishes

A completely accurate reflection of God in the material creation was only seen by Adam and Eve before they sinned. God was very clear that everything He originally created was good. Seven times in Genesis 1 God noted that what He was creating was good(1:4,10,12,18,21,25) and after He completed everything He passed his assessment of the entire material creation:

*Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Gen 1:31*

Though no one but Adam and Eve ever saw this beautiful world God made, God testified it was “good:”

*tob... This word, in its various forms, is used in a very extensive sense: of that which is *good to the senses, agreeable, pleasant, and desirable; beautiful, fair...* of that which is *useful, fit, and suitable...* it is also applied to things *prosperous and abundant; to happiness and joyfulness; to advantage and pleasure...*” (Wilson OT Word studies 197)*

*tob 2896, “good; favorable; festive; pleasing,; pleasant; well; better; right; best.” This word appears in Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic, Ugaritic, and Old South Arabic. Occurring in all periods of biblical Hebrew, it appears about 559 times.... This adjective denotes “good” in every sense of that word. For example, tob is used in the sense “pleasant” or “delightful”: ... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)*

The heavens and the earth as God originally planned and created was perfect. Everything was good to the senses, pleasant, and fair. It was a place of prosperity and abundance where happiness and joy abounded. It was prosperous, abundant and delightful and created in such a way as to bring happiness and enjoyment. Yet not only does God pronounce it good, but good in every sense of that word! God even added “**very**” to emphasize just how “**good**” it really was!

3966 *me` od-* as an adverb: 1) *exceedingly, much* as a substantive: 2) might, force, *abundance* as a masculine noun: 3) muchness, force, abundance, *exceedingly...* b) *exceedingly, greatly, very* (idioms *showing magnitude or degree*) 1) *exceedingly...* (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

## A Portal into that World

The creation as it originally came from the loving hands of God, the one that would have perfectly reflected His “*everlasting power and Godhead*” only existed until the time of the curse. But it was an exceedingly beautiful world. It perfectly met all God’s expectations. It was **exceeding beautiful**, **abundantly pleasant**, and **most excellent!** To help us imagine how beautiful it was, He offers a few glimpses into it. Gen 1:29-30:

### 1. Every Created thing Ate Vegetation

*And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. Gen 1:29-31*

When we carry this to it’s logical conclusion(necessary inference), what kind of world do we see? God clearly revealed that man, every beast, every bird, and everything that creeps on the earth in which there is life(insects, bacteria, rodents, reptiles etc.) all ate “*every green herb for food.*” What does this mean? How does that compare to the world we now live in? What kind of world would it be where all things at herbs?

**Every beast of the earth**(including lions, tigers, leopards). There were no carnivores if **all** at every green herb!

**Every bird of the air**(hawks buzzards, eagles, etc.). There were no birds that preyed or ate the

flesh of other animals.

**Everything that creeps on the earth** If everything means everything then all reptiles; amphibians, rodents, insects, bacteria, and mammals all ate herbs.

**Everything that has the breath of life** if we are tempted to limit it in some way, God makes it clear that everything that has the breath of life is included.

Imagine the difference this one change would make! How peaceful and lovely that world was! Everything in the jungle ate herbs like the sheep! All the insects ate herbs like the grasshopper and did not prey on one another. A spider web was for seeds not insects, there was no stalking and no danger. There would be no illnesses for all the bacteria and viruses that cause them only ate herbs! All that now has life was benign, docile and good. No need for claws to rend, fangs to inject, poisons to kill, stings to protect, or webs to capture. All existed in a beautiful harmony. What a different reflection of God this world gave before Adam and Eve sinned!

## **2. Man had Dominion**

*26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." .... 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Gen 1:26; 28*

Man was given complete control and rule over birds, cattle, all the earth, every creeping thing, fish of the sea, and every living thing that moves on the earth. Again, since we have no way to gauge, since we have never seen it, we have to carefully consider the implications. If man has dominion and there is no possibility of death, then physics and chemistry must have been different. In our world it is impossible to have dominion. Things more powerful and sinister than man can take that dominion away in a moment. Fire, heat, cold, gravity, and poisons can bring an end to all dominion for every man. Hence if man had full dominion these things must have been different. Ecclesiastes will make clear what these difference are.

## **Ecclesiastes Described the Creation after the Curse**

God had sternly warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they ignored Him. How great must their agony have been to be cast from the garden, and to witness the harsh changes their sin caused. God later records the "new" condition of the world after the curse of sin entered it:

*2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." . . ." 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. Eccl 1:2, 13-15*

Comparing this passage to Genesis 1-2 reveals the difference between the world before sin and the world after. Before sin entered the world, God saw that everything was very good. Yet in Ecclesiastes, God revealed that everything is now vanity and striving after the wind. Man's task is now a grievous one as he cannot straighten what is crooked, and all the things that are lacking cannot be counted. The Spirit of God now calls everything "**vain.**" Things are vain when they have no meaning, no purpose, or no value. This is God's verdict on the universe after it the curse. It is "all vanity."

*hebel "breath; vanity; idol." Cognates of this noun occur in Syriac, late Aramaic, and Arabic. All but 4 of its 72 occurrences are in poetry (37 in Ecclesiastes). First, the word represents human "breath" as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath]" Second, *hebel* means something *meaningless and purposeless*: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" Eccl. 1:2. Third, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they*

have provoked me to anger with their vanities..." Deut. 32:21—the first occurrence. (Vine's 1892)

Everything that had been very good was twisted and perverted beyond repair. Some small thing was removed from each perfect work of God that made it bad. Animals lost their docile nature and were given a desire to prey. The insect realm was changed from creatures with the nature of butterflies to preying creatures (scorpions, spiders) and carrion creatures (flies). Bacteria and viruses began to feed on the bodies of other life causing illness and death. Physical laws were changed and twisted to allow death. Man's body became prone to the affects of poisons. Forces in nature were changed. No longer would man live in a paradise with dominion. Gravity, wind, weather, water, heat and cold were all modified. No longer benign they became fearful. God sums all this up in 1:15: **"What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted."** The term "crooked" is defined:

5791 *avath-* to be bent, to be crooked, to bend, to make crooked, to pervert a) (Piel) 1) to make crooked, to falsify, to pervert, to subvert 2) to bend, to make crooked. (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

God bent, subverted, and made crooked things that had originally been created "straight."

8626 *taqan-* to equalize, to make straight, to become straight a) (Qal) to become straight b) (Piel) to make straight, to put straight, to arrange in order, to set in order. (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

What God created as recorded in the first chapter of Genesis was arranged in order, it was straight, and would have worked perfectly. It would have been something delightful and pleasant. But now these things have been made crooked, and it is not within the power of mankind to straighten them back out. This is why everything is now vanity. Added to this is the fact that what is "lacking" can't be added up.

2642 *checrown-* to diminish, cut short; to be diminished, to fail, to be wanting; to want, to be in want, to suffer need... adj. wanting, destitute of... deficiency...poverty..." Wilson, OT Word Studies p 472)

When God cursed the earth, He took multitudes upon multitudes of things away. There is no way to even count up the number of things that are now "*diminished, cut short, and wanting.*" God revealed that He had taken a little something out of everything. That which is necessary for things to be complete is no longer within the power of man to bring about.

