

The Nemesis of Human Labor (vv. 18-23)

VERSE 18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the

sun (וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שָׂאֲנִי עֲמַל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) [waw w/Qal perf.1s. shana hate

+ *pro.1s. ani* + *d.o.* + *noun m.s.constr. kol all* + *noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. amal labor* + *rel.pro.w/pro.1s ani* “for which I” + *noun m.s.abs. amal labor* + *part tachath under* + *d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun*], **for I must leave it to the man who will come after**

me (שָׂאֲנִיחֲנוּ לְאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָי) [rel.pro.w/Hiphil impf.1s.w/3m.s.suff. nuach rest; “leave

it to” + *prep lamed w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam man* + *rel.pro.w/Qal impf.3m.s. hayah* “who will” + *adv achar after*]).

VERSE 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool (יְהִיָּה אִוֹ סָכָל)

וְיָדַע הַחֲכָם [waw w/interrog. mah who? + *Qal part.m.s.abs. yada know* +

d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise + *Qal impf.3m.s. hayah be* + *conj. o or* + *noun m.s.abs. sakal fool*])?

Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by

acting wisely under the sun (וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי וְשָׁחַכְמָתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ)

[waw w/Qal impf.3m.s. shalat exercise power (over) + *prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. kol all* + *noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. amal labor* + *rel.pro. w/Qal perf.1s. amal to labor* + waw w/rel.pro.w/Qal perf.1s. chakam be wise + *prep tachath under* + *d.a/w/noun both s. shemesh*]).

This too is vanity (וְגַם־זֶה הֶבֶל) [conj gam also + *adj.m.s.abs. zeh this* + *noun m.s.abs. hebel*

vapor; “vanity”]).

VERSE 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I

had labored under the sun (אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֵמֶל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ)

אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֵמֶל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ [waw w/Qal perf.1s. sabhabh turn around; “completely” + pro.1s. ani + prep lamed w/Piel infin.constr. ya-ash despair + d.o. + noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart + prep al over + noun m.s.constr. kol all + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. amal labor + rel.pro.w/Qal perf.1s. amal labor + prep tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s. shemesh]).

VERSE 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and

skill (כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמַלוּ בַחֲכָמָה וּבִדְרֵעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן)

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמַלוּ בַחֲכָמָה וּבִדְרֵעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן [part ki when + adv yesh exists + noun m.s.abs. adam man + rel.w/Qal perf.3m.s.w/3m.s.suff. amal labor + prep beth w/non f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + waw w/prep beth w/noun f.s.abs.da-ah knowledge + waw w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. kishron success, skill], then he gives his legacy to one who has not

labored with them (וְלֹאֲדָם שְׁלֹא עָמַלְבוּ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ)

וְלֹאֲדָם שְׁלֹא עָמַלְבוּ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ [waw w/prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. adam “to one” + rel.pro w/neg lo + Qal perf.3m.s. amal labor + prep beth w/3m.s.suff. + Qal impf.3m.s.w/3m.s.suff. nathan give + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. chalaq share; “his legacy”]).

This too is vanity and a great evil (גַּם־זֶה הַבֶּל וְרָעָה רַבָּה)

גַּם־זֶה הַבֶּל וְרָעָה רַבָּה [conj gam also + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.abs. chebel + waw w/adj.f.s.abs. ra-ah evil + aj.f.s.abs. rab great]).

VERSE 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which

he labors under the sun (לְאָדָם בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לְבוֹ שֶׁהוּא עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ)

כִּי מִה־הַיּוֹם [part ki for + interrog.pro. mah what? + prep lamed w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. kol + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. amal labor + waw w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. te-uth striving + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.suff. leb + rel.pro.w/pro.3m.s. hu he + noun m.s.abs. amal labor + prep tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh]?)

VERSE 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his

mind does not rest (כִּי כָל-יְמֵיוֹ מִכָּאֲבִים וְכַעַס עֵינָיו גַּם-בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא-שָׁכַב לְבוֹ) [part

ki for + noun m.s.abs. kol + noun m.p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. yom day + noun m.p.abs. mak-obh sorrow + waw w/noun m.s.abs. ka-as vexation + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. inyan task + conj. gam even + prep beth w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. layilah night + neg lo + Qal perf.3m.s. shakab lie down + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. leb “his mind” + cong gam even + adj.m.s.abs. zeh his]).

