

The Futility of Human Existence (vv. 8-11)

VERSE 8 All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it (לֹא-יוּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר)

כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים [noun m.s.constr. kol all + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. dabar word, thing + adj.m.p.abs. yegea wearsome; from vb. yagea to weary or to toil + neg lo not + Qal impf.3m.s. yakol be able + noun m.s.abs. ish man, mankind + prep lamed w/piel infin.constr. dabar speak, declare, tell]).

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing (אֵין מְשֻׁבַּע עַיִן וְלֹא-תִמְלֵא

אָזֶן לֹא-תִשְׁבַּע עַיִן לְרֵאוֹת וְלֹא-תִמְלֵא [neg lo not + Qal impf.3f.s. shabea be satisfied + noun f.s.abs. ayin eye + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. ra-ah see + waw w/neg lo + Niphal impf.3f.s. male be full + noun f.s.abs. ozen ear + prep min from w/Qal infin.constr. shama hear, listen]).

VERSE 9 That which has been is that which will be (מָה-שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיְהִיָּה) [pro mah

what?; "That" + rel.pro. asher which w/Qal perf.3m.s. hayah be + pro.3m.s. hu that + rel.pro. asher w/Qal impf.3m.s. hayah be],

And that which has been done is that which will be done (וּמָה-שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה) [waw w/interrog. pro. mah + relative pro. asher w/Niphal perf.3m.s. ashah do + pro.3m.s. hu that

+ rel.pro. asher w/Niphal impf.3m.s. ashah do])

So, there is nothing new under the sun (וְאֵין כָּל-חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) [waw w/adv ayin

nothing + noun m.s.constr. kol + adj.m.s.abs. chadash new + part. tabath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun]).

VERSE 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new" (זֶה הַדָּבָר שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ מְדֻבָּר)

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂאָר לְרֹאשׁוֹ [adv yesh existence, there is + noun m.s.abs. dabar word, thing + rel.pro. asher w/Qal impf.3m.s. amar say + Qal imper.m.s. ra-ah see + adj.m.s.abs. zoth this + adj.m.s.ab.s chadash new + pro.3m.s. hu it]?

Already it has existed for ages (כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים) (adv kebar already + Qal perf.3m.s.

hayah be; "it has existed" + prep lamed w/noun m.p.abs. olam forever; "for ages")

Which were before us (אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ) [relative asher which + Qal perf.3m.s. hayah exist

+ prep min w/prep lamed w/noun both pl.w/1.p.suff. panim face; "us"]).

VERSE 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things (אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְרֵאשִׁיטִים) [adv ayin

no + noun m.s.constr. zeker remembrance + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.p.abs. rashon first; "earlier"]);

And also of the later things which will occur (וְגַם לְאַחֲרָנִים שִׁיְהִיוּ) [waw w/conj. gam

also + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.p.abs. achary afterwards; "of the latter things" + rel.pro. asher w/Qal impf.3m.p. hayah "will occur"]),

There will be for them no remembrance (לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוֹרֹן) (neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s.

hayah "will be" + prep lamed w/3m.p.suff "for them + noun m.s.abs. zeker remembrance])

Among those who will come later still (עִם שִׁיְהִיוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה) [part im with, among + pro.rel.

w/Qal impf.3m.p. hayah "will come" + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.f.s.abs. acharon afterwards; "latter"]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 8-11

