

# Ecclesiastes 1 Commentary

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## THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The Search for Significance  
The Quest for Contentment  
The Pursuit of Purpose

Exploration			Exhortation		
All is Vanity	Vanity of Doing	Vanity of Having	Vanity of Being	Using Life Well	Source of True Living
Eccl 1:1-18	Eccl 2:1-26	Eccl 3:1-6:12	Eccl 7:1-9:18	Eccl 10:1-11:10	Eccl 12:1-14
Declaration of Vanity	Demonstration of Vanity		Deliverance from Vanity		
Subject	Sermons		Summary		
Fickleness of Life Versus Fear of the Lord					
Place: "Under the Sun"					
Decades of Searching (in the days of King Solomon) circa 936BC					
King Solomon Author					

## Under the Sun vs. Above the Sun

Under the Sun	Above the Sun
Life limited to human understanding	Life informed by divine wisdom
Temporary and often frustrating experiences	Eternal perspective brings purpose and peace
Pursuing gain, pleasure, knowledge, or power	Pursuing God and His will (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13)

### Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:1 ματα κκλησιαστο υ ο Δαυιδ βασιλ ως Ισραηλ ν Ιερουσαλημ

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem:

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:1 These are the words of the Teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:1 Words of a preacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:1 Composition of Qoheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of David's son, Qoheleth, king in Jerusalem:

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the spokesman, the son of David and the king in Jerusalem.

- **the Preacher:** Ec 1:12 Eccl 7:27 Ec 12:8-10 Ne 6:7 Ps 40:9 Isa 61:1 Jon 3:2 2Pe 2:5
- **king:** Ec 1:12 1Ki 11:42,43 2Ch 9:30 10:17-19



### THE WORDS OF THE PREACHER SOLOMON

**The words of the Preacher** (qoheleth; Lxx - ekklesiastes), **the son of David, king in Jerusalem** - It is fascinating that people argue over the author of the book when the text plainly read clearly indicates it has to be Solomon. Why do I say that? Well, first note that this Preacher is the son of David and secondly that he is king and Ecck 12:7 adds "over Israel." The question is then how many sons of David reigned as king over Israel and of course the answer is one, Solomon. So Solomon is the author of this book. One might ask at what stage of his life did Solomon pen this book? Most authors favor it was when he was old and had "experienced life," as full of a life as just about any human being who has ever lived. There is however no specific text in this book which allows one to be

absolutely dogmatic and there are some writers for example who think Solomon was experiencing what we today call "a middle age crisis." While that is possible, personally I favor the old age idea picturing a pensive grey haired man pondering the hills and valleys of his life.

And as an aside, Solomon actually did not experience as long a life as his father David (he was about 70 when he died - cf 1Ki 2:1, 2Sa 5:4). 1Ki 11:42 says he reigned 40 years and 1Ki 3:7 has the phrase "a little child" when he began to reign which suggests he was about 20 when he began his reign (Jewish tradition estimates he was 18-20 when he became king.) In short he died when he was about 60. The was almost certainly because he was disobedient and developed "heart disease," what we might call a "divided heart" (Read and ponder 1Ki 11:1-14+)

Note that while King Solomon identifies himself as the human author in Eccl 12:11 he implies divine authority.

**James MacDonald** - He speaks in the style of an aged man, who had had large experience of the world, and made trial of all its sources of happiness, and had occasion bitterly to lament many follies..... Koheleth (**qoheleth**) seems to combine the two ideas of the Penitent and the Preacher; that is, he presents himself to those whom he addresses, as one who, having departed from the Lord, and having been brought to him again, penitently seeks to counteract his pernicious example, and to gather other wanderers to the same gracious, forgiving God. ([Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 - Vanity of the Material Creation and of Man](#))

**Michael Eaton** notes that Solomon "makes no mention of Yahweh, the Lord, the name of the God of Israel's covenant faith. It scarcely refers to the law of God, the only possible reference being in [12:13](#). It scarcely refers to the nation of Israel (only in [1:12](#)). Why these omissions? The answer seems to be that the Preacher's argument stands on its own feet and does not depend on Israel's covenant faith to be valid. He is appealing to universally observable facts." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 46](#))

**Alexander Maclaren** on Solomon in this book - He does believe in 'God,' but, very significantly, he never uses the sacred name 'Lord.' He has shaken himself free, or wishes to represent a character who has shaken himself free from Revelation, and is fighting the problem of life, its meaning and worth, without any help from Law, or Prophet, or Psalm."

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**Preacher** ([06953](#)) **qoheleth** (from qahal = to gather or assemble, convocation - 116v frequently in context of assembling people for worship, war or teaching) refers to a collector (of sentences or of wisdom), preacher, public speaker, speaker in an assembly, Qoheleth. Qōheleṯ only occurs in Ecclesiastes and is the Hebrew name for the book.

The English title **Ecclesiastes** is a transliteration of the Greek (Lxx) word **ekklesiastes**, which is one who speaks to the assembly or a preacher/public speaker in an assembly and is derived from [ekklesia/ecclesia](#) which means assembly or congregation. In sum, the Greek **ekklesiastes** is one who addresses the congregation or the assembly.

[Complete Biblical Library](#) The Hebrew word qōheleth occurs seven times in the Book of Ecclesiastes and is the name of the Book in Hebrew. It functions as a Qal active participle, feminine, singular absolute from the verb qāhal, meaning "to gather together." It is translated as "Teacher" (NIV, NLT), "Preacher," (KJV) or is transliterated into English from Hebrew as "Koheleth" (Ecc. 1:1; 12:9). The word is masculine despite its seemingly feminine form. (It is traditionally held that Koheleth was Solomon.) All of the uses of qōheleth are treated as masculine in the Book; that is, it is modified by masculine adjectives or used with a masculine form of the verb that accompanies it. The speaker sought out wisdom and even composed proverbs to serve as goads to encourage his hearers to listen and learn (Ecc. 12:9). Some scholars think that the object of his "gathering" or "collecting" were the proverbs and sayings of the wise which he then delivered to his hearers or readers. He was evidently both the convener of the people and the one who delivered his words to them (Ecc. 1:1f, 12; 7:27; 12:8ff). He was a king over Israel who had the wealth and influence to live the "good life" and report his findings to the assembly.

[TWOT \(PAGE 790\) - qōhelet](#). Preacher, speaker in assemblies. qōhelet is a Qal feminine participle from qāhal which in the Niphal means "to come together" and in the Hiphil "to bring together." The Qal form is used only here. The word is related to the noun qāhal (assembly). The LXX chose ecclesiastes (a member of an assembly) as a translation due to the alleged relation of qāhāl to ecclēsia (assembly, see above). The English rendering "Preacher" follows Jerome's Latin concionatur ("speaker before an assembly"), however the meaning of the Hebrew name is by no means clear. The content of the book fits the wisdom literature category rather than the sermonic category. A second conjecture contends that the Qal form qōhelet is used as though it were a Hiph 1 and means "one who convenes an assembly." The word has the definite article in Eccles. 12:8 which lends credence to the claim that the word is intended to be a description, not a personal name.

qōhelet occurs seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes (Eccles. 1:1-2, 12; Eccles. 7:27; Eccles. 12:8-10) and

nowhere else in biblical literature. As a noun designating the speaker, it also gives the Hebrew name Qōhelet to the book itself. The noun is ordinarily construed with masculine forms of verbs. The exception in Eccles. 7:27 may be due to an erroneous word division since qōhelet identifies himself as a son of David, king in Jerusalem (Eccles. 1:1, 12).

