

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Review:

The prologue of the first chapter(1:1-11) set forth the conclusion the book was designed to prove. The inspired and gifted Solomon determined to make a thorough examination of physical life. Life that begins at birth and ends at death. He captured the nature of his inquiry with the term "*life under the sun*" intending to focus only on the material realm with very few references to God, or to the eternal issues this life is designed to determine. There were two important purposes. For those who already serve and love God this book reveals the things that can still bring full satisfaction and also those things that must be avoided because they do not bring the satisfaction and joy they appear to possess. There are many illusions and false paths in life.

The second purpose of the book is to reveal the frustration, vanity, and fruitless nature of "*life under the sun*" for those who like Cain "*went out from the presence of the Lord*" (Gen 4:16). Although some avoid the problems and pitfalls in this life multitudes of people have led bitter lives. Yet no matter how good the life one is blessed to live, he cannot stop the moment when everything done is removed and he enters the void with nothing. This is what the prologue of the book is designed to reveal:

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." 3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? Eccl 1:2-3

Many of those living "*out of the presence of the Lord*" sooner or later come to the above conclusion. That the life they lived or are living is empty, futile, and without purpose or meaning. Solomon based this conclusion on several facts:

First, the earth has not been and cannot be fundamentally changed. Despite the multitude of generations that have come and gone, the earth still remains as it was, the rising and setting of the sun has not changed, nor have the winds or rivers. Even man has not changed. Second, satisfaction can not be attained during our "*life under the sun*." No matter how much one sees, he must see more and nor matter how much one hears he must hear more. Both eye and ear are never filled.

Perhaps the most startling statement of all in his prologue is the truth that no man no matter how wise or powerful can have any real impact. Thus even the greatest and most noble of all the quests men who do not regard God or eternity seek after, making the world a better place, cannot truly be attained. No matter what the advances, it will all need to be done again.

Solomon found two reasons why this could never be(1:9-11). First, everything that now is, is exactly what was when other generations were here. Man has made no impact on the world, nor can he. Second, all of man's accomplishments to ease and make that which he cannot change more tolerable will have to be done again. Nothing the previous generations have done have really changed the makeup of the world.

But perhaps Solomon was wrong! Perhaps he did not really examine everything thoroughly. Perhaps there is some stone he did not turn, or some human device he missed. The remainder of the book takes away all hope. He tried everything! He looked at everything, he went exploring both outwardly by categorizing all that is, and inwardly by examining the tiniest details of these things. The Spirit even allowed him to use human intellect and intelligence(1:13), along with inspiration to find the right answers.

To prove this point, Solomon reminded us that there is nothing new under the sun. Anything that any generation thinks is novel and new while it takes it's turn on the earth has only forgotten what has already been. He then confirmed it in verse 11 by noting his observation that people easily forget what has gone on before them. There simply is no remembrance of intimate details even in history classes. Once the truth of this is grasped it is easy to see that no one is going to remember us or our lives either.

He then summed up his quest. He will seek out and thoroughly explore everything(1:12-13). The remainder of the book chronicles these inquiries. But one broad generalization describes it all. Everything he assessed was either crooked and unable to be straightened or lacking with no possibility of creating what was missing(1:15). So all his wisdom and insight into the intimate details of human existence only revealed problems with no real and lasting solutions. The band-aids man has devised only salve and cover it, but they can never be fixed. Therefore all wisdom does in the final analysis of "*life under the sun*" is increase grief and pain as we see all the problems and realize there are no solutions.

Introduction:

As the second chapter opens he leaves philanthropy and idealism which seeks to "make this world a better place." Though multitudes of zealous young men and women have chosen this over God, it only leads to sorrow and grief. Ultimately, it is meaningless futility and empty vanity. It will never bring true joy or satisfaction.

So, Solomon moved on to pleasures and possessions. Once again he chose from among the most popular quests of the young. The vast majority of young people choose between changing the world(idealism) or enjoying life to the fullest and earning as much money as possible. These are not mutually exclusive, but often one is drawn more toward one or than to the other. Although multitudes of people have been captivated by pleasure and wealth, can satisfaction and the true meaning and value of life be found in gaining possessions and enjoying pleasure?

Solomon recorded the nature and breadth of what he did to try and find out whether this could be done.

1. I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth;

It is important to note that he was not fully captivated or overcome with this and then later went back to draw his conclusions. He made a conscious decision within himself before he ever began. He spoke within his heart as we so often do talking to ourselves and planning our future. The term "*come now*" denotes a slight change of direction.

halak- to go, to walk, to come, to depart, to proceed, to move, to go away(BDB 1980)

He departed, proceeded, moved and went away from the idealism of "making the world a better place for our children" to "*testing*."

nacah- to test, to try, to prove, to tempt, to assay, to put to the proof or test (BDB 5254).

He would "prove," "assay," "put to the test" and try "*you*" which personifies "*life under the sun*" with mirth to see what conclusions ought to be drawn from it. This is to be a test. Again, he was not caught up in it and then decided to use what he had learned. He decided going in to this inquiry that he would do everything necessary to test "*life under the sun*" with mirth to see if any real satisfaction could be found in it. The term "mirth" is a term describing "joy," "gladness," "gaiety" and "pleasure:"

simchah- joy, mirth, gladness a) mirth, gladness, joy, gaiety, pleasure b) the joy (of God) c) a glad result, a happy issue(BDB 8057).

simchah "joy." This noun, which also occurs in Ugaritic, is found 94 times in biblical Hebrew. Simchah is both a technical term for the external expression of "joy" Gen 31:27 ... and (usually) a representation of the abstract feeling or concept "joy" Deut 28:47." (Vine's OT:8057)

While the later translations(NASB; ESV; NIV) chose "*pleasure*," the real essence of the word is "*joy*." Solomon looked into his own heart and assessed those things that truly brought him joy and personal pleasure and satisfaction. This is the emotion we feel when we begin doing something we think will bring this emotion. It may be a vacation, a hobby, or just a day doing something we truly enjoy. Solomon intended to seek out all those things that gave him such personal pleasure. Everything that interested him or gave him joy/gladness he determined to use to see if it would bring genuine satisfaction. Once he made that decision he acted upon it.

therefore enjoy pleasure" but surely, this also was vanity.