1. The author shifts from the natural realm to the realm of human endeavor in v. 8.
2. V. 8 expresses a pessimistic tone to this section of the text.
3. The ceaseless repetition in the natural world is parallel to that of humans living and surviving on the earth.
4. “All things” (where the noun *darar* meaning word, speech) is inclusive of human activity.
5. The adjective “wearisome” is the cognate of the verb ‘to toil/labor’ (*yagea*).
6. The idea is that the things of human experience and endeavor, apart from a relationship to the Creator, are futile.
7. The weariness of all things is so mind-boggling that it exceeds human ability to describe it all.
8. Each of the three clauses starting with “man is not able” begin with the negative particle *lo*.
9. Again, the first of these last three clauses has the negative with the imperfect of the verb ‘be able’ (*yakal*).
10. The final two clauses further illustrate why all things are so tiresome.
11. Eyes may see much and ears may hear much, but it is never enough—there is more to see and more to hear.
12. The eye would be satisfied if it had no more to see and the ear would be satisfied if it had no more to hear.
13. Just as the rivers flow to the sea and the sea is never full so it is with seeing and hearing.
14. It is beyond humans to arrive at closure and complete satisfaction regarding the realm of human endeavor.
15. In v. 9 that subject shifts to human history.
16. He notes the futility of the advance of human history saying that it stays the same.
17. It may appear to change but nothing new happens as expressed in the words “that which has been is that which will be.”
18. This statement refers to history as viewed from the vantage point of the present looking backward.
19. “And that which has been done is that which will be done” views history from the present looking to the future of human endeavor and behavior.
20. Here we have the cyclic repetition of human activity.
21. The past, present, and future are filled with oppression, hard work, and loneliness (4:1-17).
22. For those who forsake God there is really nothing to look forward to but death.
23. It is important for the readers to this book to understand that the author is viewing human existence from the perspective of humanity in a state of unbelief.
24. In that sense “there is nothing new under the sun.”
25. Also, this must be limited to human behavior and activity.
26. The phrase “under the sun” occurs 29X in 27 verses in Ecclesiastes (1:3, 9, 14: 2:11, 17, 19, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18, 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5).
27. In the verse instance (v. 3) the observation is from the standpoint of those are without God and hope.
28. In v. 10 the author deals with a likely objection to what is affirmed in v. 9.
29. “Someone might say, ‘See this is new’” is countered by “Already it has existed for ages, which were before us.”
30. The perspective is the time frame of Solomon’ life.
31. Much had transpired in human history by the time of Solomon so much so that he could speak of ancient times.

32. Early in mankind's history it could have been said that something was new provided the one affirming it had perfect knowledge of human behavior and activity.
33. The earliest humans existing around the time of Adam and Eve no doubt encountered behavior that was new.
34. A modern objection to Solomon's assertions would be that there is new developments related to human invention.
35. This is not what the writer is asserting.
36. The context must be confined to human behavior and human endeavors.
37. Toiling under the sun would include human invention through the ages.
38. So, what might appear as new to people has happened before.
39. V. 11 explains what appears as novel to us is in actuality not new but a repeat of something old.
40. Old things appear as new to us because the knowledge of them has been forgotten.
41. For instance, a new line of thinking on a topic is really not new as someone in the past expressed the same idea, but it was unknown to the person who thinks he has come up with a fresh idea.
42. This verse does not only set us straight with respect to our ignorance of the past.
43. It informs us that we should not expect anything different in the future.
44. This cycle of lost knowledge will continue after the passing of a generation so the words, "There will be no remembrance among those who will come later."
45. Solomon views this cycle of lost knowledge continuing into the future beyond his time (v. 11c).

Autobiographical Discourse (vv. 1:12-12:7)

Introduction (v. 12)

VERSE 12 the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem (יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם)

אֲנִי קִהַלְתִּי הַיְיָתִי מִלֶּךְ עַל [pro.1s. ani I + noun m.s.abs. qoheleth speaker in an assembly;

"Preacher" + Qal perf.1s. hayah be; "have been" + noun m.s. melek king + prep al over + proper noun Israel + prep beth w/proper noun Jerusalem]).

VERSE 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven (כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם)

וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי [waw w/Qal perf.1s. nathan give; “I set” + d.o.marker + noun m.s.cnstr.w/1s.suff. leb heart, mind + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. darash seek + waw w/prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. tur search out + prep beth w/d.a.w/noun f.abs. chokmah wisdom + prep al “concerning” + noun m.s.cnstr. kol all + rel.pro. asher that + Niphal perf.3s. ashah do + prep tachath under + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. shamayim heaven]).

It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with (בֹּ

הוּא עֲנִין רָע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֲנוּת [pro.3s. hu it + noun m.s.cnstr. inyan task + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil; miserable + Qal perf.3m.s. nathan give + noun m.p.abs. Elohim + prep lamed w/noun m.p.cnstr. ben son + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. ish + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. anah afflict + prep beth in; “with”]).