**QOHELETH - 7V - Preacher(7).** Eccl. 1:1; Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:12; Eccl. 7:27; Eccl. 12:8; Eccl. 12:9; Eccl. 12:10

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**Walter Kaiser addresses this question on Ecclesiastes - Is “The Teacher” Solomon?** from [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

Even though the heading for this book of Ecclesiastes does not name the author of this book, can we assume from the fact that he is the “son of David” and a “king in Jerusalem” that he is Solomon? Or is there a certain genre of writing that allows for such attributions without intending them to be taken literally?

The main speaker in this book of Ecclesiastes is called qōhelet, meaning “teacher” or “preacher,” a feminine participle from a verbal root meaning “to assemble.” But at that point the agreement ceases.

The well-known conservative scholar of the nineteenth century, Franz Delitzsch, declared in a much-quoted opinion, “If the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history to the Hebrew language.”<sup>1</sup> However, Fredericks devoted a careful inspection of all the linguistic arguments for dating the book late and concluded that they were unpersuasive.<sup>2</sup> The other approach to show that the book is late is to try to show affinities in thought between Hellenistic thought and Ecclesiastes. This would mean that the book originated in the Greek period, but this method also has been beset by problems. These so-called affinities can be shown to be just as easily related to far earlier thought and literary forms than the late Greek period.

So this leaves us with deciding if indeed the text could have come from Solomon. Evangelical scholars such as Moses Stuart, Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Young and Kidner have all challenged the view that Solomon wrote the book. But much of that was on the strength of the allegedly late language and concepts. Now that that obstacle has fallen, at least since Fredericks’s study in 1988, it is worth looking at the idea of Solomonic authorship one more time.

The only immediate son of David who was also king over Israel in Jerusalem would be Solomon. But against his authorship it is argued that in Ecclesiastes 1:12 the king is represented as saying, “I ... was king over Israel in Jerusalem.” But far from declaring that he was no longer king, Solomon is saying “I have been king,” for the action of the Hebrew verb begins in the past and continues up to the present. The argument shifts to Ecclesiastes 1:16, where the writer compares himself advantageously to “anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me.” Since David was the only Hebrew ruler to precede him in Jerusalem, the words hardly seem appropriate in Solomon’s mouth. The reference could very well be to the line of Canaanite kings who preceded Solomon in Jerusalem, such as Melchizedek (Gen 14:18) and Adonizedek (Josh 10:1).

But the most convincing telltale signs that Solomon is “the Teacher” are the allusions to circumstances that fit only Solomon’s life and experience: (1) his unrivaled wisdom (Eccles 1:16; compare 1 Kings 3:12); (2) his unsurpassed wealth (Eccles 2:4–10, compare 1 Kings 7:1–8); (3) his huge retinue of servants (Eccles 2:7–8, compare 1 Kings 9:17–19); (4) “there is no man that does not sin” (Eccles 7:20, compare 1 Kings 8:46); (5) not a god-fearing woman in a thousand (Eccles 7:28, compare 1 Kings 11:1–8); and (6) his weighing, studying and arranging proverbs (Eccles 12:9, compare 1 Kings 4:32). This forms a very convincing case that Solomon is “the Teacher.”

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**NET NOTE** adds - Solomon would fit the description of the author of this book, who is characterized by great wisdom (1:13, 16), great wealth (2:8), numerous servants (2:7), great projects (2:4–6), and the collection, editing and writings of many proverbs (12:9–10). All of this generally suggests Solomonic authorship. However, many scholars deny Solomonic authorship on the basis of linguistic and historical arguments.

1. SCOTT’S STORY The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” Ecclesiastes 1:1—2

Scott was only twenty-six years old when he died. Although he grew up in a Christian home, during his teens and early twenties he went through a period of rebellion and spiritual searching. His life changed when the doctors discovered a brain tumor. Surgery brought a brief remission, but then the cancer returned. As the months passed, his faith increased even as his physical condition worsened. He began to seek the Lord as never before. The Word of God became sweet to him. He became bold in his witness, especially to his many friends. He asked God to use him to reach others so that he could point people to Christ no matter how long he lived. God answered the request. But several months later Scott died.

During the funeral, his younger sister talked about how much she loved him, how as a young girl she wanted to be like him, and how exasperating he could be at times. Then the cancer came. And she saw a difference so profound that it changed everything. Her

brother, she said, had figured out what life is all about. Then she said this: "Life is nothing without God." Scott had shown her that it doesn't matter how long you live or how much money you have or even how well you do in your career. His faith at the end spoke one simple message: Life is nothing without God.

When I stood up to deliver the message a few minutes later, I didn't have to say very much. I simply repeated what she said one more time: Life is nothing without God. I then made this simple application. If you live for eighty years but don't discover that truth, you've missed the very reason for your own existence. If you should earn a million dollars—ten million dollars—and have hundreds of friends and the praise of your contemporaries, if you have all that but don't figure out this basic truth, you're still in spiritual kindergarten.

*Have you discovered what life is all about?*

*Life is nothing without God. Everything else is just details.*

Life is nothing without God. Everything else is just details. Your career, your education, your degrees, your money, your fame, your accomplishments, your long-range goals, your dreams, your possessions, your friendships—they're all just details. If you don't figure out that God is the central truth of the universe, you will spend your days mired in details, drifting along with no clear purpose. That's the ultimate "vanity" that causes life to be meaningless

Have you discovered what life is all about? Life is nothing without God. Everything else is just details.

O God, show me what life is all about so that I won't waste my years on things that don't really matter. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Was Solomon a pessimist, an optimist, or a realist? Which of those three words describes you best?
- \* Do you agree that "life is nothing without God"?

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### Norman Geisler - ECCLESIASTES 1:1—If this book is inspired, why isn't it quoted in the NT? - [When Critics Ask](#)

**PROBLEM:** The NT writers quote the vast majority of the OT from Genesis to Malachi. There are literally hundreds of citations from every major section of the OT. Yet, the Book of Ecclesiastes is not quoted once. If it was inspired, then why isn't it cited at least one time?

**SOLUTION:** There are several OT books that are not directly quoted in the NT, including Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Esther, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. However, all these books were considered inspired by both Judaism and Christianity. Several points should be kept in mind.

First, being quoted in the NT was not a test for the inspiration of an OT book. Rather, the question was whether it was written by a spokesperson accredited by God and accepted by His people. Ecclesiastes meets this test.