He began to “*enjoy*” pleasure. More literally he began “to inspect” “consider” “regard” “learn about” and “give attention” to it.

ra'ah- to see, to look at, to inspect, to perceive, to consider... 4) ... to regard, to look after, to see after, to learn about, to observe, to watch, to look upon, to look out, to find out 5) to see, to observe, to consider, to look at, to give attention to, to discern, to distinguish ... (BDB 7200)

He began to look carefully into pleasure to see what type of satisfaction it would bring. The type of pleasure he examined involved all that is “good” “pleasant” and “agreeable.” Things that made one “glad,” “happy,” and “prosperous.” They were “good things,” that brought “benefit” and “happiness.”

towb- as an adjective: 1) good, pleasant, agreeable a) pleasant, agreeable (to the senses) b) pleasant (to the higher nature) c) good, excellent (of its kind) d) good, rich, valuable in estimation e) good, appropriate, becoming f) better (comparative) g) glad, happy, prosperous (used of man's sensuous nature) ... 2) a good thing, benefit, welfare a) welfare, prosperity, happiness b) good things (collective) c) good, benefit d) moral good as a feminine noun: 3) welfare, benefit, good things a) welfare, prosperity, happiness b) good things (collective) c) bounty (BDB 2896)

Although pleasure and mirth are relative terms depending upon each individual, Solomon was careful to seek and search into all types of areas that were enjoyable not only to him but to all men, then lived in them for a time. This too turned out to be vanity. It was empty, futile and meaningless. This is the broad conclusion he drew even before explaining exactly what he did. But his conclusion is obvious. When one gives oneself daily to all that one enjoys and likes to do without any other diversions, it soon becomes empty. All who have taken a long vacation know this to be true. There is enjoyment to it, but there is also an emptiness that soon leaves a void which can only be filled by going home, and going back to work. The areas in which his pleasure were taken fill the remainder of this chapter.

2. I said of laughter, "It is madness";

“Laughter” is the greatest product of pleasure. It means to “*laugh in merriment.*” To feel a joy and happiness that bring exhilaration at the way things are going. At that moment one simply feels the mouth smiling and the heart bursting forth in laughter. Yet Solomon concluded that even this was “madness.”

“to shine; to make oneself shine, to boast of oneself, to be foolish; to be puffed up with vain glory, to vaunt, to rave with foolish conceit; hence, to be mad, to rage... madness, implies so great a departure from wisdom that the mind without any control, rushes on with a blind fury...” (Wilson OT Word Studies p. 262)

Laughter is “*foolish.*” It “*boasts*” of things it cannot deliver. It is “*puffed up with vainglory.*” These are strong charges against laughter, but they are true. How many times have we had such feelings, but how long to they last, and what do they accomplish. We feel so strongly that they are desirable, but they are momentary and cannot be held on to. What makes us laugh one day in excitement is the next day only commonplace or even a burden. There is nothing lasting to it.

and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

He concluded that the inherent joy found pleasure/mirth doesn't accomplish anything. Since there was no lasting value, it just doesn't “do” anything. It doesn't “fashion,” “accomplish,” or “produce.” anything.

`asah- 1) to do, to fashion, to accomplish, to make a) (Qal) 1) to do, to work, to make, to produce a) to do b) to work ... 2) to make a) to make b) to produce c) to prepare d) to make (an offering) e) to attend to, to put in order f) to observe, to celebrate g) to acquire (property) h) to appoint, to ordain, to institute l) to bring about j) to use k) to spend, to pass b) (BDB 6213)

Joy, gaiety, gladness and pleasure are emotions of the moment. First, there is no guarantee that what we are doing will even produce it. What brings joy one day may feel empty and pointless the next. With no lasting accomplishment, a short laugh, a few moments of thrilling joy in the heart and

are quickly gone. There is nothing to show for them and they barely leave a remembrance of what it was like. Although the length of such pleasure can be extended perhaps even a whole night or even a few days, but the transitoriness of the emotion makes it certain that what caused great joy one day may bring nothing the next.

3. I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine,

In the midst of searching for pleasure, Solomon did not overlook one of the great tools of the worldly minded, to extract more pleasure out of life. The term wine in the Scriptures is somewhat ambiguous moving from fresh grape juice to intoxicating wine to vinegar depending on the context. Here the context appears to demand the use of alcohol. Alcohol has been used by man through all generations to attempt to give the mind a better ability to enjoy mirth and pleasure. It gives a relaxing stimulus to the mind that many find pleasurable. Solomon searched in his heart to see if wine could gratify his flesh. The term “*search*” was first used in 1:13. Solomon wanted to “search out” and “explore” the various aspects of how alcohol could be used.

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 8446).

“Gratify my flesh” comes from the idea of “drawing out,” “cheering” or “gratifying.” He brought wine to himself with the intent of cheering and gratifying himself with it.

mashak-to draw, to drag, ... 1) to draw (and lift out), to drag along, to lead along, to drag or to lead off, to draw down ... 7) to cheer, to draw, to attract, to gratify b) (Niphal) to be drawn out c) (Pual) 1) to be drawn out, to be postponed, to be deferred ...” (BDB 4900).

Many have sought this, and have brought great disaster upon themselves. Solomon makes it very clear that it was not his intent to allow wine to enslave or bring him into sin. He did not use it sinfully(become drunk), but sensibly:

while guiding my heart with wisdom,

Solomon guarded himself from the excesses of alcohol. His heart was “guided” with wisdom. Solomon forced wisdom to “lead” and “guide” his heart.

nahag- 1) to drive, to lead, to guide, to conduct ... 2) to behave itself (figurative) (of heart) b) (Piel)... 2) to lead on, to guide, to guide on 3) to cause to drive 2) (Piel) to moan, to lament (BDB 5090)

Never for a moment did he allow alcohol to drive reason and wisdom from him. Some of the conclusions that this wise guidance toward alcohol gave him were later set forth in the Proverbs:

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise. Pr 20:1

Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, {or} with gluttonous eaters of meat; 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe {a man} with rags. Pr 23:20-21

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. 35 "They struck me, {but} I did not become ill; they beat me, {but} I did not know {it.} When shall I awake? I will seek another drink." Prov 23:29-35

It is obvious that not only did this experiment prove that moderate use(non-drunkenness) of alcohol didn't bring any real satisfaction, but worse than that, alcohol should not even be a part of the life of those who “*live under the sun.*” When he later spoke of “wine” as a pleasure,” it is clear that alcohol is not a part of it. Alcohol promises enjoyment and fun, gusto and a great weekend. What it delivers is drunk driving arrests, auto accidents, fights, a decreased ability to resist temptation, and unhappiness. Even those who guard themselves with wisdom(and there are few indeed who can) do not find what it promises to deliver. It just isn't there to be delivered. It is vanity and a striving after wind.

and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

This is actually the general heading that takes one down to 2:10. Everything Solomon did was done because he wanted to “lay hold” on folly. He wanted to grasp and take possession of it. He wanted to be able to put it under a microscope and truly take it all in. Is it possible that a little bit of folly, like a little bit of alcohol could have some value to it if you did not let it get out of hand?