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Rom 8:18-23*

The book of Ecclesiastes was therefore dedicated to revealing to us that there is little point to putting a great deal of focus on this life. We must focus instead on:

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. Eccl 12:13*

The book of Ecclesiastes was written to explain to us what we can expect out of "*life under the sun*" (a phrase used 28 times in this book). What can we expect out of our physical lives here? What things will still work and bring satisfaction and enjoyment? What things are a waste of time for the idealism in our youth. Good causes abound! But most of them lead to "*a striving after wind*" (a phrase used 9 times in the book), and to "*vanity*" (used 37 times in the book). If we want to keep our heads on straight, if we want to get all the enjoyment we can out of life and remove from ourselves as much frustration and bitterness as possible, then we must take this book to heart.

A summary of the book (Remember this all has to do with physical life, not spiritual!)

Chapter One: Because life "*under the sun*" is under a curse, "*all is vanity.*"  
Chapter Two: Chasing after pleasure, material possessions and labor is vanity.  
Chapter Three: There is a time for everything under heaven. Man no longer has dominion.  
Chapter Four: Man's freewill leads to grave oppressions in life.

Chapter Five: General proverbs; Striving for wealth is folly.  
Chapter Six: The uncertainty of physical life/death makes all things “under the sun” vain.  
Chapter Seven: General Proverbs.  
Chapter Eight: Civil government must be obeyed.  
Chapter Nine: Death - the great equalizer of all.; Strive to be diligent and wise.  
Chapter Ten: General Proverbs  
Chapter Eleven: Instructions to the youth about how to live their life.  
Chapter Twelve: Remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come.

One of the most wonderful sides of this book are God’s instructions on what will make us truly happy:

- ◆ Wisdom excels folly. 2:13
- ◆ Nothing better than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. It is of God. 2:24
- ◆ There is a time for everything and you must work within this time frame. 3:1-11
- ◆ Nothing better than to rejoice and do good, eat and drink and see good in your labor. 3:12-13
- ◆ Nothing better than for man to be happy in his activities for that is his lot. 3:22
- ◆ The sleep of the working man is pleasant. 5:12
- ◆ It is good & fitting to eat and drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor, this is his reward. 5:18
- ◆ In the day of prosperity be happy and in the day of adversity consider. 7:14
- ◆ Nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat, drink and to be merry. 8:15
- ◆ Enjoy life with the woman whom you love for this is your reward in life. 9:9
- ◆ Rejoice in youth, follow the impulses of the heart and desire of your eyes, but know God will bring them to judgement. 11:9
- ◆ Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. 12:1

## I. WRITER

From the time of its writing up until the early reformation(beginning with Martin Luther), there had been a universal acceptance that Solomon was the author of the book. Martin Luther seriously questioned this opinion, and was soon followed by many others. The arguments on both sides are interesting, but not certainly not inspired by the Spirit of God! Keil & Delitzsch offer 28 pages of information to prove Solomon could not have been the author, the Pulpit Commentary uses 15 pages to draw the same conclusion, while Leupold takes only 8. Adam Clarke compromises by saying that Solomon wrote most of the words and a later inspired writer put it together. Gray & Adams says the author is unknown, but “assumes the character of Solomon.” Matthew Henry thinks Solomon wrote it after he repented of the sins recorded in **I Kings 11.**

It is obvious from the above that the opinions of men have waxed eloquent on this book. We may want to believe that Solomon wrote this after he repented of his sins and that he is now safe in heaven, there is nothing in I Kings to give any hope to it. Solomon’s life ends fighting God’s newly appointed king Jeroboam(**I Kings 12:40**). Not exactly a good sign of remorse or repentance.

Say what they will, those who reject Solomon as the author must admit that his wisdom and influence were used:

*I have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge. Ecc. 1:16*

One is forced to either reject it as not true, or believe that it was Solomon because God promised he would be wiser than all before or after(**I Kings 3:11-13**)

*I made my words great, I build myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes I had great possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. **Ecc. 2:4-9***

Again, the things spoken of Solomon in First Kings clearly shows a parallel between the statements above and those of Solomon. **I Kings 4:20-34** speaks of his wisdom and his wealth. **I Kings 10:14-29** speaks of the silver and the gold which he possessed.

The strongest reason for concluding that Solomon was the author comes from above. No King in Jerusalem from the time of Solomon on had as much opportunity to seek the things out that are posed in the two scriptures above as did Solomon. No king was wiser, no king was wealthier or had more servants than did Solomon. If it was not Solomon, then it is almost dishonest for him to speak in this manner. Those who seek to date this book to the time of Malachi have much to explain when they affirm it was not Solomon. Not only this, but consider also the final chapter:

*And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright--words of truth. Ecc. 12:9-10*

This too fits well with the words of First Kings.

*He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of tress, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. And men of all nations from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. **I Kings 4:32-34***

These are the internal evidences that Solomon was the author of this book. Against this stand nearly every scholar who has written a commentary on the book. Almost without exception beginning from Luther and continuing to the present day, there has be a denial that Solomon was the author. The proofs are actually not very convincing though. Delitzsch’s main argument are the Hebrew words in the book. He believes that some of the words used in the book were not in use during Solomon’s day. That some of the words in Ecclesiastes are not found in Proverbs or Song of Solomon. He therefore places the time of its writing at the time of Malachi.

This is an argument that can only be appreciated by Hebrew Scholars who understand the original language.

The problem of identifying the “human authorship” of an inspired book is not confined to

Ecclesiastes. Some of the Psalms, as well as parts of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles have the same difficulty, as does the book of Hebrews and James. Sometimes God identifies the author:

*And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, **Acts 28:25***

*"Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. **Acts 1:16***

Other times He does not.

*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. **2 Pet 1:20-21***

*whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. **Acts 3:21***

Whether we know the human author or not, it is the inspiration of the writing that is the key, not the man God used to speak through. But since the Holy Spirit places internal marks pointing to Solomon, it seems foolish to attribute it to someone else.

## **II. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK**

More important for our understanding of this book full of enigmatic sayings is the general purpose of the book. If we can grasp that purpose even before we enter the words written, we will be in a much better position to understand its words.

A study of Genesis 1-3 explains much that is in this book. God begins the Bible with a clear explanation of the original creation. He speaks very precisely about how each day of creation was accomplished, what was created and how it looked to God after its completion. It was good and wholesome, perfectly suited for man. In Chapter three, the curse is introduced into God's beautiful and perfect creation through the sin of Adam and Eve. The book of Ecclesiastes is a book that explains what the curse of sin has done to the beautiful creation of God. It reveals the depth of damage that sin has done to "life under the sun" and what man can expect from life. Every aspect of what the inspired writer explores and finds to be vanity traces itself back to the curse of sin and the evil of man.