Second, while no text of Ecclesiastes is cited as such in the NT, many of its truths are. For example:

What we sow we reap Ecc. 11:1, cf. Gal 6:7

Avoid lust of youth Ecc. 11:10, cf. 2 Tim. 2:22

Death is divinely appointed Ecc. 3:2, cf. Heb. 9:2

Love of money is evil Ecc. 5:10, cf. 1 Tim. 6:10

Don't be wordy in prayer Ecc. 5:2, cf. Matt. 6:7

Third, the NT writers had no occasion to quote from every book in the OT. Few Christians have quoted recently from 1 Kings, yet the NT did (Rom. 11:4). Indeed, few believers ever cite 2 or 3 John, and yet they are part of the inspired Word of God. Whether, or even how often, a book is quoted does not determine whether it is inspired.

### Norman Geisler - ECCLESIASTES 1:2—How can this book be part of the Scriptures since it contains such skepticism? - [When Critics Ask](#)

**PROBLEM:** Several statements that Solomon makes throughout this book indicate a skepticism that seems contrary to the Bible as a whole. In Ecclesiastes 9:5 Solomon says, "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing." However, the Book of Ecclesiastes is included in the canon of Holy Scriptures as an inspired book. How can such a skeptical book be inspired Scripture?

**SOLUTION:** Although Ecclesiastes does contain statements that, when taken in isolation, appear to be contrary to the teaching of the Bible, the book is not a book of skepticism. Once these statements are understood in their contexts, their meaning is compatible with other Scriptures. Such statements as found in Ecclesiastes 1:2 are not designed to produce or to promote skepticism. Rather,

Solomon is recording his search for happiness and meaning in life by pursuing everything that this world offers. Each of these seemingly skeptical observations is aimed at demonstrating that, apart from God, everything “under the sun” is only vanity, and that the only source of true happiness and lasting peace is the Lord our God. Solomon’s investigations led eventually to the conclusion that the whole duty of man is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecc. 12:13).

### **Ecclesiastes 1:2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:2 ματαιι της ματαιιοτ των ε πεν κκλησιαοτ ς ματαιι της ματαιιοτ των τ π ντα ματαιι της

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, said the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Futile! Futile!" laments the Teacher, "Absolutely futile! Everything is futile!"

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Absolute futility. Everything is futile."

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!"

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, said the Preacher, Vanity of vanities: the whole is vanity.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:2 Sheer futility, Qoheleth says. Sheer futility: everything is futile!

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Absolutely pointless!" says the spokesman. "Absolutely pointless! Everything is pointless."

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:2 All is to no purpose, said the Preacher, all the ways of man are to no purpose.

- Ec 2:11,15,17,19,21,23,26 Ec 3:19 Ec 4:4,8,16 Ec 5:10 Ec 6:11 Ec 11:8,10 Ec 12:8 Ps 39:5,6 62:9,10 Ps 144:4 Ro 8:20

#### **Related Passage:**

Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says the LORD, “What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness ([hebel](#)) and became empty?

2 Kings 17:15 They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them.

## **SOLOMON'S FRUSTRATION EXPRESSED**

**Vanity** ([hebel](#); Lxx - [mataiotes](#)) of **vanities** ([hebel](#)) **says the Preacher** (qoheleth; Lxx - ekklesiastes) - Note the repetition, "Vanity of vanities" is a Hebrew superlative ("Utterly Meaningless"), analogous to the Hebrew idiom “Holy of Holies” or “Song of Songs”. The idea is “The most utter vanity” or “complete emptiness.” The Preacher (Qohelet) is declaring that everything under the sun — all human efforts, wisdom, pleasures, and toil — are ultimately temporary, unsatisfying, and elusive apart from God. The phrase captures the existential frustration of life “under the sun” of life without eternal perspective, and specifically life without the Son!

**Vanity** is translated in the Septuagint with [mataiotes](#), which describes the state of being without use or value, emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness. See [Michael Eaton's note](#) on use of Hebel in Ecclesiastes.

The word **vanity** ([hebel](#); Lxx - [mataiotes](#)) challenges us to: (1) See the limits of earthly pursuits. (2) Acknowledge the brevity and fragility of life. (3) Find lasting meaning not “under the sun,” but in the fear of God (Eccl. 12:13) Hebel is not just pessimism — it’s a poetic and prophetic call to seek substance beyond the smoke. Hebel doesn’t mean "pointless" so much as “transitory, elusive, or



without lasting substance.”

**Vanity** ([hebel](#); Lxx - [mataiotes](#)) of **vanities** ([hebel](#); Lxx - [mataiotes](#)). **All is vanity** ([hebel](#); Lxx - [mataiotes](#)) (also Ec 1:14, 3:19, 12:8) - Solomon uses the adjective "all" which usually means "all without exception!" **All** is used in Eccl 1:14; 2:11, 17; 3:1, 19; 12:8. Solomon is saying everything (without God) is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning!

*Most all of Ecclesiastes is written from this perspective,  
through the eyes of a man who thinks and lives as if God doesn't matter.*

**David Guzik** - It seemed that every part of life suffered from this emptiness. We see from the first two verses that Solomon wrote this from a certain perspective, a perspective that through the book he will expose as inadequate and wrong. Most all of Ecclesiastes is written from this perspective, through the eyes of a man who thinks and lives as if God doesn't matter. "*It is an absolutely accurate statement of life when it is lived under certain conditions; but it is not true as a statement of what life must necessarily be.*" (Morgan) If you say, "My life isn't vanity; it isn't meaningless. My life is filled with meaning and purpose." That's wonderful; but you can't ignore the premise of the Preacher – the premise of life under the sun. Therefore Ecclesiastes is filled with what we might call *true lies*. **Given the perspective "God does not matter," it is true that all is vanity. Since that perspective is wrong, it is not true that all is vanity.** Yet Solomon makes us think through this wrong perspective thoroughly through Ecclesiastes.

*The bitter things which the Preacher is saying so abundantly through its course  
do not represent his ultimate convictions, but thoughts  
that he took up in his progress from error to truth.*

**Alexander Maclaren** has a helpful introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes writing "Now in reading this Book of Ecclesiastes -- which I am afraid a great many people do not read at all -- we have always to remember that the wild things and the bitter things which the Preacher is saying so abundantly through its course do not represent his ultimate convictions, but thoughts that he took up in his progress from error to truth. His first word is: 'All is vanity!' That conviction had been set vibrating in his heart, as it is set vibrating in the heart of every man who does as he did, viz., **seeks for solid good away from God**. That is his starting-point. It is not true. All is not vanity, except to some *blase* cynic, made cynical by the failure of his voluptuousness, and to whom 'all things here are out of joint,' and everything looks yellow because his own biliary system is out of order. That is the beginning of the book, and there are hosts of other things in the course of it as one-sided, as cynically bitter, and therefore superficial. But the end of it is: 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.' (Eccl 12:13+) ([What Passes and What Abides](#))

**J Stafford Wright** - Man chose to become self-centered and self-guided rather than remaining God-centered and God-guided. Thus man became earthbound and frustrated, and this book demonstrates that there is no firm foundation under the sun for earthbound man to build on so as to find meaning, satisfaction, and the key to existence. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Page 239](#))

The words of James 4:14+ sound very similar to the opening words of Solomon "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."

