

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

As we begin (chapter 2 verses 1-11), we find that Solomon pursued fulfillment through pleasure (verse 1-2), wine (verse 3), great works (verses 4-6), wealth (verses 7-8), aesthetic and artistic pleasures (verse 8), and fame (verse 9). Yet all of these failed to bring a lasting satisfaction to the wisest man of all time. And yet, people 3000 years later are still trying them in search of enduring fulfillment.

Pleasure, although not necessarily evil, has its shortcomings, much like human wisdom. Solomon reflected upon his tragic experiences in attempting to draw satisfaction purely out of pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also [is] vanity.

We see that Solomon was so dissatisfied with life the way he had experienced it, that he decides to try pleasure of the flesh. He is like so many who look for peace in all the wrong places. He has plenty of money and fame, but that does not satisfy the hungry soul.

I have heard so many people say, they thought great riches would make them happy. When they acquired the great riches, they were still unhappy. Some of them searched for fame, thinking that would satisfy them.

True satisfaction comes from a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else in life can fill that void. In verse one, Solomon finds that fleshly happiness does not bring satisfaction either.

The investigation or test was crucial for Solomon. But the test was not scientific; rather it was a practical experiment to see what worked. He was interested in what a given act accomplished.

Ecclesiastes 2:2 I said of laughter, [It is] mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

This speaks of laughing on the surface, but your heart is crying. Laughter is but for a moment.

Proverbs 14:13 "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth [is] heaviness."

Ecclesiastes 2:3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what [was] that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

Many people in our society today, drink alcohol and take drugs to hide from the realities of life. They feel that for a moment, the deadening will help them to forget their sorrows. It really does not work. When the effects are gone, they are even more depressed than when they began. This is what Solomon discovered here, as well.

In further tests on the human level, Solomon overemphasized human gratification at the expense of God's glory.

Ecclesiastes 2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

The accumulations of fine houses and vineyards will not help. "Things" do not bring that peace, Solomon is looking for. Peace and satisfaction is not brought by outward influences. This comes from the heart of man.

(See 1 Kings 4-10), for an amplified account of Solomon's riches.

Ecclesiastes 2:5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all [kind of] fruits:

Solomon loved beautiful gardens. The garden he had on the outskirts of Jerusalem was well known. Even the beautiful gardens he loved did not bring the satisfaction he was looking for.

Ecclesiastes 2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

Many people find it very soothing to live on the banks of a lake. This was the thoughts of Solomon, as well. Again, this does not cause him to be satisfied.

Ecclesiastes 2:7 I got [me] servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

We know that even the queen of Sheba was impressed by the finery of the king's court. She had many servants herself, but nothing to compare with Solomon's.

1 Kings 9:20-21 "[And] all the people [that were] left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which [were] not of the children of Israel," "Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice unto this day."

We can see from the following Scripture, an example of the number of animals he had.

2 Kings 3:4 "And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool."

Ecclesiastes 2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, [as] musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

Solomon, besides being the wisest man, was also the richest man. The following Scripture is an example of the wealth he acquired in one year.

1 Kings 10:14 "Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold" (666).

We see in the following Scripture, that Solomon had whatever he wanted. He had many singers and those who played instruments.

1 Chronicles 25:6: "All these [were] under the hands of their father for song [in] the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman."

Musical instruments: This Hebrew word occurs only here in the Old Testament. The meaning is indicated in an early Egyptian letter that used a similar Canaanite word for "concubines." This fits Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

Ecclesiastes 2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

Solomon's wealth, fame, and wisdom were known throughout the lands around them.

1 Kings 10:23 "So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."

Ecclesiastes 2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor.

"Reward": Solomon's portion in life. This was what he received for all his activity and effort.

We see in this, a fulfillment of every earthly desire that any person could imagine was Solomon's. Everything Solomon put his hand to prospered. Attaining worldly fame and fortune cannot bring true happiness. The search for fulfillment in life always ends with searching for the Lord and everlasting life. All the other things do not satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all [was] vanity and vexation of spirit, and [there was] no profit under the sun.