It is an inspired list of all that is wrong in the world. It describes the vanities and frustrations of life, and reveals that there is nothing man can now do about them. They have been placed here by God for a purpose. The purpose of leading man through all the frustrations and trials of life is to lead us to the conclusion of the book. That after everything in life has been examined, categorized and comprehended, and all has been said:

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. **Eccl 12:13***

This is purpose of the book. He shows us all the bleakness and inconsistencies of life. He shows us the damage sin has done and the affect that the continuing threat of wickedness, oppression and death have on all. With time and chance, man's cruelty to man, and the unwanted intrusion of death, no one has any real control over their "life under the sun." Although man can still enjoy the fruits of his labor, the wife of his youth, his food and his drink, he has no way of controlling how long he will enjoy any of them. God wants us to eat, drink, and be merry(**8:15**), but also to know that for all these things we will come to God for judgement(**11:9**).

This book teaches us how to keep our footing as we walk the path in this world of vanity. He warns of the areas where one can slip and fall, where things seem right to man but the end is the way of death. There is a great deal of wisdom in this book. It teaches us how to enjoy what can still be enjoyed in life, but reveals the pitfalls and dangers that can destroy it.

One important consideration must be kept in the forefront of the mind as this book is studied. The Spirit makes it very clear in the first chapter and continues to emphasize it over and over. This book is limited in its scope to "life under the sun." The book of Ecclesiastes was not written to expound on God's scheme of redemption. It was not written to explain God's grace, mercy, or salvation. It is not a book to offer comfort to the redeemed of God. It is a book explaining what happened to the physical creation after sin entered. It gives a stark and penetrating look at the dangers, pitfalls unfairness and bitterness that this life can bring to anyone. It stresses the uncertainty and frailty of

human life. It offers the sad and bitter conclusion that sin ruins all that it touches, leaving only bitterness and despair. Man can still eke out an existence in this life. He can still enjoy things in this life, he can still have limited dominion and power. But if he really wants victory, then he must trust to the grace, mercy, compassion and wisdom of God. Only God can get us out of the mess we have made. After reading and comprehending the book, all of us will be much better prepared to be meet for our masters use, and prepared for every good work.

## **“Under the Sun”**

The key to a proper understanding of the purpose and scope of the book of Ecclesiastes is found in the phrase “*under the sun*.” Which is carefully explained and defined in the first two chapters and then used throughout the remainder of the book.

As noted in the preface, the world we now live in is not the same world God created in the beginning and recorded in Genesis 1-2. Not only are the laws of physics, chemistry, and everything governing the working of the universe no longer working in harmony with God’s original intent, but many of the spiritual and moral laws that operate in heavenly realm have been suspended under terms such as “*longsuffering*” and “*forbearance*.” Think about it! After man sinned, God could have done what was fair and just. He could have punished Adam and Eve for their sin and created two new perfect beings to try again. But God did not do that. Instead God chose to continue working with Adam and Eve after they sinned. Yet sin is a violation of Law and must be dealt with. First, God put a curse on the material creation and the bodies of Adam and Eve. Because God chose the scheme of redemption over punishment and grace and mercy over justice, many things unjust and unfair things occur and they do not paint an accurate picture. The full impact of that curse is now revealed. The phrase “*under the sun*” is a actually giant parenthesis, covering the period between the eternity that existed prior to and eternity that will exist after this time of longsuffering, grace, forbearance, mercy, and redemption.

**←...ETERNITY BEFORE)...(*Life Under the Sun*)...(ETERNITY AFTER ...→**

What is described in Ecclesiastes with the phrase “*life under the sun*” are all the paradoxes and inconsistencies that were created due to the curse. These circumstances will continue to exist as long as we live “*under the sun*,” only death or the creation the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells(2Pet 3:10-13) will bring them to a close.

Such a world exists for one purpose. A purpose not revealed until the very end of the book. “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all(this is the whole of man)*” (Eccl 12:13). This world exists for God’s eternal purpose. Although man can become distracted by all the things listed in the book, the true purpose of Ecclesiastes is to help each of us to remove all the distractions and see clearly.

As a result of the curse, What profit from **all his labor** In which he toils **under the sun**? 1:3  
has been is what will be, is done is what will be done, **there is nothing new under the sun.** 1:9  
**all the works that are done under the sun**; all is vanity and grasping for the wind. 1:14  
all the works my hands had done; the labor in which I had toiled; was **no profit under the sun.** 2:11  
**the work done under the sun was distressing to me**, for **all is vanity and grasping for the wind.** 2:17  
I hated **all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun**, must leave it to the man after me. 2:18  
wise or a fool he will rule over all I have **shown myself wise under the sun.** 2:19  
despaired of **all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.** 2:20  
what has man for all his labor, **the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?** 2:22  
**I saw under the sun**: In the place of judgment, Wickedness; in the place of righteousness, Iniquity 3:16  
considered **all the oppression that is done under the sun**: they have no comforter 4:1  
better is he who has never existed, Who has not seen **the evil work that is done under the sun.** 4:3  
Then I returned, and **I saw vanity under the sun:** 4:7

I saw all the living who walk under the sun; 4:15  
a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. 5:13  
enjoy good of labor which he toils under the sun all the days God gives; his heritage. 5:18  
There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: 6:1  
For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? 6:12  
every work that is done under the sun: a time one man rules over another to his own hurt. 8:9  
a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; 8:15  
for this will remain in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun. 8:15  
I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. 8:17  
This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. 9:3  
their love, hatred, envy have perished; Nevermore share anything done under the sun. 9:6  
Live joyfully with the wife you love all the days of vain life He has given you under the sun, 9:9  
for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. 9:9  
saw under the sun that race not to swift, battle to strong, bread to wise, riches to men of understanding, favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. 9:11  
This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me: 9:13  
There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: 10:5

## Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

### 1. The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Again, as was pointed out in the introduction, the Holy Spirit made a very strong implication that the writer is Solomon. He is the son of David, and he is a king in Jerusalem. All who read the book are going to conclude that these words are literal. Although the possibility exists that this is a different son at a different time, it would not be the first conclusion that the godly would make. It is clear that the Holy Spirit wanted us to know this book was written by the son of David who was a king in Jerusalem. What other king after Solomon has more credentials and is better qualified? But as stressed in the introduction, it is not the man, but the Spirit who is the real author of the book.

The term "preacher" comes from the Hebrew word "*koheleth*." Which the Septuagint translates ἐκκλησιαστής (*ekklesiastes*). The Greek transliteration became the title of the book. The Hebrew term is defined:

"...*Koheleth*, the proper name by which Solomon is distinguished in the book of Ecclesiastes; once with the article, Ecc. 12:8, "the Preacher;" so called from his delivering his lectures of wisdom in the assembly of congregation of the people. **Ecc. 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10**" (Wilson, OT p. 323)

6953 *qoheleth*- a collector (of sentences), a preacher, a public speaker, a speaker in an assembly, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) Brown-Driver-Briggs

This book contains the words of the "*collector*." The words of the preacher who had assembled others together to listen and heed them.