It is worth noting that Psalm 127:1<sup>±</sup> was also written by Solomon and he alludes to "**vanity**" twice (although using a different Hebrew word for vain) writing "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in **vain** who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in **vain**." Clearly Solomon is telling us that our human endeavors (building, guarding, etc) are "**vanity of vanities**" without depending on God!

**THOUGHT** - Let's apply this principle by asking a question. Are you trying to live the Christian life depending on your own strength, your fallen flesh? Are you frustrated with your Christian life? Could it be that you have fallen into Solomon's "trap" of all is vanity and you find yourself striving after the wind (so to speak) trying to live this supernatural life in dependence on your natural strength? In Zechariah 4:6 Jehovah says "not by might nor by power but by My Spirit." As Solomon says in Psalm 127:1, we are responsible to work (to live out our Christian life) but we must learn daily to depend on God's Spirit for the supply of supernatural strength. The pattern that will enable you to live a so-called victorious Christian life is what I like to call "100/100," which is not the best math but is my way of saying we are 100% responsible but at the same time we are 100% dependent on the Spirit. Our part. His part. See more discussion of the "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" (100/100). I pray our Father opens the eyes of your heart so that enabled by His Spirit you might enter into His rest (while doing His work) for the rest (pun intended) of your life in Christ. Amen.

**Michael Eaton** adds a qualifier on **All is vanity** - It is only to one seeking satisfaction in disregard of God that the Preacher's message stops at 'All is vanity'. For any who adopt his total world-view he has a note of encouragement. When a perspective of faith is introduced, 'All is vanity' is still true, but it is not the whole picture; 'under the sun' it is the whole truth. When, in 2:24–3:22 and

intermittently thereafter, new factors are brought in (the generosity of God, divine providence, divine judgment), the 'vanity' of life is not obliterated or forgotten; but the new factors transform the perspective and turn pessimism into faith. This prefigures the New Testament perspective in which the believer is 'outwardly ... wasting away' (2 Cor. 4:16), is 'subjected to vanity' and 'groans' with creation 'right up to the present time' (Rom. 8:20–22). Yet he 'knows' what is happening (Rom. 8:22), 'gazes' at a different perspective (2 Cor. 4:18), 'waits' for something different (Rom. 8:25). The new perspective does not cancel out the old; the believer is living in an overlap. But the new perspective revolutionizes his outlook. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 44](#) and [page 158](#))

**Charles Bridges** points out, "This verse appears to have been intended to be a the compendium of the whole treatise. The subject opens upon us abruptly and no wonder. The preacher's heart is so filled with it, He longs to make a forcible impression. His text is the whole world with all the pleasures and profits and honors and endeavors and business and events that are under the sun. He brings out his subject with a vast variety of illustration and then closes with emphatically repeating his judgment. He seems as if he could not give full expression to his convictions. It is not only vain, but vanity itself. He redoubles his assertion to show the certainty of it and that all is unmixed vanity in its highest degree: "Vanity of vanities!" Nor does this belong only to a part. Everything severally, all things collectively, all is one expanse, one vast heap of numberless perishing vanities. I affirm again and again that there is nothing in this world for the great end of man's true happiness. It only enlarges his desires in the endeavor to gratify them. But it leaves behind an aching void, a blank that it cannot fill up." ([Ecclesiastes 1 Commentary](#))

**David Hubbard** points out, "Strong language the Preacher used. Everything is empty, hollow, futile. Life is not what it seems (ED: OH, I THINK IT IS IN FACT WHAT IT SEEMS => EMPTY!!!), not what we want it to be. Not only is everything vanity but it is the vainest kind of vanity, the most futile brand of futility. The expression (ED: VANITY OF VANITIES) conveys a superlative quality (ED: LIKE HOLY OF HOLIES OR SONG OF SONGS). A **Song of Songs** means the finest song and as **King of Kings** (Rev 19:16+) points to the greatest kings (ED: THE GREATEST KING SINGULAR = JESUS!), so **vanity of vanities** means that life is as empty as possible. It is marked by the worst sort of futility. (BORROW [The Preacher's Commentary - Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon page 44](#))

*the nearest thing to zero:  
that is the vanity this book is about.*

**Derek Kidner** points out, "A wisp of vapor, a puff of wind, a mere breath, nothing you could get your hands on, the nearest thing to zero: that is the vanity this book is about. What makes this reading of life disturbing is that this airy nothingness is not seen as a mere flicker on the surface of things, where it might even have had a certain charm. It is the sum total. If that is really so and the rest of the book will be arguing that it is, it makes **vanity** a desperate word. It will no longer mean simply what is slight and passing but more ominously, what is pointless. The author doubles and redoubles this bitter word, using twice-over a phrase which might be a parody of that other superlative 'Holy of Holies'. Utter emptiness stands here in mute contrast to utter holiness, that potent reality which gave shape and point to the traditional piety of Israel. Finally, he clenches it with the terse dismissal, '**All is vanity**'. In the terms we use today, the summing up could be, '**Utter futility! Utter futility! The whole thing is futile.**'" (Borrow [The message of Ecclesiastes : a time to mourn, and a time to dance page 22](#))

**J. Vernon McGee** points out, "**Vanity** here speaks of emptiness. It is to waste life without any purpose or any goal (ED: I DO NOT TOTALLY AGREE WITH THAT STATEMENT - SOLOMON HAD GOALS, MANY OF THEM, SO IT IS MORE ABOUT WHETHER THE GOAL HAS ANY ETERNAL VALUE). It means to live like an animal or a bird lives. There are a great many people who live like that. Without God and without a relationship to the person of Jesus Christ this is truly a summary of life. It (ED: VANITY) is sort of like eating cotton candy. When you put it in your mouth, it just sort of disappears. (BORROW [Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon](#))

**Don Anderson** echoes McGee - What does it mean "**meaningless**?" It's kind of like taking the cotton candy in your mouth—it disappears when you put your mouth on it. It's like when we were kids, we always get this bubble stuff and fill the air with bubbles. But every time you reached out to try to touch one, you know, it disappeared in thin air. It's a bubble that pops. It's cotton candy that disappears when you try to bite into it. There's no content. Life is as empty as possible. It's utter futility. It's emptiness.

**NET NOTE - Vanity of vanities** - Heb "*futility of futilities.*" The phrase "absolutely futile" (הַבָּל הַבָּלִים, havel havalim) is a superlative genitive construction (GKC 431 §133.i). When a plural genitive follows a singular construct noun of the same root, it indicates the most outstanding example of the person or thing described. Examples: קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים (qodesh haqqodashim, "holy of holies"), i.e., "the most holy place" (Exod 26:33); שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (shir hashirim, "song of songs"), i.e., "the most excellent song" (Song 1:1); אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים וַאֲדֹנָי אֲדֹנָי (‘elohe ha’elohim va’adone ha’edonim, "the God of gods and Lord of lords"), i.e., "the highest God and the supreme Lord" (Deut 10:17). See also R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 17–18, §80; IBHS 154 §9.5.3j.