This too is vanity (גַּם-זֶה הֶבֶל הוּא) [conj gam also + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.abs.

hebel + pro.3m.s. hu himself]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 18-23

1. The subject of this new section is human labor.
2. The writer focuses on a negative aspect of a lifetime of labor.
3. The connection between this section and the previous one is the anticipation of death which throws a dark shadow over “all the fruit of [his] labor.”
4. “I hated” is here repeated from v. 17 (“So I hated life”) and the object is essentially the same.
5. Solomon worked hard and was very successful, but it came at a price.
6. He is not speaking here like someone who is mentally acclimated to God’s plan.
7. In his dark period he suffered soul-torment and this constituted the downside of his pleasure-seeking.
8. Solomon torments himself with what happens to his wealth when he dies (v. 18)?
9. He has no control over that, it will go to someone.
10. He has to leave it to someone, but to whom?
11. Coming face to face with his powerlessness torments him.

12. In his dark period he suffered soul torment and this was the downside of his pleasure-seeking.
13. Solomon torments himself with what happens to his wealth when he dies.
14. He has no control over that, it goes to someone.
15. He has to leave it to someone, but to whom?
16. Coming face to face with his powerlessness torments him.
17. That person is referred to indefinitely (“to the man”).
18. Solomon’s successor was his son Rehoboam.
19. In v. 19 he expands upon the thought of v. 18b.
20. He does not even have the solace that the one who winds up with his vast wealth will act in a responsible manner.
21. What if a fool takes it and squanders it?
22. Even though Solomon labored wisely and diligently and successfully, he laments that he has no control over “the fruit of [his] labor” after he dies.
23. For him the whole of it is a mess.
24. In v. 20 Solomon narrates the utter despair (“I turned around”) that overtook him during that period between his initial elation and the pessimistic mood that followed (before his repentance).
25. Eventual death and the uncertain prospect of the kind of person that would inherit his fortune produced soulish despair.
26. In v. 21 Solomon illustrates his point with an anecdote.
27. He presents a person who labored in life “with wisdom, knowledge, and skill/success” and a person who winds up with the first person’s “legacy” who did nothing to earn or deserve that fortune.
28. In standard fashion, the author designates this scenario as “vanity and even “evil.”
29. It is doubtful that Solomon has in mind the normal process of inheritance, since the one who benefits is a non-specific individual rather than “son.”
30. In v. 22 is a rhetorical question requiring a negative answer.
31. A man works all his life exercising physical and mental energy (“strivings of the heart”) so what is the bottom line?
32. For him that bottom line is not worth the effort.
33. In v. 23 two negative aspects of a life of hard work are divided between daytime and nighttime.
34. The word order reads: “all his days sorrows and his occupation frustration.”
35. This then characterizes the life of hard-working people facing the negatives associated with survival and advancement.
36. As for even the nighttime there is no respite.
37. Literally, “hearts/minds do not rest” is idiomatic.
38. Hence, our proverb “there is no rest for the weary.”
39. Here the idea is, “No rest for the hard-worker.”
40. So “this too is vanity” as there is no escape from the daily grind, and for the worker who has no hope in the afterlife, there is no permanent reward.
41. There is frustration now as temporal achievements come with possibility that someone else will benefit from the efforts of another, and not even a person chosen by the one who has amassed wealth!
42. Solomon’s wisdom let him down as it did not have anything to offer outside this life.

43. That wisdom held the expectation that a life of hard work that would yeild lasting reward.
 44. But death sets that aside and therein arises Solomon’s frustration with human achievement.

Making The Most of Life (vv. 24-26)

VERSE 24 There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself

that his labor is good (אֵין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם שְׂיֵאכֹל וְשָׁתָה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֵמְלוֹ)

[adv. ayin nothing + noun m.s.abs. good; “better” + prep beth w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam man + rel.prol.w/Qal impf.3m.s. akal eat + waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. shathah drink + waw w/Hiphil perf.3m.s. yatsa go out; find; “tell” + d.o. + noun f.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. nephesh soul; “himself” + noun m.s.abs. tob good + prep. beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. amal labor)].

This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God (אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא)

גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי [conj gam also + adj.f.s.abs. zeh this + Qal perf.1s. ra-ah see + pro.1s. ani I + part. ki that + prep min w/noun f.s.constr. yad hand + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + pro.3m.s. hi he, himself]).

VERSE 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment [have anxiety] without

Him (כִּי מִי יֵאכֹל וּמִי יַחֲוֹשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי)

[part ki for + interrog. mah who? + Qal impf.3m.s. akal eat + waw w/Qal imperf.3m.s. chush hurry; “have enjoyment” + noun m.s.abs. chutz outside; “without” + prep.min from, more than])?