### 2. "Vanity of vanities," says the preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

"Vanity" is defined:

"... used of that which soon vanishes away, like vapor, or a bubble; to breathe, to become vain, insignificant and worthless.... c... a breath, breathing, e.g. of air, a gentle breeze, Isa 57:13;... so very often of anything evanescent, transient, frail. Hence the signification vanity, something vain, empty, fruitless; specially of idols..." (Wilson 465)

*hebel* 1892, "breath; vanity; idol." Cognates of this noun occur in Syriac, late Aramaic, and Arabic. All but 4 of its 72 occurrences are in poetry (37 in Ecclesiastes). First, the word represents human "breath"

as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath]" Second, hebel means something meaningless and purposeless: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" Eccl. 1:2. Third, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities..." Deut. 32:21-- the first occurrence. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Vanity of vanities makes the term a superlative, strengthening and making it even more powerful. Empty of emptiness, fruitless of fruitlessness, worthless of worthlessness, meaningless of meaninglessness, vapor of vapors. All is emptiness, vanity, fruitlessness. As the preacher begins the book, he states the conclusion which he will go on to prove. It is startling, powerful, and compelling, and certainly gets one's attention! What does he mean by "All is vanity (empty, fruitless and vain)"? The term "all" is defined:

3605 *kol* or (Jer. 33:8) *kowl-* all, the whole a) all, the whole of b) any, each, every, anything c) totality, everything (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

"The whole," "everything," "the totality" is vanity! Is it really that bad? Is "everything" in this life really worthless, empty and useless? These are the questions this statement is calculated to bring up in the mind. He will explain himself in the course of the book as he leads to his conclusion that serving God is all that gives meaning to the life of man. It is all there is to man. Take God out of life as many have sought to do after sin entered the world and you truly have a life that is empty, fruitless and meaningless.

### 3. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?

He begins with the labor of man. He repeats "all" to stress that the totality of man's labor is under consideration. "Labor" is

*`amal* 5999, "labor; toil; anguish; troublesome work; trouble; misery." Cognates of this noun and the verb from which it is derived occur in Aramaic, Arabic, and Akkadian. The 55 occurrences of the noun are mostly in later poetic and prophetic literature Gen. 41:51; Deut. 26:7; Judg. 10:16.... Third, *`amal* means "troublesome work"; the emphasis is on the difficulty involved in a task or work as troublesome and burdensome: "What profit hath a man of all his labor [troublesome labor] which he taketh under the sun?" Eccl. 1:3. All 17 appearances of the word in Ecclesiastes bear this meaning. (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

What is the profit for all the difficult toiling and striving that man undertakes? Man fights against death and disease, he strives to overcome weather and environmental difficulties, he strives to remove poverty, ignorance, and prejudice. He struggles and toils nobly and zealously, but what has man really accomplished? What is the "profit" to it?

"... excellence; advantage, profit... gain; pre-eminence, advantage... abundance..."

Mankind works and toils yet what gains have really been made? All the gains of the Egyptian, Israelite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman cultures died with them. There were no real lasting affect. When the new cultures of Western Civilization arose they borrowed what they wanted from them, but just as the lasting affects of the earlier efforts were ephemeral, so also will be the efforts being put forth today. The truth is that we are no further along today with all that they did than they were. Still facing the same difficulties and still without solutions to them. All the toil, labor and learning for the most part died with them as ours will with us. Whatever gains the world made before the flood were lost. Whatever the gains of Sodom and Gomorrah were lost. What then is the true advantage, profit or excellence to all man's labor and toil? The cities are torn down, the technology is lost, and the benefits of one generation seldom are passed to the next. Even all the advances we have made in learning, technology, and advances in medical knowledge have not solved the basic problems of life. They have actually brought troubles of their own.

From the time that man enters this world until the time he leaves it, what is the value to him? What real impact does him make on "life under the sun?" He labors, he toils, he seeks to get ahead in this life and make something of himself. What is the profit and advantage to it?

Paul captured this when speaking of the resurrection.

*19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. ... 32 If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" 1 Cor 15:19, 32*

If there is no life after death, if we will not be rewarded for our efforts and toils here, then all that we have done will be lost in death and it will have been meaningless and without any purpose.

This is the simple question Solomon posed. Ask yourself, what is the profit to all my hours on the

job, all the work on my house, my car, my possession? What ultimate difference will it really make?

*For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 1 Tim 6:7*

*And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." Job 1:21*

**4. One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6. The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7. All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, There they return again.**

In these four verse above, the writer says the same thing in four different ways. God has not given man the ability to have any real lasting impact on the earth. Contemplate and consider the time that has elapsed from the creation to the present day. What real impact have all those generations had upon the earth? A pyramid here, a ruined wall there, the seven wonders of the ancient world are impressive, but those who built them are dead, and their impact on our world is little more than a few moments of wonder before we go back to our own lives. So will it be with us.

Generations come and go, and nothing has really changed, man still dies, man still fights to survive and loses, man still cannot conquer the elements. The sun is unreachable by man. It is the same sun that shone on the new creation in Genesis one. It will continue to be the same sun. The wind will blow today as it has done since the beginning of the world. There is nothing man can do about it. The clouds come in from the sea, rain and snow upon the mountains, the rivers run back down into the sea. Man builds a dam or two, a flood takes them away, he changes the course of the river then the river changes it again. When it rains, the rivers take the water to the sea, if there is a drought, then the rivers shrink and things dry. What affect has man had on any of these things with all the wearisome toil he has poured into them? They are still the same and always will be.

One simply cannot have a lasting impact on the world as we know it. In spite of all the research and study, man cannot truly change that which is. Though science continues to promise great things, up to this time they have changed none of these things. Empty boasts are all man can accomplish. Nothing has truly gotten better. All still die, generations still come and go, the earth still remains the same, and it always will. These are not exclamations of discouragement or pessimism. They are simple facts stated as facts. They are the reality of the sin cursed world.

#### **8. All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it.**

Everything that exists in every realm is simply more work to do. There is nothing in existence which does not take labor and toil to bring about. Whether it be the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter or the luxuries of all our other possessions, they all require maintenance. Everything one sees is "full of labor:"

*"... to be fatigued, weary; quite exhausted and spent with labor, or in any other way; to work hard, take great pains; laborious fatiguing work, weariness...." (Wilson p 241)*

He repeats the same "all" he used in verse Three. The totality of everything requires great labor and toil. There is so much that it cannot even be fully explored or expressed. Consider the amount of labor expended daily just in this country alone, and at the end of the lives of all of them, what will really have been accomplished? What will really have been changed? Man has to struggle and strive simply to stay where he is and he always will.

Again this is not pessimism. It is not apathy or depression. It is reality when God and His promises are removed. He will deal with these things one by one. Only with God can these things be neutralized.