**David Guzik** has an interesting note that "Solomon thinks through this perspective, but he wasn't the first nor the last to see life this way. Many moderns judge life to be equally futile.

"We all live in a house on fire, no fire department to call; no way out, just the upstairs window to look out of



while the fire burns the house down with us trapped, locked in it." (Playwright Tennessee Williams)

"Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise." (Author George Orwell)

"Life is rather like a can of sardines, we're all of us looking for the key." (Playwright Alan Bennett)

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**Vanity (SEPTUAGINT)** (3153) ([mataiotes](#) from [mataios](#) = vain, empty <> derived from [maten](#) = to no purpose or in vain) means emptiness, vanity, nonsense, nothingness, frailty, folly, purposelessness, transitoriness! Thayer says [mataiotes](#) is a "purely Biblical and ecclesiastical word" which describes "what is devoid of truth and appropriateness". It defines the inability to reach a goal or achieve a purpose. It includes the idea of being without success, of being unable to achieve a goal or purpose. It has the quality of being empty, fruitless, nonproductive, useless. [Mataiotes](#) speaks of want of attainment with the idea of aimlessness or of leading to no object or end.

See also lengthy discussion by Trench in **Synonyms of the New Testament**.

Futility is best pictured in Greek mythology. Doomed to Tartarus (hell) forever, [Sisyphus](#) is given the endless task of trying to roll a huge stone up to the top of a mountain. But just when he gets within sight of the pinnacle, the weight of the stone pushes him and the stone all the way down to the bottom, where he begins again the futile attempt to push the stone to the top. Complete futility!

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**Vanity** (futility, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness) (01892) [hebel](#) means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. [Hebel](#) commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21, cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! [Hebel](#) refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use "my days are but a **breath**." (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where [hebel](#) parallels [behālā](#) from root [bāhal](#) "to hasten": Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) [Hebel](#) "generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be "Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die." (Gilbrant)

**Michael Eaton** adds [Hebel](#) means (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness (NEB), spelt out in Job 7 where the 'vanity' (Job 7:16, Heb.) of man's life is a 'breath' (Job 7:7), an evaporating cloud (Job 7:9), soon to be ended (Job 7:8) and return no more (Job 7:9f.); (ii) unreliability, frailty, found also in Psalm 62 where God, a 'Rock' and a 'high tower' (Ps 62:6), is compared with man who is 'vanity' (Ps 62:9), a 'leaning wall' and a 'tottering fence' (Ps 62:3); (iii) futility, as in Job 9:29 (Heb.), where 'in vanity' means 'to no effect'; (iv) deceit (cf. Jer. 16:19; Zech. 10:2). Ecclesiastes includes each of these emphases. All is untrustworthy, unsubstantial; no endeavour will in itself bring permanent satisfaction; the greatest joys are fleeting. Between Eccl 1:2 and Eccl 12:8 the Preacher will echo this key statement about thirty times, showing that his book is in fact its exposition. Vanity characterizes all human activity (Eccl 1:14; 2:11): joy (Eccl 2:1) and frustration (Eccl 4:4, 7-8; 5:10) alike, life (Eccl 2:17; 6:12; 9:9), youth (Eccl 11:10) and death (Eccl 3:19; 11:8), the destinies of wise and foolish (Eccl 2:15, 19), diligent and idle (Eccl 2:21, 23, 26). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 56](#))

**Vine's** summary of [hebel](#) - **First**, the word represents human "breath" as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath] (Job 7:16). **Second**, [hebel](#) means something meaningless and purposeless: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). **Third**, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities ..." (Dt. 32:21, the first occurrence). See SPIRIT usage notes.

**Warren Baker** adds that [hebel](#) "refers to the vanity and ultimate emptiness and meaninglessness of all things in this life, whether they seem good or bad (Eccl. 1:2, 14; 2:11, 15, 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 4, 9; 7:6, 15; 8:10; 9:9; 11:8). Combined with itself in the plural, it means **absolute meaninglessness** (Eccl. 1:2). Idols and the vain religious customs associated with them are all delusions (Jer. 10:3, 15). It denotes an empty, vain life (Eccl. 6:12). Used with the verb [hāḇal](#), it means to carry out vain talk or action or what is empty (Job 27:12). As an adverb, it means to talk in vain, emptily (Job 35:16). To walk after [hebel](#) means to go after or follow vanity (2 Ki. 17:15; Jer. 2:5). Anything obtained through evil is vain, such as wealth (Prov. 13:11)." (Complete Word Study Dictionary— Old Testament)

**Victor Hamilton** on "the cluster of references (of [hebel](#)) found in Ecclesiastes (thirty-six). These may be grouped into several subdivisions. First are those passages in which the author states his inability to find fulfillment in work, both in his failure to be creative and in his lack of control over the privilege of free disposition of his possessions; this is "vanity": Eccl 2:11, 19, 21, 23; Eccles. 4:4, 8; Eccles. 6:2. Second are those verses in which the author struggles with the idea that the connection between sin and judgment, righteousness and final deliverance is not always direct or obvious. This is an anomaly about life and it is vanity": Eccles. 2:15; Eccles. 6:7-9; Eccles. 8:10-14. The meaning of hebel here would be "senseless." Thirdly are those verses in which the author laments the shortness of life; this is vanity": Eccles. 3:19; Eccles. 6:12; Eccles. 11:8, 10. Life, in its quality, is "empty" or "vacuous" (and thus unsubstantial), and in its quantity is "transitory." Rather than the above observations being final conclusions about life by the author of Ecclesiastes, perhaps they reveal something of his method and his concealed premise. He may be attempting to demonstrate man's inability to find meaning to life unaided by divine revelation and interruption. This solo quest will always end in futility.

