

QOHELET'S SEARCH: ECCL. 1:12-2:23

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Summary:

1. 1:12-18. The principles of the search. "Thesis Proposal."
2. 2:1-23, The Three Areas of Inquiry
These correspond to the three things "that are in the world"
(1 John 2:16, compare Gen. 3:6 and the temptations of our Lord).
 - a) 2:1-11, Pleasure ("Lust of the Flesh")
 - b) 2:12-17, Wisdom and folly ("Pride of Life")
 - c) 2:18-23, Labor (not searched out, but hated) ("Lust of the Eyes," producing wealth)
3. 2:24-3:22, The answer, in God's sovereignty.

A. 1:12-18. Principles of the search.

1. 1:12, his qualifications. Solomon, holding unchallenged rule over the Levant, from Anatolia to Egypt and from the Med. to the Euphrates.
2. 1:13, the approach.
 - a) Object of study: "all that is done under heaven."
 - b) Method: "by wisdom." As we will see, includes experimental method as well as theory.
 - c) Scope: DR\$ is depth; TWR is breadth. This is to be a comprehensive study.
 - d) Motivation: This is the task God has given man.
3. 1:14-15, Preliminary result on the Object: Empty and Vain. The world is crooked and wanting (the result of the fall), and man cannot set it right.
4. 1:16-18, preliminary result on the Method: does not seem to solve the dilemma, but rather turns into a dilemma itself!

B. 2:1-11, Examining the Lust of the Flesh (Pleasure)

1. 1-2, Summary:
 - a) 1a, Examination of pleasure.
 - b) 1b-2, Conclusion: Vanity; folly; useless.
2. 3-10, Examination
Chiastic, with doubled middle section.
 - a) 3,9b-10. "Meditative Libertine." Attempts to combine dissolute abandon with wisdom and reflection.
 - b) 4-7,8-9 The things he examines. Alternation:
 - 1) Riches:
 - a> Real estate, 4-6
 - b> Treasure, 8a
 - 2) Living things:

- a> Servants, flocks, and herds, 7a
- b> Singers and concubines, 8b
- 3) Both series end with "above all that were before me in Jerusalem," 7b, 9a.

3. 11, Conclusion

- a) Considers all his works and all his labors--the actual deeds, and the stress he has gone through to accomplish them. Think of how hard it would be to set up the pleasure palaces described in 4-9. Maybe from time to time he stopped to wipe his brow and ask, "Are we having fun yet?"
- b) In the light of all this effort, it wasn't worth it!

C. 2:12-17, Examining the Pride of Life (Wisdom and Folly)

1. 12, Prolog to this particular investigation.

a) 12a, Objects:

- 1) Wisdom--"Applied intelligence." The exercise of the intellect in successful living. Solomon showed it through wise judgment (dividing the baby), scientific scholarship (describing the plants and animals), and literary activity.
- 2) Madness--What David feigned before the Philistines. Uncontrolled behavior.
- 3) Folly--More sinister: wilful wickedness.

b) 12b, Motive: he is the best qualified for the task.

- 1) KJV: "For what [can] the man [do] that cometh after the king? [even] that which hath been already done."
- 2) Revise: drop out italics, and make last clause a modifier to the first. "For what man cometh after the king [with respect to] that which hath been already done?" That is, who could possibly be better qualified in the matter of wisdom than Solomon?
- 3) Seems proud, except that he takes no credit for his own wisdom. It is God's gift and trust to him, and he is accountable for it. In fact, he would be delinquent if he did not exercise it for the benefit of others! NB: We are responsible to exercise our gifts!

2. 13-17, Conclusion

- a) 13-14a, What Wisdom can do.
Wisdom conveys an advantage over folly, since it shines light upon the path and enables the wise man to avoid dangers that entrap the fool. Cf. 7:12; 10:10. This is not a

thesis to disprove, but a true statement of the advantage of wisdom.

b) 14b-17, What Wisdom cannot do: Guarantee freedom from "fate," the quirks of life. The same happenstance happens to all. [Technical note: "happen" QRH at 2:14,15; 9:11, MQRH at 2:14,15; 3:19 (3x); 9:2,3. Thus very high concentration here.]

1) The three-fold conclusion, 14b-15

Centers on "happen." The word is not fatalistic, as though there were no God; nor does it express God's loving care. It is a plain, unvarnished observation: any event in daily life that a wise man experiences, you can find a fool who experiences the same thing, and vv.

a> 14b, One happening happens to all. The same set of events are experienced by all men.

b> 15a, Thus he cannot understand the special wisdom that has been given to him.

c> 15b, this certainly fits the pattern of emptiness!

2) The data, 16

a> Nobody will remember you; the world has a short memory. Ev

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the people we remember are not distinguished as all wise c
all fools.

b> Everybody dies, fool and wise alike.

3) The result, 17

Leads him to hate life, for it weighs heavy on him. Not a strange OT concept, but very much in accord with the NT: John 12:25 exhorts us to "hate our life in this world," just as Qohelet "hates life ... under the sun." Qohelet's thoughts are not godless frustration, but the true logical and philosophical basis for setting our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. The OT motive is that this world is dead and corrupt; the NT motive, that we have died with Christ (Col. 3:1ff).

D. **2:18-23, Examining the Lust of the Eyes (Labor and Wealth)**

This section has three big ideas: Hard **labor**; **leaving** the resulting wealth to someone unworthy; the resulting **despair**.

1. Hard labor.

The word here is uniformly (ML, emphasizing the pain and stress of work, not the fact of busyness. 18a, 19b, 21a, 22-23. Note emphasis on pain in 23.

2. Leaving it to someone unworthy. Note two disqualifiers:

a) 19a, may be a fool.

b) 21b, he hasn't worked for it! Presumes a basic morality in work as a means to wealth. One who has not earned it has no right to it. P.C. the socialist or communist idea of providing for all men's *needs* without respect to their *labor*.

3. Results in despair, 20. He turns around and abandons himself to despair. NB: the result of trying to find contentment in what he can build!
4. Technical note: Arranged in a complex chiasm.
 - a) 18-19, Labor/Leave/Labor
 - b) 20, Despair
 - c) 21-23, Labor/Leave/Labor

E. Conclusion

No satisfaction can be found in the things that are "under the sun," "all that is in the world."

1. Abandoning oneself to pleasure is stressful; and since pleasures are expensive, it takes a lot of work.
2. Wisdom is useful, but it doesn't provide insurance against the happenings of life, the inevitability of death, and the fate of being eventually forgotten.
3. Possessions are frustrating, for eventually they will go to someone unworthy.
4. Next time, we will see the first positive encouragement, an exhortation to enjoy good in the small things of life, as a gift from God's hand.