*As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor — this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart. Eccl 5:19-20*

#### **The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.**

Another absolute truth. "Satisfaction" is nowhere to be found:

*saba` 7646, "to be satisfied, sated, surfeited." This word is found in Akkadian and Ugaritic, as well as in all periods of Hebrew. It occurs some 96 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. In its first occurrence in the Old Testament text, saba` expresses the idea of "being filled, sated": "...when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full..." Exod. 16:8. (Vines Expository Dictionary)*

Another interesting aspect of “life under the sun.” One is never satisfied. The eye is never satisfied no matter how much it has seen, the ear is never satisfied no matter how much it hears. No one will ever be satisfied. The more they hear the more they will want to hear. Man cannot even gain enough knowledge through the eyes and ears to feel fully satisfied. There is simply not enough time in the day for it. One can never feel fulfillment or satisfaction by using these two main senses for gathering information. There is simply no end to it.

### **9. That which has been is what will be,**

The very heart of the vanity of all things is here expressed in a very short and succinct thought. No matter how long man is here and no matter how much is seen, heard and even understood, and no matter how much one generation seeks to build upon the previous one, there is no progression. We are not getting higher and higher, not becoming more and more. It has all been done before and it will all be done again. The terms “which has been” and “is what will be” are the past and the future of the same verb:

*hayah* 1961, “to become, occur, come to pass, be.” This verb occurs only in Hebrew and Aramaic. The Old Testament attests *hayah* about 3,560 times, in both Hebrew and Aramaic. Often this verb indicates more than simple existence or identity (this may be indicated by omitting the verb altogether). Rather, the verb makes a strong statement about the being or presence of a person or thing. Yet the simple meaning “become” or “come to pass” appears often in the English versions. ... *hayah* occurs in Exod. 3:14, where God tells Moses His name. He says: “I am [*hayah*] that I am [*hayah*].” (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

This verb “indicates more than simply existence or identity,” it “makes a strong statement about the being or presence of a person or thing. With the past and future placed in this manner, God expresses the fact that all that has been present “under the sun” is what will be present in the future. All that exists is what will exist, all that is present is what will be present. Job expressed this one way while Paul another.

*For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. I Tim 6:7*

*And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job 1:21*

As far as life under the sun is concerned, the dust that becomes the home for our spirit is given to us when we enter the world. While we are here nothing that exists will change. We have no power in our bodies of dust to change what has been or what will be. We enter with nothing, we take nothing out. We change nothing, except our own eternal destiny and perhaps the destinies of others, but that is not under consideration in this book.

### **That which is done is what will be done,**

What about the works of our hands? Again the verbs “which is done” and “what will be done” are the past and the future of the same verb “do:”

6213, “to make, do, create.” This root also occurs in Moabite and Phoenician (only in a proper name). It occurs in early extra-biblical Hebrew, Hebrew, and about 2,625 times in the Bible (in all periods). It should be distinguished from the second sense of *`ashah*, “to squeeze.” In its primary sense this verb represents the production of various objects. ... The verb can mean to make something into something: (Vines)

This verb is used 16 times in Genesis 1-3 to describe what God had “made.” What God did in the creation man cannot add to or diminish from. No matter what art or device man might attempt, what man does is what man will do again. No matter what is accomplished, by those who brought nothing in and will take nothing out, it will all have to be done again. Those living in one culture may get the skewed notion that man has continually built upon the previous generations, but this is not true. So many cultures have been lost and all that they accomplished needed to be relearned or redone. No matter what the generation we live in accomplishes in its lifetime, the next generation will simply continue with the same problems. The threat of war has not been done away with since the beginning. The threat of murder, rape, kidnaping have not yet been removed. The fear of death from all sorts of means is always present. There is no way to abolish these things. They are a part of the world today just as they were then. There is nothing new under the sun. 10,000 years from now people will be facing the same problems they were at creation and we are facing today. In all the history of this world, man has succeeded in changing nothing. Everything is still the same today as it was then. Hence from that which exists to that which has been made, man can have no lasting affect on what is done “under the sun.”

## **And there is nothing new under the sun.**

In his final point about the reason behind the vanity of “life under the sun,” he states in all of man’s labor and toil through all the years he has lived, he has not developed anything “new.”

*chadash* 2319, “new; renewed.” This adjective appears 53 times in biblical Hebrew. Chadash means “new” both in the sense of recent or fresh (as the opposite of old) and in the sense of something not previously existing. (Vines Expository Dictionary)

There is nothing “fresh”, nothing “recent,” nothing that has not been “previously existing.” All that man does is simply an imitation of what God has created. Man may use the things God has created or even imitate them, but he has not made anything “new.” Even our modern technology is only an imitation of things God has already created. A computer, camera, television, etc. our mastery of electricity and the atom are only small imitations of things God has already made on the first day of creation. God wants this point driven home clearly so He elaborates further in the next verse.

### **10. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient time before us.**

Is there any single thing now in existence that one could point to and say “See, this is new.” No God says there isn’t. Everything that now exists has already been in the ages that were before us. The writer clears away all possible objections. Is the car new? It takes one from one place to another a little faster maybe, but man has always had transportation. Man might make his life a little more comfortable, but he doesn’t change anything. We may find easier ways of doing the same old things, but the basic things have never changed.

### **11. There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.**

This is his final introductory point. It presents another reason why all is vanity. Not only can we not have any affect on the world in which we live either by our existence or by our work, but now he tells us that no one will remember either us or the things we do. There simply is no remembrance of former things. Most of us do not even know our great great grandparents names, let alone anything about them. We don’t know much about the kind of lives our grandparents lived except in generalities. We cannot expect to be remembered. If you are looking for something special out of our life under the sun do not look for it in what you are, what you have done or will do, the impact you will have on the world or in people remembering you. It just isn’t going to happen. People do not remember the things that are done, nor those who did them. No matter what you build, or accomplish, there won’t even be anyone around to remember it in a hundred years. Due to all this “vanity of vanity, vanity of vanity, all is vanity.”

## Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

### Review:

The book began with a sweeping and universal conclusion which is summed up in the second verse: *All is vanity!* His inspired summation is that everything in the physical realm or material creation (*life under the sun*), is now “*empty, fruitless, and meaningless.*” He then listed three distinct reasons that prove why what he had seen about “*life under the sun*” led him to that conclusion.

- 1 1:3-8** There is no possible way for any man to ever find satisfaction in this life. Generations will come and go and they will leave no mark that they were ever here. As we come to realize that all the effort and toil we put forth brings no lasting value to one’s life in this world. It leads to the conclusion that what we are doing is both *fruitless* and *meaningless* since we can make no real impact on anything. Both our presence (all that makes us what we are trapped in a body of dust that can only inevitably return to dust), and our works (things we can accomplish in our bodies of dust) are empty because we can bring nothing in and we can take nothing out. Even worse we can’t even make a mark while we are here.
- 2 1:9-10** There is nothing new left to discover or to bring into the light of day. Nothing we can do to make our lives distinctive or impressive. Although men search and seek, they can only find new ways to do old things that have been done since the beginning. Many today have deceived themselves into believing they have made an impact and accomplished something so special with their life that there will be meaning and value. Yet there just is not anything new under the sun. Man’s needs have not changed since the beginning and the ways to fulfill those needs have long ago been created. We might build a better mousetrap, create a better way to cook, easier ways to travel, and faster tools to work with, but the basic needs these things meet have always been. There is simply nothing distinctive to our generation. We are not special, we will pass from the earth leaving no mark just as all those who lived before us.
- 3 1:11** His most poignant and powerful point is offered in verse 11. No one remembers the “former things.” They don’t remember or even care to try and remember the kind of lives and type of people who lived before them. His point: No one will remember us and our lives in just a few years. It makes life very bleak unless we are building our hopes on things eternal.