**HEBEL - 67X/64V - breath(5), delusion(2), emptily(1), emptiness(2), fleeting(2), fraud(1), futile(1), futility(13), idols(7), mere breath(2), nothing(1), useless(1), vain(3), vainly(1), vanity(19), vanity of vanities(3), vapor(1), worthless(2).** Deut. 32:21; 1 Ki. 16:13; 1 Ki. 16:26; 2 Ki. 17:15; Job 7:16; Job 9:29; Job 21:34; Job 27:12; Job 35:16; Ps. 31:6; Ps. 39:5; Ps. 39:6; Ps. 39:11; Ps. 62:9; Ps. 78:33; Ps. 94:11; Ps. 144:4; Prov. 13:11; Prov. 21:6; Prov. 31:30; Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8; Isa. 30:7; Isa. 49:4; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 2:5; Jer. 8:19; Jer. 10:3; Jer. 10:8; Jer. 10:15; Jer. 14:22; Jer. 16:19; Jer. 51:18; Lam. 4:17; Jon. 2:8; Zech. 10:2

Deuteronomy 32:21+ 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their **IDOLS** (no god - ESV, so-called gods - CSB, false gods-NET)(hebel; Lxx - [eidolon](#)). So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

## **G Campbell Morgan - Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ec 1.2**

The sub-title of this book found in our translations, "or the Preacher," we owe to Luther, and it is misleading. As Dr. Plumptre has argued at length, and proved conclusively, the more correct rendering of the Hebrew word Koheleth would be "The Debater." This is important, for it at once reminds us that here we have Discussion, rather than Teaching. In these words we have the general proposition of the Debater. Everything he says from here on to Ec 11:8 is in defence of this statement. Then in a paragraph, brief but pregnant (Ec 11:9-12), he gives an entirely different view of life, which is a corrective of this. Let us, then, at once face this opening declaration. It is an absolutely accurate statement of life when it is lived under certain conditions; but it is not true as a statement of what life must necessarily be. There are thousands of men and women to-day who cannot, and do not, accept this to be true of life as they find it; it is not vanity, vapour, emptiness, nothingness. To them life in every way is real, rich, full, glorious. It is well, then, that at the beginning we should understand the viewpoint of the Debater. His declaration is that things in themselves bring no satisfaction to the soul of man. To live on earth without recognition of the supreme wisdom which begins and continues in the fear of Jehovah, to deal only with that hemisphere which is "under the sun," is indeed to find things of exceeding wonder and beauty and power; but it is to find nothing that satisfies, and to be left at last without any reality, to find only vanity, vapour, emptiness.

### **Ecclesiastes 1:3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:3 τ ς περισε ατ νθρ π ν παντ μ χθ ατο μοχθε π τ ν λιον

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:3 What advantage is there to a man in all his labour that he takes under the sun?

NET Ecclesiastes 1:3 What benefit do people get from all the effort which they expend **on earth**?

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:3 What does a man gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:3 What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:3 What advantage is to man by all his labour that he laboureth at under the sun?

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:3 What profit can we show for all our toil, toiling under the sun?

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:3 What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:3 What profit has man from all the labor which he toils at under the sun?

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:3 What do people gain from all their hard work under the sun?

- profit: Ec 2:22 3:9 5:16 Pr 23:4,5 Isa 55:2 Hab 2:13,18 Mt 16:26 Mk 8:36,37 Joh 6:27
- under: Ec 2:11,19 4:3,7 5:18 6:12 7:11 8:15-17 9:3,6,13

### Related Passages:

Luke 12:19-20+ '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?'

Genesis 3:17–19+ Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 **By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.**"

## THE VANITY OF TOILING UNDER THE SUN

**What advantage** ([yithron](#); Lxx - [perisseia](#) - that which is beyond the regular or expected amount) **does man have in all his work** ([amal](#); Lxx - [mochthos](#) = hard, difficult labor involving suffering) **Which he does under the sun?** - **Advantage** ([yithron](#)) appears 10 times in Ecclesiastes and each time it questions what is the lasting benefit or eternal value of all this effort? Thus Solomon opens his argument on **all is vanity** with a rhetorical question calling for a negative response. Answer? NONE! **Advantage** ([yithron](#)) is a commercial term so the idea is life "pays no dividends." Solomon, despite having wealth, wisdom, and success, looks around and sees that everything under the sun is fleeting. Ultimately, the answer Ecclesiastes points toward is that is no lasting **advantage** ([yithron](#)) exists apart from God. Solomon in effect is forcing us to look beyond earthly accomplishments to eternal purpose. He is forcing us to (See [Vertical Vision](#))

Solomon's words remind us of the words of Jesus in Mark 8:36+ declaring "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" That is the ultimate vanity of vanities!

**NET NOTE** - This rhetorical question expects a negative answer: "Man has no gain in all his toil." Ecclesiastes often uses rhetorical questions in this manner (e.g., Ecc 2:2; 3:9; 6:8, 11, 12)

**IN AFFIRMATIVE NEGATION** This is a very important division, because some of the weightiest truths are conveyed by this form of question: i.e., where the question is put in the affirmative, and the answer to be supplied by the mind is a very emphatic negative. "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). No! there is nothing too hard for Him, for compare Jer. 32:17. Zech. 8:6. Matt. 3:9; 19:26. Luke 1:37. (Source- [E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 949](#)).

**Does man have in all his work** ([amal](#); Lxx - [mochthos](#) = hard, difficult labor involving suffering) **which he does under the sun?** Note that the Hebrew word for **work** ([amal](#); Lxx - [mochthos](#) = hard, difficult labor involving suffering) can denote physical labor but also alludes to mental anguish (cf Ps 25:18 YLT = "my misery"; Joseph's trouble - Ge 41:51, Job's trouble - Job 3:10) and this makes sense because physical labor is often associated with mental pain.

**Eaton** - If the earthly realm is subject to vanity, there is no hope of finding ultimate gain or satisfaction from its resources alone....If

our view of life goes no further than 'under the sun', all our endeavours will have an undertone of misery. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 56](#))

What does "under the sun" mean? It means that since no place on earth is hidden from the sun, Solomon is referring to life on earth, in the visible, temporal realm (not the supernatural realm as with angels).

*If his resources are entirely this-worldly, 'No profit' is the motto over all he does.*

**Michael Eaton** - Vanity characterizes man and the realm he occupies and dominates. If his resources are entirely this-worldly, 'No profit' is the motto over all he does. There is another realm altogether (**ED**: "OTHER WORLDLY"), the Preacher will contend later (Eccl 5:2), when he will speak of God who may be approached and worshipped (Eccl 5:1-7). Meanwhile the **abyss of pessimism** has to be explored. (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 58](#)) (Bolding added)

*Solomon affirmed at the outset that people gain no ultimate advantage or profit from all their toil.*

-- Donald Glenn

**Under the sun** is only found in Ecclesiastes and describes life viewed solely from a horizontal, earthly perspective and is Solomon's way of saying that without God, everything is ultimately meaningless. Solomon uses ([yithron](#)) to probe whether anything "under the sun" can give true satisfaction or permanence.