'achaz- to grasp, to take hold, to seize, to take possession a) (Qal) to grasp, take hold of b) (Niphal) to be caught, grasped, be settled c) (Piel) to enclose, overlay d) (Hophal) fastened (BDB 270)

Could the power of enjoyment that leads inexorably to ruin be controlled with wisdom and actually enjoyed if the foolish overuse is avoided. He wanted to closely examine all the acts of “folly” that man could do. Men can act in such a way that they are acting “stupidly,” “absurdly,” and “inconsistently” without there being sin involved.

“... to act stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently; to be sottish, infatuated: it denotes any deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent...” (Wilson p 172)

So this is not the folly of evil, but the folly of imprudence and lack of wisdom. Many things men do have no redeeming value. They are not sinful, but they are not prudent either. It was not prudent to spend so much time and money on a garden, or making his home grander and more beautiful than necessary. It was not wise to exercise no self control in what they see with their eyes and buy everything they want. It was not wise to acquire more servants than needed nor to hire many servants just for the purpose of entertainment. Solomon left wisdom and prudence for a time to seek for an answer. In doing all these things he created a check list to see how many things that are not prudent could actually become good for the sons of men.

4. I made my works great,

This is an area that has certainly captivated a large segment of the human race. Man never tires of building “great” works. Monuments to their great wealth or wisdom. The term “works” is a very broad term referring to anything man might decided to make or do.

ma`aseh, "work; deed; labor; behavior." This noun is used 235 times in biblical Hebrew.... The basic meaning of *ma`aseh* is "work." ... As the word is the most general word for "work," it may be used to refer to the "work" of a skillful craftsman Exod. 26:1, a weaver 26:36, a jeweler 28:11, and a perfumer 30:25. The finished product of the worker is also known as *ma`aseh*: "(Vine 4639)

It is quite possible that the list that follows is only a summary of all the great “works” that Solomon did. But all that he did whether “deed,” “work,” “labor,” “business,” “enterprise” or “achievement,” they were all “great.” They were “important” and “powerful.”

gadal- to grow, to become great or important, to promote, to make powerful, to praise, to magnify, to do great things a) ... (BDB 1431)

Man still seeks the exhilaration of building taller skyscrapers, Greater bridges, architectural marvels, seeking for greater beauty in painting, sculpturing or gardening. Man never tires of seeking to reveal himself to be something special and even “eternal” in the works he does. Solomon tried it all, but it did not bring what he sought.

I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

The houses that Solomon himself built are described in the Kings:

Now Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. 2 And he built the house of the forest of Lebanon; its length was 100 cubits and its width 50 cubits and its height 30 cubits, on four rows of cedar pillars with cedar beams on the pillars. 1 Kings 7:1-2

This home took 13 years to build, it was 300' long, 75' wide and 45' tall. For a more detailed description see 7:3-12. But this is singular, and he speaks in Ecclesiastes in the plural, so this house was only one of others that he also built for himself.

So Solomon rebuilt Gezer and the lower Beth-horon 18 and Baalath and Tamar in the wilderness, in

the land of Judah, 19 and all the storage cities which Solomon had, even the cities for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen, and all that it pleased Solomon to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land under his rule. 1Kings 9:17-19

Possibly also summer homes and winter homes, or homes for various purposes. Different types of architecture, different purposes and buildings. Filled with different types of furniture. Along with this he also planted vineyards.

5. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

Solomon also sought the joy of watching the earth produce the marvels of God's creative genius. He made both gardens and orchards. These terms also have a broader meaning in Hebrew than they do in English. The first is broad enough for both "garden" and "orchard." The second captures the idea of a park, a "forest," and even a "preserve."

gannah- a garden, an orchard 1593

pardec- a park, a preserve, an enclosed garden, a forest 6508

Flowers, trees, shrubs, and plants of all types and varieties. He gave his life over to gardening and planting fruit trees making a magnificent work.

6. I made myself waterpools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

He made beautiful pools or ponds with which to water the trees. It is obvious from the way this is put that they too were beautiful and magnificent. Probably placed in the midst of the trees with fountains, fish, birds, and other things to enhance the beauty.

7. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

Solomon also made a conscious decision to "acquire" male and female servants. Although this term can mean "buy," he did not buy his Hebrew servants.

qanah- to get, to acquire, to create, to buy, to possess a) (Qal) 1) to get, to acquire, to obtain ... c) used of acquiring knowledge, wisdom 2) to buy b) (Niphal) to be bought c) (Hiphil) to cause to possess(BDB 7069)

When the queen of Sheba saw these great "works" she was amazed.

When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 5 the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her. 1 Kings 10:4-5

Many of them no doubt were beautiful to look upon, others were highly skilled in their ability to do what needed to be done. He also had great possessions of animals. Sheep, goats, cattle, oxen, camels, and other livestock were had in abundance. Multitude of animals to go out and look upon, to eat and enjoy.

8. 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.

This too is a "great work" that multitudes seek to imitate. The gathering of possessions is still the "American Dream" today. Solomon went after wealth, with the same zeal he had everything else. As the king of a great empire, there was no real limit to his quest. Not only pure silver and gold in bars and coins, but also skillfully wrought into beautiful objects. Anything that looked beautiful and enjoyable he sought and purchased. Price and the extent of the search were no object. If he saw it and liked it, he took whatever steps were necessary to gain possession of it.

He also brought in all kinds of entertainers. People with beautiful voices and the ability to play musical instruments. He had them in abundance. Never an idle moment. Anything he wanted to hear played, anything he wanted to hear sung, he could have it in a moment.

9. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

He now begins to sum up the results of all the things he did. He finally reached a level of possessions which excelled anything that had ever been before him in Jerusalem. No Jew had ever been as wealthy as Solomon, or had as much ease, beauty and great works around them. If life could be made satisfying, he would have found it. Even more important, through it all his wisdom had remained with him. He had not succumbed to the temptations to go too far and pass into sin. He was able to maintain his integrity in the eyes of God. Though he was acting imprudently and foolishly(2:3) at times, never did his true wisdom leave him.

10. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,

With his unlimited resources, and his express desire to try everything to see if life could be satisfying on such a course, everything his eyes saw that he had the slightest desire for he got. Along with this, any pleasure(joy, mirth, gladness) that his heart desired he did not hold himself back from. He completely gave himself over to every form of need, desire and joy. No one can say that if this experiment in the satisfying elements of pleasure can say that it failed through lack of effort or means.

For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.

He found great enjoyment in the searching and in the building. His heart rejoiced in all the labor. It was thrilling and exciting to do all these things, but once it was built or gained, there was no further value of satisfaction actually possessing it. It was the labor that was sweet, but nothing more. There was no lasting or abiding happiness in such a life. Once he finished with the actual laboring and doing of the projects, there was nothing more to extract from it. It was just another hollow undertaking.

11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled;

When once this conclusion hit him, he saw the emptiness in all endeavor. No matter how many works his hand wrought, and no matter what areas these works took him would always fail to give long lasting satisfaction. No matter how much the toil he put forth in designing creating and bringing these things into being, it too brought no lasting satisfaction. The "*laying hold of folly*" to see if there was a prudent way to enjoy what generally destroyed men led to a complete failure. Even with prudence guiding the heart, the enjoyment of pleasures, the seeking for treasures, and the gaining of possessions through toil led to only one conclusion.

And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

It was futile, empty, with no meaning or value. It was a chasing of the wind. There was no profit or benefit to it even under the sun. The only benefit received was in the joy of the doing.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

Introduction:

In all our study of Ecclesiastes we must remember that it is God's explanation of the affects of the curse on the physical creation. No matter when or where we are we cannot escape these truths. "Life under the sun." begins when we bring nothing into this world and always ends when we take nothing out. When sin entered the world, God cursed the creation in such a way that it forces all who reject him to see the futility in this life and hopefully lead them back to God. In God's love, mercy and compassion no one is to find success and fulfillment without a close relationship with Him. Jesus explained the reason behind this:

"For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Mt 16:26-27

No one is really profited, if they live this life in such a way as to lose their soul. Ecclesiastes is a step by step approach to the truth of Jesus words. Man has been given an eternal soul and 70-80 years of life to prepare it for eternity. All that is involved in God's curse that made everything vanity and a chasing after the wind has been designed to teach us to number our days.

As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is {but} labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. 11 Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee? 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:10-12

There is no area of life that has not been modified by God to leave us empty and emphasize the futility of all choices that do not lead to Him. After all has been said, this in the final conclusion:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, {is:} fear God and keep His commandments, because this {applies to} every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. Eccl 12:13-14

Review:

The above was Solomon's initial conclusion set forth in 1:2. Life without God is vanity. It is empty futile and meaningless. It is like chasing a wind that can never be caught.

1. **1:3-8** There is no possible way for any one to find satisfaction in our short life under the sun. Generations come and go and leave little trace. Truly most people who have ever lived leave no trace that they were ever here. Even if you are an exception what does it really mean?

2. **1:9-11** There is nothing new left to discover or to bring to the light of day. Man can search and seek. He can find new ways to do old things, but only fools himself if he believes he has really accomplished something special. There is nothing new under the sun.

3. **1:12-18** For the idealistic who will spend their lives seeking to make the world a better place for posterity, Solomon finds that what they seek cannot be accomplished. There are many crooked things to tackle, but none can be straightened. There are multitudes of things that have something lacking but that which is necessary to complete it has been placed so high by God that man cannot reach it.

4. **2:1-11** For those who bypass idealism and seek instead for pleasure and pride in ownership, Solomon's thorough exploration of all pleasures which "life under the sun" can give leads to the conclusion that there is no benefit here. Though there is enjoyment in acquiring things, once in one's possession, they only become empty meaningless and futile. One cannot find true happiness in materialism. It is simply not there.

And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Lk 12:15

Without God to give our lives an eternal purpose and meaning, everything sooner or later is shown

to be futile and empty.

Preview:

In this next section(2:12-17), Solomon turns himself to a deeper consideration of wisdom, madness, and folly. He concludes that though there are benefits to wisdom, if only “life under the sun” is considered, and all things are laid side by side with no eternal consequences taken into account, there really isn’t that much difference between them.

12. Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;

Solomon is actually returning to a thought that was introduced earlier:

And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain. Eccl 1:17-18

He now returns to it for a further examination. Is there a difference while we “live under the sun” between the man who is foolish, a man who acts the part of a madman, or a man who reveals great wisdom and foresight? Before we can “consider” these three terms, let us examine their exact meaning. The term “wisdom” is used 141 times in 14 different OT books. It describes the qualities of: “experience” “shrewdness,” “technical skill” “right choices at opportune time,” thus manifesting “an indication of maturity and development.”

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)

But there is a subtle difference between the wisdom Solomon is describing here in Ecclesiastes and the wisdom he will discuss in the Proverbs. Here it is used of the wisdom of “life under the sun.” What does “experience, shrewdness and technical skill” mean for those who live out of the “presence of Jehovah?” Although such men are exceedingly wise and shrewd, what does such wisdom mean? When they have rejected God and seek only for what they can extract from life, what does wisdom become and what benefits does it bring? This is not the wisdom of the Proverbs which begins with the fear of the LORD (**Prov 1:7; 9:10**) which is the true beginning of wisdom. It therefore can only mean the ability to extract as much benefit and enjoyment, skill and success as one can from life his 70-80 years “under the sun.” He looked all this over very carefully, comparing occupations, skills, benefits and deficits.