VERSE 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun (הַשָּׁמַיִם)

רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת [Qal perf.1s. ra-ah see + d.o. + noun m.s. constr. kol all + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. ma-aseh work + prep tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun], **and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind** (וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרַעֲוִת רוּחַ) [waw w/interj. hinnah behold + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity; vapor + wawl w/noun f.s.cnstr. re-uth striving + noun both s.abs. ruach wind]).

VERSE 15 **What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted** (מְעֻתָּה לֹא יִוָּכַל לְתַקֵּן וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא יִמְנוֹת) [Pual part.m.s.abs. awath bend, make crooked + neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. yakol be able + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. taqan become straight + waw w/noun m.s.abs. chestron lacking + neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. yakol be able + prep lamed w/Niphal infin.constr. manah count, number)].

VERSE 16 **I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me** (עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְפָנַי עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם) [Piel perf.1s. dabar say + pro.1s. ani I + part im to + noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart; "myself" + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. amar say + pro.1s. ani I + interj. hinneh I + Hiphil perf.1s. gadal be great + waw w/Hiphil perf.1s. yashap add, increase + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + prep al "more" + noun m.s.constr. kol all + rel.pro. asher which + Qal perf.3s. hayah be + prep lamed w/noun m.p.constr.w/1s.suff. panim "before me" + prep al over + proper noun Jerusalem]; **and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge** (רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת) [waw w/noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb "my mind" + Qal perf.3m.s. ra-ah see; "observed" + Hiphil infin.abs. rabah "a wealth" + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + waw w/noun f.s.abs. dea knowledge)]."

VERSE 17 **And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly** (וַאֲתַנְּהָ לְבִי לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת הוֹלָלוֹת) [waw w/Qal impf.1s. nathan "set" + noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb mind + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. yada know + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + waw w/Qal infin.constr. yada know + noun f.p.abs. holethuth madness + waw w/noun f.s.abs. sikluth folly];

I realized that this also is striving after wind [יָדַעְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הוּא רָעִיוֹן רוּחַ] [Qal

perf.1s. yada know + prefix relative asher w/conj. gam also + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + pro.3s. hu this + noun m.s.abs. re-uth striving + noun both s.ab.s. ruach wind]).

VERSE 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge

results in increasing pain (כִּי בְרַב חֶכְמָה רַב־כָּעַס וְיִוְסִיף הַעֵת יוְסִיף מִכְאֹב) [part

ki because, for + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. rob much + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + noun m.s.constr. rob abundance + noun m.s.abs. ka-as grief, vexation + waw w/Hiphil impf.3m.s. yasaph increase + noun f.s.abs. dea knowledge + Hiphil impf.3m.s. yasaph increase + noun m.s.abs. mak-obh sorrow; “pain”]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 12-18

1. The narrator writes in the first person singular.
2. This continues until chapter 12 verse 7; then there is a shift to the third person singular at 12:8.
3. This section constitutes the bulk of this book.
4. In this section Solomon presents an autobiographical account of that part of his life when he sought fulfillment in the pursuit of endeavors outside the will of God.
5. We observe him under the permissive will of God.
6. V. 12 is the autobiographical introduction that follows the pattern of introductions in Egypt, Syria, and especially Mesopotamia.
7. The unusual perfect tense of *hayah* (‘to be’) rather than the expected imperfect tense is to be taken as “have been king and still is.”
8. There is no evidence that Solomon ever abdicated his throne in Jerusalem.
9. For “king...in Jerusalem” see 1:1.
10. However, “over Israel” is new.
11. Solomon begins his autobiographical account of a search for happiness via human wisdom and knowledge (vv. 13-18).
12. In v. 13-15 he informs the reader of his highly ambitious task.
13. We are not told how he went about this ridiculous and futile enterprise; only that he “set his mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven.”
14. I think it is very important that the reader understand that Solomon was in a state of reversionism.
15. All the factors involved are not at once apparent.
16. Maybe his association with the pagan women of his harem and his catering to their idolatrous interests contributed to this quest for the meaning of life via the wisdom of the world.
17. Solomon use two terms in v. 13 to describe his quest for learning “all that has been done under heaven.”