**THOUGHT** - How much better would life **under the sun** be if all of our life was lived **under the Son**, in Word centered, Spirit enabled submission and obedience to Him? That's a rhetorical question. It reminds me of Paul's words in 1Ti 4:7-8+ where he instructs Timothy to "have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, **discipline** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourself for the purpose of godliness; for (term of explanation - explains why spiritually discipline yourself) bodily discipline is only of little profit (CF "VANITY"), but godliness is profitable for all things (**ED**: COUNTERS SOLOMON'S "ALL" IN Ec 1:2!), since it holds **promise for the present life** and also **for the life to come.**" This begs the simple question

**Under the sun** - 30x/28v (often used in connection with man's toil) - 2Sa 12:12; Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 1:9; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:18; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:20; Eccl. 2:22; Eccl. 3:16; Eccl. 4:1; Eccl. 4:3; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:15; Eccl. 5:13; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 6:1; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 8:9; Eccl. 8:15; Eccl. 8:17; Eccl. 9:3; Eccl. 9:6; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 9:11; Eccl. 9:13; Eccl. 10:5

**NET NOTE** on **advantage** - The term "profit" (יִתְרוֹן, yotéron) is used in Ecclesiastes to evaluate the ultimate benefit/effects of human activities, as טוב טוֹב (tov, "good, worthwhile") as well (e.g., Eccl 2:1, 3). While some relative advantage/profit is recognized (e.g., light over darkness, and wisdom over folly), Qoheleth denies the ultimate advantage of all human endeavors (e.g., Eccl 2:11, 15).

**NET NOTE** on **His work which he does** - The Hebrew root עָמַל ('amal, "toil") is **repeated here for emphasis**: "What gain does anyone have in his **toil** with which he **toils**." For all his efforts, man's endeavors and secular achievements will not produce anything of ultimate value that will radically revolutionize anything in the world. (**ED**: EVEN "**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**" CONTRARY TO POPULAR OPINION!) The term "**toil**" is used in a pejorative sense to emphasize that the only thing that man obtains ultimately from all his efforts is **weariness and exhaustion**. Due to sin, mankind has been cursed with the futility of his labor that renders work a "toilsome" task (Gen 3:17–19+). Although it was not yet revealed to Qoheleth, God will one day deliver the redeemed from this plight in the future kingdom when man's labor will no longer be toilsome, but profitable, fulfilling, and enjoyable (Isa 65:17–23).

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**Advantage** (03504) **yithron** (from [yathar](#) = to remain over, remain, be left over) is a masculine noun refers literally to what is left over (a gain or a profit) or metaphorically to what is advantageous or of benefit, or that which remains after one's work (Eccl. 1:3; 5:16, 10:11); or knowledge (Eccl 7:12). The word yithrôn appears 10 times, all in Ecclesiastes and each time it appears, it questions what is the lasting benefit or eternal value does all this effort really yield? Yithrôn is not just about material gain, but about meaning, enduring value, or spiritual profit.

**Complete Biblical Library** - Likely a loanword from Aramaic, yithron is derived from the cognate of Hebrew verb yathar, "to remain". Appearing exclusively in Ecclesiastes, the noun is attested in Jewish Aramaic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac and Mandaean. The nuance of "profit" is a direct extension of the verbal nuance of "to be left over," as it denotes that which is superfluous or more than the necessary amount. It appears in two broad contexts, that of the lack of profit of labor and in the context of the advantage of wisdom.

It appears twice in the comparative simile "wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness" (Eccl 2:13). Near the conclusion of a proclamation concerning the greatness of wisdom, the statement is: "the advantage of knowledge is wisdom" (Eccl 7:12). It also appears with this nuance in a series of metaphors which express the defilement of folly. Wisdom achieves profit (Eccl 10:10). "A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; The babbler is no different (Eccl 10:11, NKJV).

The second broad context for this noun is that of the rhetorical question, "What profit is labor?" The pointlessness of work is manifested in the realization that the earth is eternal, and generations continually do the same work, minimizing the significance of any individual (Eccl 1:3); as the only profit gained was the reward of the work itself (Eccl 2:11). Indeed, labor itself gains one nothing, not only in this life (Eccl 3:9), nor beyond as well, as one leaves life in the same financial state they entered (Eccl 5:16). Financially, a king is better than anarchy, in regard to land claims (Eccl 5:9).

**YITHRON - 10x/9v - advantage(5), excels(2), profit(3).** Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:13; Eccl. 3:9; Eccl. 5:9; Eccl. 5:16; Eccl. 7:12; Eccl. 10:10; Eccl. 10:11

**Labor** (mischief, toil trouble, anguish) (05999) **amal** from verb **amal** = to labor especially the dark side of labor, the grievous and unfulfilling aspects of work) means trouble, labor, toil. In Eccl 1:3 the Septuagint translates amal with the noun **mochthos** which describes hard and difficult labor involving suffering hardship, struggle, strenuous toil. Note that **amal** is not just describing physical toil but can also describe mental anguish as in the following passages -- anguish (Ps. 25:18), Joseph's 'anguish' of mind (Ge 41:51), the 'misery' from which Israel was delivered (Nu 23:21NIV), Job's 'trouble' (Job 3:10).

**Labor (amal)** is used by Solomon in Ps 127:1+ explaining how man's labor is in vain without the LORD! = "Unless the LORD builds the house, They **labor (amal)** in **vain** who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in **vain**."

**Gilbrant** - This is the noun that describes the labor that Qoheleth, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, considered vanity, because the laborer could never enjoy the fruit of the labor (Ecc. 1:3; 2:11). The term is used figuratively to describe the heaviness of certain painful thoughts, particularly the psalmist's concern over the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:16). 'āmāl can also refer to the fruit or produce of labor (Ps. 105:44; Ecc. 2:19) and the notion of trouble or vexation (general weariness or weariness of situations and circumstances). Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh since God had made him forget all his toil (Gen. 41:51). The Lord heard the affliction and toil of his people in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them (Deut. 26:7). Job's so-called friends are called "troublesome comforters" (Job 3:10; 16:2). The Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, experienced for our sakes "the anguish of his soul" (Isa. 53:11). 'āmāl may also be translated "wickedness" (cf. Num. 23:21; Isa. 10:1), which conveys the emotion of vexation and anguish associated with sinful behavior, especially by those who are the recipients of such evil acts. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**AMAL USES IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 2:10; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:18; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:20; Eccl. 2:22; Eccl. 2:24; Eccl. 3:13; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:6; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:9; Eccl. 5:15; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 5:19; Eccl. 6:7; Eccl. 8:15; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 10:15;

### Solomon's Use of "Under the Sun" to Explore Life's Meaning

Passage	What's Being Examined "Under the Sun"
Ecclesiastes 1:3	Human labor — what gain is there for all the toil?
Ecclesiastes 2:11	Pleasure and accomplishments — even great works are vanity
Ecclesiastes 3:16	Injustice in the place of judgment — even justice is corrupted
Ecclesiastes 4:1–3	Oppression and suffering — those who suffer have no comforter
Ecclesiastes 5:18	Enjoyment in labor — it is a gift from God, yet brief and fleeting
Ecclesiastes 8:9	Human authority — rulers often misuse power, causing harm

Solomon observes that even the best things, when considered "under the sun" (i.e., without God's eternal perspective), are ultimately unsatisfying.