All of this is nothing. It does not satisfy the soul. All the things, mentioned in this chapter, are no comparison at all, to the satisfaction knowing Jesus brings.

Proverbs 15:16 "Better [is] little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith."

1 John 2:16-17 "For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

"No profit": "Vanity" is defined in this context. The futility of the labor process is that Solomon had nothing of enduring and satisfying substance to show for it. Wisdom is no guarantee that one will achieve satisfaction, even in accomplishments comparable to Solomon's. To expend God given resources for human accomplishment alone is empty.

(In verses 12-16), we are shown that wisdom is better than folly, but both are useless when one comes to death. Human wisdom suffers another crucial shortcoming, it leaves both the wise and the fool empty handed at the threshold of death.

Ecclesiastes 2:12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what [can] the man [do] that cometh after the king? [even] that which hath been already done.

About the highest honor a man can attain on this earth is to be king. Wisdom, in a sense, is no better than folly or madness, if it is worldly wisdom. None of them satisfy his soul. This to me, is saying Solomon does not want to start all over as king. He has done what he could, and going over it again would not help.

Ecclesiastes 2:13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

Proverbs 4:18-19 "But the path of the just [is] as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "The way of the wicked [is] as darkness: they know not at what they stumble."

Ephesians 5:8 "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now [are ye] light in the Lord: walk as children of light:"

Ecclesiastes 2:14 The wise man's eyes [are] in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

The fool is not one who is mentally deficient, but is morally bankrupt. It is not that he cannot learn wisdom, but that he won't. He refuses to know, fear, and obey God.

"Eyes" speak of intelligence. The one event that "happeneth to them all" is death.

John 11:10 "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him."

1 John 2:11 "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

Ecclesiastes 2:15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also [is] vanity.

Solomon knows that just being filled with wisdom will not extend his life. His speculation here, is if this is so, what advantage is it to be wise?

Ecclesiastes 2:16 For [there is] no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now [is] in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise [man]? as the fool.

Solomon is a little negative in this statement. This is not exactly true. Solomon was remembered above his fellows for the wisdom he conveyed to all of us, when he penned some of the wisdom he had into a book. Surely the wise and the foolish do die, when their time God has allotted them to die comes. They have no control over death. God is the Controller.

Hebrews 9:27 "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

(In verses 17-20), we see that part of the futility of trying to find fulfillment in material accomplishment is the fact that one must leave the fruit of his work to another who may well waste the accrued benefits.

Ecclesiastes 2:17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun [is] grievous unto me: for all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit.

Because the work that is wrought: Since it had no more lasting value than the folly of a fool, Solomon viewed even the great rewards of his labor as a source of pain.

I hated life is translated correctly and should not be misunderstood as "I hate life". It is clearly the temporary conclusion about Solomon's historical experiment.

This is a climax of the other statements he has made. The word "therefore" connects the previous verses. Because death comes to all, I hate life, is what he is saying. He feels no accomplishment, in spite of the fact he has accomplished so much. He feels as if he has failed God.

Ecclesiastes 2:18 Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

After reigning 40 years, Solomon will die, and someone else will take his place.

1 Kings 11:11 "Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant."

Ecclesiastes 2:19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise [man] or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This [is] also vanity.

When a man dies, the work he has wrought with his hands is another's. It is not very pleasant for him to realize that the works of his hands might pass to someone undeserving.

Since he does not know who God will choose to rule after him, he also does not know whether he will be wise, or a fool. All of his wisdom is gone, when he dies. He cannot pass his wisdom on to another. Wisdom is a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 2:20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun.

We can see that Solomon was greatly troubled, about what would happen to the things he had built by the wisdom God had given him. He is looking back and wondering what earthly good was all of it.

Ecclesiastes 2:21 For there is a man whose labor [is] in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it [for] his portion. This also [is] vanity and a great evil.