VERSE 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and**knowledge and joy** (כִּי לְאָדָם שְׂטוֹב לְפָנָיו נָתַן חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה) [*part ki + prep**lamed w/noun m.s.abs. adam “a person” + rel.pro.w/adj.m.s.abs. tob good + prep lamed**w/noun both p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. panah; “in His sight” + Qal perf.3m.s. nathan give + noun**f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + waw w/noun f.s.abs. da-ath knowledge + waw w/noun f.s.abs.**shimchah joy]), while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting***so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight** (לְתֵת לְטוֹב לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים)[*waw w/prep lamed w/d.a.w/Qal part.m.s.abs. chata sin;**“sinner” + Qal perf.3m.s. nathan give + noun m.s.abs. inyan task + prep lamed w/Qal**infin.constr. asaph gather + waw w/prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. kanas collect + prep lamed**w/Qal infin.constr. nathan give + prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. tobh good + prep lamed w/noun**both p.constr. paneh face; “in...sight” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim]).***This too is vanity and striving after wind** (גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ) [*conj. gam also +**adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity + waw w/noun f.s.constr. re-uth striving,**chasing + noun both s.abs. ruach wind]).***ANALYSIS: VERSES 24-26**

1. These verses are the first of a number of passages (3:12-14; 3:22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10) that allow for the possibility of enjoyment of the present life.
2. The advice he offers here, he offers reluctantly, is the pursuit of the simple pleasures of the temporal realm.
3. Since there is no ultimate meaning in wisdom or one's work, the one must look to enjoy life as much as circumstances permit in a fallen world.
4. The Latin motto *carpe diem* translated means “seize the day!” is the advice herein.
5. In others words don't wait for tomorrow, get all the enjoyment out of life that is possible.
6. Living a life that has not ultimate meaning, he advises the working man to seize temporal pleasures that lighten the burden.
7. In this section Solomon says that theses simple pleasures come from the hand of God.

8. His practical advice to the common man is the pursuit of the basic pleasures of life: food, drink, and enjoyment of work (v. 24a).
9. The opening words “there is nothing better” indicate that the author’s advice is not given enthusiastically.
10. “There is nothing better” is a formula found here and in 3:12, 22; 8:15.
11. His reluctant advice is for those who live in a very imperfect world with all its ills.
12. He encourages his readers to eat and drink.
13. He is not advocating excessive behavior here.
14. The third realm of pleasure is somewhat surprising in that it is the *toil* that speaks of in negative terms in vv. 17-23 of this chapter.
15. He is advocating limited enjoyment, not ultimate fulfillment.
16. The translation “tell himself that his labor is good” could be translated “and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.
17. That every person can achieve this is not the case.
18. This limited enjoyment is under divine control and He will distribute it as He chooses (v. 24b).
19. “Hand of God” refers to His sovereign power related to human endeavor.
20. By means of a rhetorical question (v. 25) the author asserts that it is God who makes it possible for people to eat and have enjoyment (?).
21. The first verb “eat” is clear and connects to the previous verse, but much debate occurs over the second verb.
22. The verb *chush* means ‘to hasten/hurry.’
23. It usually is translated ‘hasten’ but in Job 20:2 it refers to Job’s inner agitation and in Isa. 28:16 it is used with the negative in connection with the one who believes in Messiah “will not be disturbed.”
24. This is not the only problem here as the noun *chuts* meaning ‘outside’ or ‘street’ is followed by the preposition *min* (from).
25. Here it will be taken as something negative that happens to people causing them mental agitation.
26. So both the good and the bad comes “from Him.”
27. Not only do the good things come from the hand of God but also the circumstances that produce worry as well.
28. In the last verse of this section Solomon contrasts two categories of people and how God deals with them.
29. The “person who is good in His sight” refers to anyone who adheres to basic moral and establishment principles, believer or unbeliever.
30. This is the wise man who lives according to a body of wisdom and knowledge that brings earthly pleasure.
31. The “sinner” on the other had is someone who is offensive to God but who engages in the “task of gathering and collecting.”
32. God can and does bring about a situation where the wealth of the sinner is given to the one who is good in God’s eyes.
33. The sinner is given by God a task, and God can take the benefits of hard work and transfer to the One who did not work for it.
34. God has the freedom to do this from time to time.

35. “That he may give it” does not indicate a universal activity; just that God is able and free to make such a transfer of wealth.
36. If this is a good thing, why does the author label it “vanity?”
37. Consistent with the theme of this book all that is done apart from a transcendent relationship with God does not yield eternal benefit.

END: Ecclesiastes Chapter Two
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