### Vocabulary terms from 1:1-11:

Preacher (Ecclesiastes) -	“preacher, collector, assembler of people”
Vanity-	“that which soon vanishes away, vain, insignificant, frail, empty, fruitless, meaningless purposeless.”
“Life under the sun”	“Life as it exists in this world separate and apart from God. What begins at birth and is left at death, with no eternal component under consideration.

1:12–18 continues, the explanation of the various inquiries he had made that had led to the strong conclusion he arrived at that “*all is vanity*”

### **12. I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

As noted in the introduction this is one of the key indicators to help identify the human author. We need to appreciate how limiting this statement actually is. Although there were about 20 rulers in Jerusalem after Solomon, none of them could make this statement. After Solomon, Israel was broken into two distinct nations. God made Jeroboam (I Kings 11:37-38) king over the 10 tribes which He continued to call Israel. He left the other two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) for Rehoboam (Solomon’s son) to reign over (I Kings 12:17-24; 14:21-22), and called them “Judah.” This continued throughout the book of the Kings. Only Solomon could be the “*son of David*” who was “*reigning in Jerusalem*” over “*Israel*”. After him those reigning in Jerusalem were kings over Judah. No king over Israel (the 10 tribes) reigned in Jerusalem after Solomon! No son of David ruled over Israel. By the time the ten tribes were carried away, the names Israel and Judah were so fixed that God spoke of Israel being removed and Judah continuing. (I Kings 17:18-19; 23:27). Solomon was the only son of David who reigned in the city of Jerusalem over Israel.

### **13. And I set my heart to see and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven;**

This passage sets the tone and direction for the remainder of the book. It also forms the proof upon

which the conclusion offered in 1:3 will be established as truth. This king in Jerusalem set his heart on something. The term set describes the act of “giving”, “granting,” “employing” “devoting,” “consecrating,” “dedicating,” “assigning” or “appointing.”

5414 *nathan-* to give, to put, to set a) (Qal) 1) to give, to bestow, to grant, to permit, to ascribe, to employ, to devote, to consecrate, to dedicate, to pay wages, to sell, to exchange, to lend, to commit, to entrust, to give over, to deliver up, to yield produce, to occasion, to produce, to requite to, to report, to mention, to utter, to stretch out, to extend 2) to put, to set, to put on, to put upon, to set, to appoint, to assign, to designate

The author made a conscious decision to take his heart and completely give it over to this task. He was devoted, dedicated and consecrated to it. Everything else was set aside while he worked on this effort.

The fundamental difference between the way we use *heart* today in our culture and they way it is used in Scripture needs to be understood. We need to learn that when we read the word heart in the Bible is not just the seat of our emotions where we feel. The Hebrew word “*heart*” is much broader. A careful examination of how it is used in the Bible reveals how much broader it was.

*leb* 3820, “heart; mind; midst.” *Leb* and its synonym *lebab* appear 860 times in the Old Testament. The law, prophets, and Psalms often speak of the “*heart*.” The root occurs also in Akkadian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Arabic, and post-biblical Hebrew. The corresponding Aramaic nouns occur seven times in the Book of Daniel. “Heart” is used first of man in Gen. 6:5: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In Gen. 6:6 *leb* is used of God: “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” ... of the inner man, contrasted to the outer man, ... of the man himself or his personality: The seat of desire, inclination, or will can be indicated by “heart”... the seat of emotions: ... the seat of knowledge and wisdom and as a synonym of “mind.” ... the seat of conscience and moral character. ... the inner being of man, the man himself. As such, it is the fountain of all he does Prov. 4:4. All his thoughts, desires, words, and actions flow from deep within him. Yet a man cannot understand his own “heart” Jer. 17:9. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary).

God called the human heart the place where “*imagination and thoughts*” occur. He also revealed it to be “*the inner man,*” the “*personality,*” and the “*seat of desire inclination, and will,*” He called it the “*seat of emotions, knowledge and wisdom,*” the “*seat of conscience and moral character,*” and “*the fountain of all that he does.*”

The author decided to take his heart and “seek” and “search” with it. These two terms set forth the idea of “seeking,” “inquiring,” “consulting,” on the one hand and “searching,” “spying out,” “exploring,” and “making a search,” on the other.

*darash* 1875, “to seek, inquire, consult, ask, require, frequent.” This word is a common Semitic word, being found in Ugaritic and Syriac as well as in Hebrew in its various periods. It is commonly used in modern Hebrew in its verbal form for “to interpret, expound” and then in its derived noun forms for “sermon, preacher.” Occurring more than 160 times in the Old Testament, *darash* is first used in Gen. 9:5: (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

8446 *tuwr-* to seek, to search out, to spy out, to explore a) (Qal) 1) to seek out, to select, to find out how to do something 2) to spy out, to explore; explorers, spies (participle) 3) to go about; a merchant, a trader (participle) b) (Hiphil) to make a search, to make a reconnaissance (BDB)

... two kinds of searching: one penetrating in depth, the other going out in extent, for the former of these verbs (from the root idea of grinding, testing) signifies to investigate an object which one already has in hand, to penetrate into it, to search into it thoroughly; and the latter verb (from the root-idea of moving round about) signifies to hold a survey,— look round in order to bring that which is unknown, or not comprehensively known, within the sphere of knowledge...” Keil & Delitzsch on Ecc. P 227

His emphasis is that these conclusions and writings were not the simple result of God’s inspiration. They were the result of careful and cautious research. One might say that he used what is today called the “*scientific method.*” This is very similar to Luke’s promise at the beginning of his book:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write {it} out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. Lk. 1:1-4*

Both Luke and Solomon did the same thing. They were not denying their own divine inspiration with these words. They were instead stressing with the Holy Spirit’s approval that the things He examined and scrutinized were not only not by inspiration, but also by careful human inquiry! Even

uninspired men who researched as Solomon did would come to the same conclusion. It doesn't take divine inspiration to prove these things. All of us could draw these same conclusions if we looked at things as carefully as "Solomon" did. Yet in this case, Solomon's wisdom was overwhelmed by the *wisdom* of the Holy Spirit.

*chokmah* 2451, "wisdom; experience; shrewdness." This word appears 141 times in the Old Testament. Like *chakam*, most occurrences of this word are in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. ... can refer to technical skills or special abilities in fashioning something.... *Chokmah* is the knowledge and the ability to make the right choices at the opportune time. The consistency of making the right choice is an indication of maturity and development.... (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

Solomon was noted for his wisdom. It was greater than that of any man who had ever lived before him. He could look into things and see how they worked.

*Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. 30 And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was {known} in all the surrounding nations. 32 He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. 33 And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. 34 And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom. | Kings 4:29-34*

Solomon set all his faculties to this task. His conclusions were not those of a night, but of careful inquiry.