18. The first (“seek”- *darash*) is general and the second (“explore”- *tir*) views his search as intense investigation.
19. “By wisdom” refers here to his methodology.
20. “All that has been done under heaven” is a variant of “under the sun.”
21. “All that has been done” refers is inclusive of human activity as well as study of the natural world.
22. Solomon had the resources to engage in this vain enterprise and he went down this path until he hit a dead end.
23. Writing in retrospect, Solomon describes this task as “grievous” or “burdensome.”
24. In line with the theme of this book this is utter vanity as it cannot really come to terms with the ultimate meaning of life.
25. God lets the sons of man engage in this enterprise.
26. The reason this task is futile will be answered later, but it will have to do with the inability of human beings to understand the work of God in the world (3:11).
27. In v. 14 he tells the reader that even after he has examined everything under the sun he could find no meaning to it all.
28. He bases his opinion on personal experience.
29. He does not appeal to divine revelation but only to observation and study of human pursuits and the like.
30. Solomon sought meaning from intellectualism.
31. At the end of v. 14 he describes the study of human activity as “vanity and a striving after the wind.”
32. His focus is on lifestyles or approaches to life that he has observed.
33. “All is vanity” as one is not superior to another in arriving at the meaning of human existence apart from God and His plan.
34. “Striving” or “chasing after wind” serves to highlight the utter fallacy of finding an approach to life that is the one over against another that overcomes the futility of human existence apart from a relationship to the Creator.
35. For striving after the wind see Hos. 12:1 “Ephraim feeds on the wind, and pursues the east wind continually, He multiplies lies and violence. Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria and oil is carried to Egypt.”
36. V. 15 is a proverbial saying.
37. The thrust of the verse is that there is something fundamentally wrong with life on the earth.
38. And there is nothing humans can do about it.
39. “What is crooked cannot be straightened” refers to human endeavor that will never achieve what is in the best interests of mankind.
40. Lifestyles devoid of a relationship with God are that which are crooked and like something that has been bent and by its very nature cannot be made straight; so it is with all who pursue the wind.
41. The second part of this proverb is a truism as that which “is lacking/missing cannot be counted.”
42. What is missing is the pursuit of divine wisdom.
43. In v. 16 he introduces a second reflection.
44. Here he presents his credentials.
45. He comes off as rather presumptuous in his claims to unsurpassed wisdom, but that is not the point.

46. If he cannot find the meaning to life via intellectual inquiry, then who can?
47. Solomon was the wise king of Israel and as such was wealthy and wise.
48. If he could not find fulfillment and happiness via various selected approaches to life, then no one can.
49. The historical books record his unwise actions that were ultimately the seeds to the division of his kingdom.
50. “I said to myself” or literally, “I spoke with my mind/heart” refers to his interior dialogue found also at 2:1; 3:17, 18.
51. “I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me” comes off as arrogant and silly as there was only one king before him, his father David.
52. Perhaps he is saying that he was more astute than others who were of the intellectual class that lived in Jerusalem.
53. What he is saying is that he took intellectual pursuit to a level that surpassed all others in the city.
54. I “have observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge” shows the empirical nature of his method of investigation (cf. 1:14).
55. In v. 18 Solomon divides the approaches to life into two broad categories.
56. “Wisdom” refers to lifestyles that could be viewed as normal or beneficial in the short term.
57. The second “to know madness and folly” refers to what normal humans would label as insane or foolish approaches to life.
58. In regard to both of these extremes; the end result is “a striving after the wind” as neither brings genuine satisfaction.
59. This final reflection in v. 18 concludes with a proverbial saying.
60. Here we have an example of synonymous parallelism.
61. This verse reflects negatively on the process of his search for life’s meaning.
62. In the book of Proverbs wisdom brings joy and life.
63. But the pursuit of intellectualism brings “much grief” and “increasing pain” to the one who hopes to find answers for human existence.
64. In his quest wisdom, he experienced only frustration and mental anguish the more he discovered!

END: Ecclesiastes Chapter One
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