Then he turned to madness and folly. Since our interpretation will be based upon an understanding of these two terms, we have to take careful thought to what Solomon meant when he used them. Yet since they are only used a few times and only in the book of Ecclesiastes, we have to be cautious. Although they could mean nothing more than the mad insanity and folly of a person who cannot function at all, and must be committed to an asylum, the context does not seem to favor something so simple. There is a moral component to this “madness” and this “folly:”

madness "... to shine; to make oneself shine, to boast of oneself, to be foolish; to be puffed up with vain glory, to vaunt, to rave with foolish conceit; hence to be mad, to rage... madness, implies so great a departure from wisdom, that the mind, without any control, rushes on with a blind fury..." (Wilson p 262)

folly "... to act stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently; to be sottish, infatuated: it denotes any deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent..." (Wilson, p 172)

While the wise man takes the time while living in this life under the sun to be “shrewd,” gain “technical skills” and make “right choices at opportune times” thus revealing “maturity and development,” the madman and fool does none of these things. He does not consider the outcome of his endeavors, never takes time to develop a plan, is “puffed up with vain glory,” and “raves with foolish conceit.” Such people know everything and learn nothing. They are self-important, pompous, and arrogant. It does not seem consistent with other uses of the term in Ecclesiastes to draw the conclusion that they completely unable to think well, only that they do not choose to do so. In **Ecc**

7:25-27, Solomon makes it very clear that a part of the “foolishness of madness” is “the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains.” In **Ecc 9:1-3** he concludes that the same fate awaits the “righteous and the wicked,” “the good, the clean, and the unclean.” It is “an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men.” He claims that this leads to “insanity in their hearts throughout their lives.”

In the context of Ecclesiastes it appears that Solomon used “madness” to refer to those who live against all the rules of “life under the sun.” They push the limits of life. They drive drunk, steal from and swindle others, pick fights, violate laws, go against the norms of society. They risk their lives, refuse to seek for success, and do not realize the eternal consequences of their actions. Such “madness,” abounds even today.

The fool acts “stupidly” “absurdly” and “inconsistently.” Again, there is no compelling reason to confine this exclusively to those with a touched mind. Only the absurd folly of those who are not consistent in the way they live “life under the sun.” They take risks with their life, do absurd things, push the envelop of safety, health, and prudence.

Solomon is therefore examining and assessing whether those who are wise in this life, who properly assess things, and act shrewdly and maturely have any real advantage over those who treat their lives under the sun like “madmen and fools” risking life, accepting foolish challenges and difficulties unprepared, and stumbling from one problem and difficulty to the next. Is there any real advantage to one over the other?

Thus the inquiry takes in the extremes of mankind. A man who has no ability to reason at all, who is completely and totally insensible to the making of decisions about himself, then in the middle is the man who is foolish in the making of his decisions, who makes decisions that are not right, unwise and imprudent. Then on the other end is the man of wisdom and intelligence, who can make wise decisions and knows where he is going.

Complete & Total Folly	Unwise Imprudent	Shrewd Intelligence
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Solomon made an exhaustive investigation of this to determine whether the wisdom of the wise serves them in such a way as to make the crooked and sin cursed world better. Will wisdom be enough to counteract the damage done by sin and make this life worth living without God?

For what can the man do who succeeds the king?— only that which has already been done. At first glance we are forced to ask: how does this statement fit with what Solomon just said? It is evidently some type of explanation or reason behind why after an examination of pleasure and possessions, Solomon moved immediately to wisdom, madness, and folly. The term “for” generally gives the reason, purpose or time behind a preceding statement.

3588 kiy- that, for, because, when, as though, as, because that, but, then, certainly, except, surely, since a) that; yea, indeed b) when (of time); when, if, though (with a concessive force) c) because, since (causal connection) d) but (after negative) e) that if, for if, indeed if, for though, but if f) but rather, but g) except that h) only, nevertheless l) surely j) that is k) but if l) for though m) forasmuch as, for therefore (BDB)

In this passage it seems to be an explanation of the validity of this examination. The fact is that all the kings who succeeded Solomon fell into one of those three categories. Some were so wicked they lived a life of complete folly and brought the people under grave difficulties. Others were unwise and imprudent in their decisions. Some were wise and prudent.

Though it has now been about 3000 years since King Solomon penned these words, nothing has changed. With nothing new under the sun, live will cycle between these three types of rulers. Therefore it is an important examination since the basic nature of man will never change and each will also fall into one of these three categories.

In addition, has man learned anything new that Solomon could not have seen then? He is among

the wisest of the wise, had great stores of resources at his disposal to make this inquiry, along with an abundant amount of time to search them out. What could any man who comes along later hope to gain that has not already been gleaned? There is nothing new under the sun. There will be no later revelations that will undermine these conclusions. That which has been is that which shall be. That which has been done is that which shall be done. The conclusions which Solomon here comes to will not be undone or made better with the passage of time.

13. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness.

After this thorough and complete survey and study, he drew the conclusion that even with only “life under the sun” as the basis, wisdom “excels” folly.

“... to remain; to be abundant; to be more than others; to excel... what exceeds bounds or measure, pre-eminence... very great, excellent...” (Wilson p 152)

The difference in lifestyle between one who chooses the course of wisdom and one who chooses the path of folly is as tangible as the difference between a room filled with light and then filled with darkness. Wisdom is more abundant than folly, It exceeds the bounds of folly and is greater and more excellent than folly. The quality of life of the wise man is pre-eminently better than that of the fool. Who would choose to live in darkness when they could have light? Light reveals detail, color, texture and beauty. The fool misses all that. He walks through life missing most of its beauty and loveliness. Wisdom gives life a clearer perspective and the ability to see and enjoy more.

14. The wise man’s eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in the darkness.

Herein lies the most obvious reason why the life of the wise will be better than the life of the fool. The wise man knows where he is going. He can see the dangers in his path long before they materialize and he can get out of their way. He can see the good coming to him long before it reaches him and he can therefore take the steps needed to get there. The fool on the other hand walks in the darkness. He just does not know where he has been, where he is, or where he is going. The fool is blind.

The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive go on, and are punished for it. Pr 22:3

The difference in the quality of life between two such people is so clear and obvious that it hardly needs an examination. Everyone with any ability to reason can see that wisdom that gives insight will enhance life while folly diminishes it. But remember, there is no spiritual component here. The limits of the examination center on “life under the sun.” This is where the difficulty in this limited inquiry lies. While wisdom and folly in the spiritual realm equate to eternal life with God in heaven or eternal punishment and banishment in hell, it is not so clear in the material realm what the real benefits of wisdom over folly really bring. For although the quality of life is enhanced, it doesn’t really change the final outcome.

Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all.