This speaks of the portion of one's life that he must leave behind at death.

This is Solomon speaking of himself. The person who takes Solomon's place has not worked to build all of this. He receives this, because God is taking it from Solomon.

Psalms 49:10: "For he seeth [that] wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others."

Ecclesiastes 2:22 For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun?

There is a certain amount of pride that goes along with the finishing of some important project here on the earth. It is a known fact, that none of that follows us after our death.

The only treasures we carry with us, are those we have stored in heaven before our death. Things we do for ourselves, or for earthly fame, will be of no assistance in heaven. Solomon had great wealth and fame on the earth. All of that is left behind.

Ecclesiastes 2:23 For all his days [are] sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

Solomon has difficulty sleeping, because of his thoughts about the inevitable end that comes to all.

Job 14:1 "Man [that is] born of a woman [is] of few days, and full of trouble."

Jesus explains that this world is full of trouble. Our hope is in Him.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

In verses 24-26 we find the first of seven passages that give one of the solutions to life's problems: enjoy life and work as God's gifts. When a man toils in his own strength, he is bound to suffer pain and grief. The answer then is for him to enjoy his work by receiving it as a gift of God.

Elsewhere, work is said to be part of God's curse on man (gen. 3 17-19), but it can become the sphere of God's blessing.

To eat and drink, used five times in the book, must be understood in a good sense. Solomon always counsels the fear of God, and the concept is used in the Old Testament in a good sense.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 [There is] nothing better for a man, [than] that he should eat and drink, and [that] he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it [was] from the hand of God.

We find that even the everyday functions of eating and drinking can only take place at the will of God. The prayer that Jesus taught the apostles says, "Give us this day our daily bread". It is by the grace of God, that we have bread to eat.

We should be thankful for whatever God has provided us with. We should be like Paul and be satisfied with what God has given us.

1 Timothy 6:8 "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

“Nothing is better”: Even with the limitations of this present life, humanity should rejoice in its temporal goodness. “From the hand of God”: Solomon’s strong view of God’s sovereignty brings comfort after an honest critique of what life in a cursed world entails.

Ecclesiastes 2:25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten [hereunto], more than I?

Possibly, Solomon had the most to be thankful for.

Ecclesiastes 2:26 For [God] giveth to a man that [is] good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to [him that is] good before God. This also [is] vanity and vexation of spirit.

God had thought very highly of Solomon. He had loved him so much, that He gave him wisdom above all his fellowmen. He gave him great wealth and tremendous fame. But Solomon did not stay faithful to God. The temptations of life were more than he could handle, and he sinned.

God will abundantly bless those who are in the will of God. The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous. God does not overlook the slightest thing you do to please Him. God is the Rewarder of those who follow Him.

“Give to him that is good”. The qualifier “in His sight” makes God’s prerogative the standard.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 Questions

1. What caused Solomon to try pleasure for satisfaction?
2. Where else had Solomon looked for satisfaction?
3. Where does true satisfaction come from?
4. What is verse 2 speaking of?
5. What does the author believe the problem is in our society today with drugs and alcohol?

6. Solomon built what, that did not satisfy him.
7. Where is true peace from?
8. Where did Solomon get this huge number of servants?
9. What queen was overwhelmed by Solomon's finery?
10. He had _____ and _____ singers.
11. What were some of the musical instruments Solomon had?
12. Attaining worldly fame and wealth cannot bring _____.
13. What do wisdom, folly, and madness have in common?
14. How much does wisdom excel folly?
15. The wise man's eyes are in his _____.
16. He that hateth his brother is in _____.
17. What does Solomon say, in verse 16, that is not absolutely the way it is?
18. Why did he hate life?
19. Why did he hate his work?
20. How many years did Solomon reign?
21. Why will God rend the kingdom away from Solomon?
22. Who is verse 21 speaking of?
23. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own _____?
24. God is a _____ of those who follow Him.