### **this grievous task God has given to the sons of man,**

The words he used here to describe in another way his earlier conclusion that all is vanity. The damage done by the curse upon the world is much deeper and more far reaching than any could have dreamed. Nothing was left unaffected. He sought and searched but everything led to the same conclusion. It is a grievous task to look into such things. The term "grievous" is a most terrible adjective. It describes things that are "bad," "disagreeable," "malignant," "unpleasant," "giving pain, unhappiness, misery," "unhappy," and "hurtful." It is exactly the opposite of the conclusion God drew after His six days of creation that all was good, wholesome and beautiful.

7451 *ra`-* as an adjective: 1) bad, evil a) bad, disagreeable, malignant b) bad, unpleasant, evil (giving pain, unhappiness, misery) c) evil, displeasing d) bad (used of its kind, land, water, etc.) e) bad (used of value) f) worse than, worst (comparison) g) sad, unhappy h) evil (hurtful) l) bad, unkind (vicious in disposition) j) bad, evil, wicked (ethically) ... 2) evil, distress, misery, injury, calamity a) evil, distress, adversity b) evil, injury, wrong c) evil (ethical) as a feminine noun: 3) evil, misery, distress, injury a) evil, misery, distress b) evil, injury, wrong c) evil (ethical) (BDB)

Everything Solomon examined, explored or investigated simply increased the conclusion formed in verse 2. All is vanity, empty, meaningless and fruitless. This world with God removed and examined only on the basis of its on function and worth leads to the strong conclusion that even looking at it brings misery and unhappiness. There is so much pain, sorrow, and frustration.

### **by which they may be exercised.**

The term "exercise" which is neutral in English is more malignant in the original language. It is only used of work that is done on things that are a "*grievous*" and "*unpleasant*" task. It is a broad term for being "afflicted," "bowed down" "humbled." It describes the terrible things in life that can come upon us and afflict us.

*`anah* 6031, "to be afflicted, be bowed down, be humbled, be meek." This word, common to both ancient and modern Hebrew, is the source of several important words in the history and experience of Judaism: "humble, meek, poor, and affliction." *`Anah* occurs approximately 80 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is found for the first time in Gen. 15:13: "...they shall afflict them four hundred years." *`Anah* often expresses harsh and painful treatment. Sarai "dealt hardly" with Hagar Gen. 16:6. When Joseph was sold as a slave, his feet were hurt with fetters Ps. 105:18. Frequently the verb expresses the idea that God sends affliction for disciplinary purposes: "...the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart..."

As Solomon examined "life under the sun" and was led to the conclusion that all is vanity, he found that the very task itself was an affliction, a very humbling experience. With his added wisdom used to get to the bottom of things and then go to work finding solutions for them, he found just the opposite. The more deeply he searched and looked into things, the more fully convinced he became that there are no answers. It was a grievous exercise.

#### 14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun;

Solomon closely examined all the works that are done under the sun. Though some have sought to limit these works to those done by men, the definition of the term is much broader. It includes the works of God as well as those of men.

4639 *ma`aseh*- a deed, a work a) a deed, a thing done, an act b) work, labor c) business, pursuit d) undertaking, enterprise e) an achievement f) deeds, works (of deliverance and judgment) g) work, a thing made h) work (of God) l) a product (BDB)

All the works done “under the sun” by both God and man were examined. The affects of the curse upon all that exists, and mans attempts to fix, resolve or make some arrangements to lessen them were taken into account. Nothing was left unturned. He spent great time and effort on this. The term “all” means exactly that:

*kol* 3605, “all; the whole.” The noun *kol*, derived from *kalal*, has cognates in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, and Moabite. *Kol* appears in biblical Hebrew about 5,404 times and in all periods. Biblical Aramaic attests it about 82 times. The word can be used alone, meaning “the entirety,” “whole,” or “all,” ... everything in a given unit whose members have been selected from others of their kind:... (Vines)

#### and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

After examined “all”(the entirety and the whole of) the works that are done under the sun, he is forced to exclaim: “*Indeed, all is vanity and a grasping for the wind.*” The term “*indeed*” is actually “behold” “look” or “see.” He is revealing his conclusion. After studying it all, as he unveils his great masterpiece: **behold!** This is all there is! It is all vanity. It is all like a bubble, it pops and there is nothing inside, or like a vapor that vanishes away leaving no water.

“... used of that which soon vanishes away, like vapour, or a bubble; to breathe, to become vain, insignificant and worthless.... c... a breath, breathing, e.g. of air, a gentle breeze, Isa 57:13;... so very often of anything evanescent, transient, frail. Hence the signification vanity, something vain, empty, fruitless; specially of idols...” (Wilson 465)

Life under the sun, beginning when we bring nothing in and ending when we take nothing out is empty, meaningless and fruitless without God. It is no longer meant to bring any lasting value. It is now only meant to test and determine whether we are worthy to be redeemed and given another chance to enjoy the fulness of God’s blessings. The sooner we understand this about the world we live, the more quickly we will become the dedicated servants of the Lord we ought to be.

He now introduces a new expression that he will use nine more times in the book(Eccl 1:14, 17; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9).

“*Striving after wind*” is a picturesque way of saying that something is a waste of time. Imagine someone with a butterfly net running through the field. You watch him closely as he again and again swings it into the air. But you see no butterflies. You ask him what he is doing and when he tells you he is trying to catch the wind how do you feel about such a person? Trying to find a meaning and a purpose for this life once you have removed God is exactly like that. There are no areas of life in which a man can find full satisfaction. If he digs deeply enough into any area of life he finds that it is extremely unsatisfactory. So unsatisfactory that it cannot be uttered.

#### 15. What is crooked cannot be made straight,

This is the basis upon which the above conclusion was drawn. The things that Solomon searched for and examined that were crooked could not be made straight. Since man lives to solve, fix, and resolve things, this is quite a blow to our self-esteem. The things that were crooked when we were given a body of dust and allowed to live a “life under the sun” will still be crooked when we leave this body of dust and go before God in judgment. The term “crooked” describes things that are “bent,” “perverted” and “subverted.”

5791 *`avath*- to be bent, to be crooked, to bend, to make crooked, to pervert a) (Piel) 1) to make crooked, to falsify, to pervert, to subvert 2) to bend, to make crooked. (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

They are things that no longer work as well as even man can see they could work. Things in this world that could be made to work better if man had more control to straighten it out. But these things can’t be made straight.

8626 *taqan*-to equalize, to make straight, to become straight a) (Qal) to become straight b) (Piel) to make straight, to put straight, to arrange in order, to set in order. (Brown-Driver-Briggs)

Try as man might, there just isn’t any way to straighten out what is crooked and arrange it back into

order. There are many things that do not operate properly, and are no longer conducive to the well being and happiness of the human race. We can identify them, and we can see that they could be straightened and put into better order, but we cannot do it.