With the statement above the conclusions of 12-13 are shown to be only surface conclusions. Though the quality of life might be better, what affect does this other consideration have on the matter? Actually, this new thought has such a great bearing on the other things as to practically negate them. What does all of a man's wisdom avail him regarding this “same event” that “happens to all?” The term “event” refers generally to an “unforeseen meeting” or an “accident.”

4745 miqreh- unforeseen meeting or event, accident, happening, chance, fortune a) accident, chance b) fortune, fate(BDB)

It’s use in Ecclesiastes(2:14; 2:15; 3:19; 9:2; 9:3) all refer to the event of death. Death, which brings “life under the sun” to an irrevocable end cannot be modified or changed by wisdom, madness or folly. People who are wise in the way they conduct their “life under the sun” still die without warning both in their youth and in old age. People who are mad or foolish in their manner of “life under the sun” also die in the same manner. There is no real bearing on the length of one's life to be found in wisdom. It might help avoid some of the dangers of life, but there is nothing any one who “leaves the presence of Jehovah” and chooses to live his “life under the sun” as all he desires from life can

do about death.

Death is the end of “life under the sun.” Since “nothing can be taken out,” and we leave “naked,” **(I Tim 6:7; Job 1:21)** the ultimate conclusion now comes crashing into the difference between wisdom, madness, and folly in the way one lives his “life under the sun.” Although it makes the quality of one’s life here better to have wisdom, after “one generation goes and another has come” and “there is no remembrance,” **(Ecc 1:4, 11)** what real difference did that wisdom make? It could not stop death, no one remembers them, and all that they accomplished was left behind. What did it really matter. The fact that death invades “life under the sun,” and one is not allowed to take anything with them when they die cancels the benefits of wisdom.

Death is the great equalizer that makes this life the same for all who live “*out of the presence of Jehovah*” and thus only “*under the sun.*” No matter what is accomplished either with wisdom or discretion, the fate that will come sooner or later is to die and be forgotten. What value will wisdom “under the sun” be over folly and madness” in about 150 years? None is the only answer, and with that answer comes the deeper realization that though wisdom excels folly, it by no means counteracts all the things Solomon found to be true about it. Once dead, what good was all the wisdom gleaned? If it can’t pass through the grave and be carried into eternity, it has no lasting value or purpose.

15. So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."

Since wisdom cannot deliver from death, it is canceled as a great advantage. It adds to the quality of life, it keeps one from many sorrows and heartaches, but it can not expand or protect a man's life. Each person awakens every morning to the possibility that they will not live through that day. Accidents, sicknesses, body failures, violence and other things lurk just outside our vision and no amount of wisdom, madness or folly has any impact upon them.

The fool has just as much chance as Solomon of surviving the day, and Solomon faces the same risks of pestilence, war, famine, accidents or violence. What happens to the fool will happen to him. Since “life under the sun” can end without a moments notice, and once it is over there is no difference in the outcome, how is Solomon more wise? This conclusion forces again from his lips. **“This also is vanity!”** It is empty, futile, fruitless and meaningless!

16. For there is no more remembrance of the wise man than of the fool forever, Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.

This is a further explanation of the conclusions he has made. For those who live the full threescore and ten(70) or fourscore(80) years and for those who are cut off in the prime of life by some unfortunate accident, no one remembers either the wise man or the fool. Both will be forgotten forever.

7911 shakach or shakeach- to forget, to ignore, to wither a) (Qal) 1) to forget 2) to cease to care b) (Niphal) to be forgotten c) (Piel) to cause to forget d) (Hiphil) to make or cause to forget ... (BDB)

This is the real essence of the vanity. Everything now done will be forgotten soon after someone dies. It happens gradually and slowly, but with the passing of each day, the memories wither the emotions become less powerful(cease to care) and fewer and fewer people even remember.

And how does a wise man die? As the fool!

This too is a hard thing to meditate and consider. The drunk driver(mad and a fool) kills the sober driver(wise). The murderer(mad and a fool) kills the innocent(wise). The tornado rips through the city destroying both the wise and the fool. Heredity brings the same health problems to the wise that fools bring on themselves. How indeed do the wise die? Exactly as the fool. When one leaves the “presence of Jehovah” to “live life under the sun,” this is what the choice brings. Without God to deliver us from death or in death, “life under the sun” is an empty valueless experience indeed!

17. Therefore I hated life

At this point in Solomon's exploration and inquiry even he became depressed. The realization of how futile "life under the sun" actually is caused him to "hate" life. This term can refer to the intense emotion of "hatred" to a weaker "set against."

sane' 8130, "to hate, set against." This verb appears in Ugaritic, Moabite, Aramaic, and Arabic. It appears in all periods of Hebrew and about 145 times in the Bible. Sane' represents an emotion ranging from intense "hatred" to the much weaker "set against" and is used of persons and things (including ideas, words, inanimate objects). The strong sense of the word typifies the emotion of jealousy... Obviously, the word covers emotion ranging from "bitter disdain" to outright "hatred,"... In a weaker sense, sane' signifies "being set against" something. ... (Vine's)

At the least Solomon lost his great love and zest for life. The idealistic plans and goals have been tarnished and the bleakness of the future takes away all joy of the present. He began to love it less and less, and became cold and indifferent to it. Perhaps it even became grievous to him and he felt hatred. He then gives his reasons for these feelings. "Life under the sun" that begins at birth and ends at death lost all its luster when it is moved away from "the presence of Jehovah."

because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a grasping for the wind.

The reason he began to hate life is because the above conclusion affected every work done under the sun. All the deeds, works, materials and activities under the sun that he explored and dissected became "grievous." This is a very broad Hebrew term taking in that which is "bad," or even "wicked." It can be "morally evil or hurtful," "It can mean "bad" or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness," and it is "the antithesis of shalom"

ra' 7451, "bad; evil; wicked; sore." ... Ra` refers to that which is "bad" or "evil," in a wide variety of applications. A greater number of the word's occurrences signify something morally evil or hurtful, often referring to man or men:... Ra` is also used to denote evil words ... evil thoughts... or evil actions... Ra` may mean "bad" or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness: ... Ra` may also connote a fierceness or wildness:... In less frequent uses, ra` implies severity: ... The word may also refer to something of poor or inferior quality, such as "bad" land.... In Isa. 45:7 Yahweh describes His actions by saying, "...I make peace, and create evil [ra]..."; moral "evil" is not intended in this context, but rather the antithesis of shalom ("peace; welfare; well-being"). The whole verse affirms that as absolute Sovereign, the Lord creates a universe governed by a moral order. Calamity and misfortune will surely ensue from the wickedness of ungodly men. (Vines)

Solomon was deeply moved by the intrusion of death into "life under the sun." It literally ruined everything! No matter what inherent or intrinsic value something might have, death and forgetfulness destroyed it. It made everything painful and hurtful. It brought sorrow and grief into the most pleasant of things. It made everything vain-futile, empty, meaningless and fruitless. All became a chasing after the wind.

18. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun,

Not only did Solomon lose his love for "life under the sun" but he also began to hate and feel grieved about all the work and toil and accomplishments he had made. All the labor he had expended in the pursuit of pleasure and amassing of possessions that were described in **2:1-11** lost their luster. While in verse 11 he saw that it was vanity and chasing the wind. With the addition of death to the equation, has become cold and indifferent to it all. He loved it less and less until it simply had no meaning to him any longer. Again, it appears more likely that he is speaking of depression. It all became a waste of time in his eyes. But it was not simply death. There was another concern also:

because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

No matter how much is gained or put away, on this very day he may be called upon to leave it behind to another. Jesus made this same point in speaking of those who look to this life as an end within itself and do not look at it with their relationship with God as of primary importance.

And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" 18 "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:16-21

Herein lies the utter and complete futility of all the works and labor of "life under the sun." We have no control over when we will leave it, and we have very little control over who will have it all after we are gone. Add to this the fact that the one who receives it all will not long remember the one who made all the sacrifices to get it and one has the recipe for hating life and labor. When people see this clearly repentance and a return to God become much more interesting to people. But since this is not in Solomon's quest yet, he pursues this to its logical conclusion.

19. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

The term "who knows" is an expression even we use today for things in the future that are fraught with futility or emptiness. We just don't know what will be. In this case, he is speaking of all the fruits of his life. I am going to work hard, use wisdom and create something very special. All wise men seek to do this. Most plan to leave it all to their children. But you don't know whether you can do this or not. They may die before you, or they may be fools. You have no control over who gets the benefits of all your labor and wisdom. Nor do you have any control over whether they squander and ruin all that you have done.

Consider the validity and the power of his point! No man likes to think that all he has spent his life building may be left to others who will completely undo it. A man might spend his whole life building a garden and a home only to have his son sell it and have it all bulldozed away for a parking lot. All the labor and toil put forth by someone can be swept away in a moment by another who does not share their wisdom. The work of a lifetime can be undone in moments, and all memory of it fade quickly from the earth. This certainly is a vanity, an emptiness and an ache in our hearts when we look at our own lives like this. The things that are most important to us "under the sun" family, friends, jobs, homes, hobbies can all be removed in a moment by death, or by being left to a fool. It hurts to even think about it. But it is true of all who seek to live this life without being rich toward God.

With Solomon it all came to pass. Everything he built was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The folly of his sons, along with the rest of the nation led to the total destruction. There is little left in Jerusalem that would testify that he ever existed as far as "life under the sun" is concerned. The only reason we know about him at all is what God gave to him.

20. Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.

This was the limit of Solomon's endurance in this investigation. When it dawned on him just how extensive the transitory nature of this world is. That all his labor and effort can be taken from him in a moment with no warning in death. That it would never to be returned again, and on that on top of all that the one who receives it might ruin or lose it quickly. He fell into despair. His heart turned. It "turned around" or "changed direction."

cabab 5437, "to turn, go around, turn around (change direction)." This verb occurs only in Hebrew (including post-biblical Hebrew) and Ugaritic. Nouns using these radicals appear in Arabic and Akkadian. Biblical Hebrew attests the word in all periods and about 160 times. Basically this verb represents a circular movement--"to take a turning." First, it refers to such movement in general.... Perhaps one of the passages where this meaning is clearest is Prov. 26:14, which speaks of the "turning" of a door on its hinges.... A second emphasis of cabab is "to go around," in the sense of to proceed or be arranged in a circle.... Cabab is also used of the completion of this movement, the state

of literally or figuratively surrounding something or someone.... A third use of this verb is "to change direction." This can be a change of direction toward... There are three special nuances under this emphasis. First, the verb may mean "to roam through" as a scout looking for water: Second, cabab may be used of "turning something over" to someone. Third, cabab may be used of "changing or turning one thing into another": (Vine's)

What he had originally set out to do resulted in a complete change. He realized that this could not work. It also led him to despair.

2976 ya'ash- 1) to despair a) (Niphal) to be despaired, to be desperate b) (Piel) to cause to despair as an interjection: 2) It is hopeless!(BDB)

He gave up hope for this part of his exploration. This one fact destroyed any hope in finding joy in "life under the sun" from possessions or labor. There would be joy in the doing, but not in the retaining. He despaired and cried "It is hopeless." Who can get enjoyment out of something when they have looked it over carefully and found a grave flaw that cannot be fixed. There is no profit in labor in this life. It will all be left behind at death and go to another. Nothing abides. Life without God is so bleak, so empty, it is hopeless. There is no purpose whatsoever to it if man does not give to God first priority. It gives a reason for living and it removes the sting from leaving it to another.

21. For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; Yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it.

Again he begins with a term purpose and result. This is the reason for the above statement. A man can labor with wisdom knowledge and skill. He can do everything right and see just exactly the results he was trying to accomplish. He puts forth great amounts of time and effort to gain intimate knowledge, and the necessary skills to gain success. But he will die either while completing it or sometime after. He puts together a beautiful and wonderful heritage, which he would certainly like to enjoy forever. But he is unable to do this. Death will deliver all of it to another. Maybe the one he wants, maybe not. But either way it is given to a man who did not work for it and therefore does not appreciate it as much as the one who made it.

Because of the nature of "life under the sun," this is acceptable and every one has gotten used to it, but really it is a sad state of affairs. To leave all that labor and toil to another who has not lifted one finger for it is someone depressing. Yet the best he can hope for is a wise son to carry it on. Yet even this is sometimes denied. Many times even in our society, all that one has is sold to the highest bidder for there is no heir, or the heir wants the money and not the labor.

This also is vanity and a great evil.

Solomon is no longer content to simply call it empty, futile, void of meaning and purpose. He also calls it a great evil. The term evil was used back in verse 17 where it was translated grievous. It means be "*morally evil or hurtful,*" or "*It can mean "bad" or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness,*" and it is "*the antithesis of shalom.*" What Solomon learned led to pain, unhappiness and the very opposite of shalom peace and contentment. But he adds to this the term "great" which intensifies the meaning by making it "larger" and "more powerful."

Rab 7227, "many; great; large; prestigious; powerful." This adjective has a cognate in biblical Aramaic. The Hebrew word appears about 474 times in the Old Testament and in all periods. First, this word represents plurality in number or amount, whether applied to people or to things.... Used in conjunction with "days" or "years," rab means "long," and the resulting phrase means "a long time"... The word can be used metaphorically, describing an abstract concept: "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" Gen. 6:5... When rab is applied to land areas, it means "large".. (Vine's)

This was a very very painful and exceedingly unhappy thing. It gives one no comfort whatsoever. It is a mighty and vast evil.

22. For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?

What does a man gain for his lifetime of work in his "life under the sun?" He came in empty and he

goes out empty, and can't gain any lasting value from anything he does. There is no value to it. The question "What is the good of it?" has no answer. Man works so hard to build something, and it doesn't even matter what it is. It can be a house, a business, a hobby, a career, no matter how much labor he puts into it, it is all for nothing. If it is done only "under the sun," then when the man leaves, it remains under the sun and is therefore given to another. All his dreams, efforts, sacrifices, agonies and toil is for nothing.

23. For all his days are sorrowful, and his work grievous;

The man who truly sets his heart to build up something, is generally consumed by it. Man seldom has the self-control not to be completely engulfed in the work. He sets goals and ideals and then come the setbacks. No matter how much knowledge wisdom and skill are brought to this work there are sorrows and the work is grievous. Sometimes the sorrow comes from physical pain and other times it is mental or emotional.

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

The days of a man consumed by labor have sorrow, frustration and difficulties. The work can be "grievous." Leading to "anger" "vexation" and "frustration."

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

even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

Even during the off hours, most skillful and wise men find their minds still consumed with it. He lies awake at night seeking for solutions and better ways of doing things. This is the price one pays for drive and determination coupled with wisdom, knowledge and skill. Those who take their work seriously can all attest that problems come up which leave them exactly as Solomon describes. Yet in spite of all the sacrifices and efforts put forth, at the end of their life they have nothing to show for it, must give it all up to another, and have no hope that anyone will remember them for it. What vanity, futility and emptiness this is.

24. There is nothing better or a man than that he should eat drink and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.

Here Solomon comes to one of his great and important conclusions. It is foolish to get so involved in any sort of hobby, career, business, or lifestyle that it removes the joy from one's life. There is nothing worth that! If one does not enjoy the labor he is involved in, if he cannot enjoy the simple pleasures of eating good food, drinking good beverages which he thoroughly enjoys, and finding sheer enjoyment in what he is doing then he is missing all that one can hope to gain from their "life under the sun."

It is not much, living from day to day without any hope for the future, but it is the very best this world can offer if there is no God, or if one is not serving God. As a matter of fact in this sin-cursed world, this is one of God's gifts to man that he can find such joy and satisfaction in these simple and easily gained things. Men must learn to enjoy the fruits of their labor and toil day by day. This is all there is to this life. We must all learn to live and enjoy the present moment. There is nothing in the past that we can regain or retain, there is nothing in the future we can control or even know if we will be there so we have to enjoy the present moment for that is all we have.

This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

This is an important addition to the book. It is an admission that the attempt in the quest failed. There is nothing in "life under the sun" without God. Only when one knows that it comes from the hand of God is it safe to take and enjoy it. This is from the hand of God. God wants us to eat and drink and enjoy good in his labor. It is what God has left for man who want to live "in the presence of Jehovah."

This is the truth which the Spirit of God now reveals through Solomon. He has allowed Solomon to

examine those things which can give man security and a reason for living and has found them all to be hollow and false. Now he brings this to a conclusion. God and God alone gives to anyone the right to enjoy the things of this life. It can only be had by putting things into their proper perspective. Paul put into clear perspective:

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. 11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 1 Tim 6:6-11

Only by looking at “life under the sun” in the context of godliness can any real meaning be found and any satisfaction gained. God is the only one who can give such gifts. He gives true wisdom, and knowledge and joy only to these. In spite of possessions or the lack thereof, in spite of tribulations or their lack, in spite of persecution, or whatever other trials and difficulties might come his way, the one who is good in the sight of God will find happiness and joy.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 2Pet. 3:11-12

25. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

Is Solomon speaking only of himself, or does he put these words into the mouth of all readers. Each man has his own right to these pleasures while living here. They are the truest benefits to be extracted from “life under the sun.” There will be nothing other than this daily enjoyment that man can ever hope to hold on to. He can take nothing else with him from day to day than the satisfaction each day brings. It is the only path way to true abiding contentment and happiness that “life under the sun” offers.

26. For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight;

A difficult question here centers on whether Solomon is still considering only “life under the sun,” or life in the “presence of Jehovah” “walking with Him and calling upon His name.” Since it is obvious that a man who is “good in His sight” would have to be a man of faith, fidelity, and righteousness who was walking with Him, this must be the wisdom that fears God and keeps his commandments(Ecc 12:13). Therefore after admitting the absolute futility and anguish of his exploration, he now concludes that the only thing that gives comfort is God’s rule. God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to anyone who is good in His sight. We cannot change the truth of what Solomon found about the futility of “life under the sun,” but we can learn to enjoy our food, drink and labor, and trust God to give us wisdom, knowledge, and joy.

but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God.

This is a very candid and obviously inspired remark. This is not something Solomon could have discerned from his explorations. This however is the very heart of the pain and grief he found in the labor of those who only live “under the sun.” In God’s wisdom this is how “life under the sun” works. All sinners who refuse to be “good in His sight” by believing in Him and trusting to walk with Him can only live “under the sun.” There is nothing else. They can only do the things Solomon spoke of above. They can only seek to make the world a better place, give themselves to pleasure, to gaining things, or to labor. But all these things lead to one end. Sooner or later the sinner must give it all up. In God’s providence, ultimately His own people will receive the greatest benefits of all that is done “under the sun”

This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

The vanity, futility and emptiness of this as well as the chasing of the wind is for the sinner who spends his life in utter futility, with little enjoyment. It is such a sad thing for the righteous to watch

the wicked in this folly. It is such a waste of valuable time and effort. For the same effort they could gain their souls, if they would only trust God.