The weather is crooked in many respects. It does not give enough rain, or it gives too much rain. It is hot when it should be cold, and it is cold when it needs to be hot. Man sees little practical value to hurricanes tornados, and droughts, but man cannot stop them. There is no such thing as a thermostat to make any modifications. The drought could be solved if we could turn on the rain and force it to resolve the problem, but we cannot do it.

The insect world is also crooked. It is filled with creatures harmful to man and his efforts. Not only do they bite, sting, and claw, but they destroy man's works. Worms, mites, moths, weevils and multitudes of other creatures can destroy years of effort and toil. Man tries, but hasn't found a way to straighten this out.

The world of viruses and bacteria is also infinitely crooked. These things have led to the death of billions, yet man still can't straighten it out and put it in order.

Even man himself is crooked and cannot be made straight! It matters little what aspect of our life under the sun we look at, it does not take long to identify things that are crooked within them. Man's limited control may ease some of it, for a time, but it cannot be straightened.

### **And what is lacking cannot be numbered.**

Added to the above is the fact that so much is "lacking."

2642 *checrown-* to diminish, cut short; to be diminished, to fail, to be wanting; to want, to be in want, to suffer need... adj. wanting, destitute of... deficiencie...poverty..." Wilson, OT Word Studies p 472)

He could not even count the number of things that had been "*diminished*," "*cut short*," and were now "*wanting*." As was pointed out in the introduction, God created a very good world that was perfectly suited to all mans needs in Genesis 1-2. God warned man not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When he ate it anyway, God cursed the man, the woman, the serpent and the world. He made things crooked, and he diminished and cut other things short, by removing something vital from them. The fact that one cannot even count the number of things that this has happened to increases the frustration. Man seeks for the missing ingredients in vain. They are beyond his reach. Even with all our technologies we cannot find them. We may have put Band-Aids on death, disease, tyranny, and ageing, but we cannot fix them. We may find simplistic answers that work for a time, but there are no real solutions to many things.

### **16. I communed with my heart, saying, "Look I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge."**

After this thorough examination of all that is under the sun, he now begins to formulate his first conclusion which takes up 16-18. He began with some inward meditations about his own ability to accomplish such a task. The Spirit here allows him to speak freely of what God had done for him. This is not bragging, but simply a statement of the truth. He had attained greatness, and a wisdom that was more than all who were before and after him.

*behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. 13 And I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. I Kings 3:12-13*

All he is saying now is that what God promised in these verses was true and he knew it. His heart was filled with wisdom and knowledge. No one was better qualified than Solomon to make these inquiries and to draw these conclusions.

### **17. And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.**

As in verse 13, Solomon again "*sets his heart*." There he "*set his heart*" "*to search and seek by wisdom*", here "*to know wisdom*" and "*know madness and folly*." The term know is the same in both phrases and refers to what we "*learn*," "*see*," "*perceive*," "*experience*" "*recognize*,"

3045 *yada`-* to know a) (Qal) 1) to know a) to know, to learn to know b) to perceive c) to perceive and to see, to find out and to discern d) to discriminate, to distinguish e) to know by experience f) to recognize, to admit, to acknowledge, to confess g) to consider 2) to know, to be acquainted with 3) to know (a person carnally) 4) to know how, to be skillful in 5) to have knowledge, to be wise b) (Niphal)

1) to be made known, to be or to become known, to be revealed 2) to make oneself known 3) to be perceived 4) to be instructed c) (Piel) to cause to know d) (Poal) to cause to know e) (Pual) 1) to be known 2) known, one known, acquaintance (participle) f) (Hiphil) to make known, to declare... (BDB).

He determined in his heart that he would put forth all his efforts to fully comprehend the difference between wisdom on the one hand and madness and folly on the other. His goal was to determine the benefits of wisdom over madness and folly. He discovered that both had something that made them ultimately similar. They were both grasping for the wind. Again, get your man with the butterfly net running around chasing after and trying to catch the wind out and visualize that folly. That is what both wisdom and madness and folly lead to. This is a hard saying. We must be careful to keep it in the context of its message. When it comes to “*life under the sun*” that begins with our birth and ends at our death, with no eternal component involved, wisdom, madness, and folly have one terrible similarity. They are all chasing after wind. While the fool and the mad are “blissfully ignorant,” the wise man fully sees the problem but can’t fix it. The greater gains that wisdom gives become much less valuable when it is finally seen that all the wisdom in the world cannot truly solve. Not only that, but the “blissful ignorance” of some keeps them happy because they can’t even see the mistakes they are making. The wise on the other hand make far fewer mistakes, but have greater grief over what they cannot solve. Both are therefore a striving after the wind. The reason why madness and folly are such is obvious, the reason why wisdom is also censured is set forth in verse 18.

**18. For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.** This is what made the quest for wisdom a chasing after the wind. He was not saying that wisdom is not better than folly, quite the contrary:

*So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. Eccl 2:12-14*

Wisdom excels folly as light does darkness, but in the conditions under which man is faced in the “*life under the sun*” it makes no difference. The wise man lives sees and full of sorrow dies, the fool lives, does not see in blissful ignorance and dies. If it all ended there, then there wouldn’t be much difference.

What is the point to gaining something that does not really affect anything (because what is crooked cannot be made straight) and at the same time exacts a great price in additional sorrow and anguish? The more knowledge one gains of the deep things of life and the way things work, the more grief and sorrow one gains. These two terms attack the same emotion from different angles

3708 *ka`ac* or (in Job) *ka`as-* anger, vexation, provocation, grief a) vexation 1) of men 2) of God b) vexation, grief, frustration

4341 *mak’ob* sometimes *mak’owb* also (feminine Isa. 53:3) *mak’obah-* pain, sorrow a) pain (physical) b) pain (mental)

Grief views pain from the vexations, provocations, and frustrations of life while sorrow views it from the physical and mental pain it brings. Wisdom and knowledge lead to these two types of anguish becoming much stronger in the heart.

Wisdom allows one to see where the conduct of others is going to lead them, but finds when they will not listen that it brings great sorrow, vexation and pain.

Even the knowledge of the gospel does this! We preach the saving grace of God to all who will listen and feel great sorrow when they reject it. We are glad to have this knowledge, but it brings a great price with it.

This is what Solomon found about wisdom and knowledge. The more you learn about things, the more vexation and sorrow is unearthed. Because things cannot be truly fixed, the value of wisdom is greatly lessened.

Hence the first chapter ends with emptiness. There just was not anything to find that was satisfactory or which a man could find a reason for living for within. Wisdom leads to sorrow, the quest for something new leads to emptiness and a realization that there isn’t anything new to be found. No matter how hard one tries they are simply not going to leave any mark in this world. Few will ever know we were here within one or two generations. These are not things a man can long meditate upon without feeling very dissatisfied with their lives. What is the point to living, seeking for wisdom or striving to better things, when it cannot be done? Those who look deeply enough into

any matter will find this to be so. Those who would argue, have simply not thought things through deeply enough. This may sound startling, but it is the conclusion that an inspired man reached many years ago. If we are to be effective servants of God and find the means to enjoy our lives, we must lay this foundation of truth in our hearts.

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'* Luke 14:28-31