UNDER THE SUN	
“Under the Sun” Means...	Explanation
Life in a fallen world	Life affected by sin, toil, aging, and death (Genesis 3 consequences)
The human experience apart from divine revelation or eternal hope	It emphasizes what can be known or done without God in the equation
A perspective limited to the earthly and temporal	What life looks like if we only see what's "under" — not what's above
The boundaries of human wisdom and effort	It marks the limits of what man can achieve, understand, or enjoy by himself

### Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:4 γενε πορε εται κα γενε ρχεται κα γ ε ς τ ν α ν α στηκεν

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes, and a generation comes: but the earth stands for ever.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains the same through the ages.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation is going, and a generation is coming, and the earth to the age is standing.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes, a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm for ever.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:4 One generation passes and another comes, but the world forever stays.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:4 Generations come, and generations go, but the earth lasts forever.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:4 One generation goes and another comes; but the earth is for ever.

- One generation: Ec 6:12 Ge 5:3-31 11:20-32 36:9-19 47:9 Ex 1:6,7 6:16-27 Ps 89:47,48 90:9,10 Zec 1:5
- but: Ps 102:24-28 104:5 119:90,91 Mt 24:35 2Pe 3:10-13

#### Related Passages:

1 John 2:17+ (**A GENERATION GOES...COMES**) The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

### HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE ON EARTH

**A generation goes and a generation** (continually) **comes, but** (term of contrast) **the earth** (continually) **remains forever** ([olam](#) - NET- "through the ages") - **NET** = "A generation comes and a generation goes" Solomon will now begin to support the premise he



made in Ecc 1:3 that all toil on earth is vanity. He begins with a contrast. What is Solomon contrasting? A **generation** speaks of a life cycle of birth, life and death and the phrase **generation comes** simply states that first generation is succeeded by another generation, and on and on and on! People of earth are all short timers and no one stays that long but they are soon replaced by the next generation. In a word, generations pass but creation endures. Clearly this passage highlights the brevity of human life in contrast with the continuity of the earth and should prompt a sobering reflection on our mortality. While not stated here, clearly this cycle should prompt an eternal perspective in each living soul (See [Vertical Vision](#)) The idea of **remains forever** ([olam](#) - NET- "through the ages") is that there is no end in sight in regard to the futility of life on earth (without God).

**Alexander Maclaren** - He looks out upon humanity, and sees that in one aspect the world is full of births, and in another full of deaths. Coffins and cradles seem the main furniture, and he hears the tramp, tramp, tramp of the generations passing over a soil honeycombed with tombs." (from [What Passes and What Abides](#))

The apostle John gives us a key to how to break free of Solomon's pessimistic picture of the monotony and futility of life in this present world writing "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does (present tense - as the general direction of their life, in dependence on the Spirit) the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:17+) What is the key to breaking out of a life of vanity and striving after the wind? John says the answer is doing the will of God.

The endless cycles of life are illustrated by God's declaration to Adam...

*By the sweat of your face you will eat bread,  
Till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust, and to dust you shall return!*  
-- God

**NET NOTE** on **generation goes** - The participle הֹלֵךְ (holekh, "to walk, to go") emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). The root הִלַּךְ (halakh) is repeated in this section (Eccl 1:4a, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 7c) **to emphasize the continual action and constant motion of everything in nature. Despite the continual action of everything in nature, there is no completion, attainment or rest for anything.** The first use of הֹלֵךְ is in reference to **man**; all subsequent usages are in reference to **nature—illustrations of the futility of human endeavor.** Note: All the key terms used in Ecc 1:4 to describe the futility of human endeavor are repeated in 1:5–11 as illustrations from nature. The literary monotony in Eccl 1:4–11 mirrors the actual monotony of human action that repeats itself with no real change.

**NET NOTE** on **generation goes** - The participle הֹלֵךְ (ba', "to go") emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). The term is repeated in 1:4–5 to compare the futility of secular human accomplishments with the futile actions in nature: everything is in motion, but there is nothing new accomplished.

**NET NOTE** on **earth remains** - The participle עֹמֵד (omadet, "to stand") emphasizes a continual, durative, uninterrupted state (present universal condition). Man, despite all his secular accomplishments in all generations, makes no ultimate impact on the earth.

**NET NOTE** on **forever** - The term עוֹלָם ([olam](#)) has a wide range of meanings: (1) indefinite time: "long time, duration," often "eternal" or "eternity"; (2) future time: "things to come"; and (3) past time: "a long time back," that is, the dark age of prehistory (HALOT 798–99 s.v. עוֹלָם; BDB 761–63 s.v. III עָלַם). It may also denote an indefinite period of "continuous existence" (BDB 762 s.v. III 2 עָלַם.b). **It is used in this sense in reference to things that remain the same for long periods the earth** (Eccl 1:4), the heavens (Ps 148:6), ruined cities (Isa 25:2; 32:14), ruined lands (Jer 18:16), nations (Isa 47:7), families (Ps 49:12; Isa 14:20), the dynasty of Saul (1 Sam 13:13), the house of Eli (2 Sam 2:30), continual enmity between nations (Ezek 25:15; 35:5), the exclusion of certain nations from the assembly (Deut 23:4; Neh 13:1), a perpetual reproach (Ps 78:66).

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**THOUGHT** - We live in a world of constant change - babies born, elders pass, generations shift, photos fade, names on gravestones are slowly worn smooth by time. As I approach 80, I feel the passing of life in the aching of my bones and the rapid flipping of the calendar. Solomon, the wisest man of his age, stood still long enough to observe the rhythm of it all. He reigned as King for 40 years so he saw people come and go — other kings, workers, families, dynasties — and yet the earth kept turning, unbothered by our striving, unchanged by our ambition.

*The ground beneath our feet  
doesn't pause for anyone.*

Solomon is not trying to make us despair, but to free us from the illusion that our meaning is rooted in permanence or even our legacy (I am passing on [preceptaustin.org](#) to my oldest son Joel). Instead, it invites us to consider what *does* last. The earth remains — but even it is temporary (see 2 Peter 3:10+). What truly endures is God's Word, God's Kingdom, and the souls of men and

women. So while the world keeps turning, we are being called to live for what won't fade - Faith in Christ, Love for God and others and Spirit enabled obedience that will echo throughout eternity. In short, even as our bodies are fading away, enabled by His Spirit, we can obey Jesus' command to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Mt 6:20-21+), planting seeds now that will outlast our life on earth and yield eternal fruit.

Lord, teach us to number our days (Ps 90:12+), by Your Spirit supernaturally motivating our hearts (Php 2:13NLT+), loosening our grip on the temporary, and seeking to live for what lasts throughout eternity, redeeming our time (Eph 5:16KJV+) for Your Kingdom and Your glory through Christ Jesus our Redeemer and soon coming King of kings. Amen.

**Ecclesiastes 1:5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:5 καὶ ἄναλλεῖ ἡλιος καὶ ὄνει ἡλιος καὶ ἐστῆ τῆ πονατοῦ λκεῖ

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:5 And the sun arises, and the sun goes down and draws toward its place;

NET Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun sets; it hurries away to a place from which it rises again.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it returns to its place where it rises.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:5 Also, the sun hath risen, and the sun hath gone in, and unto its place panting it is rising there.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises, the sun sets; then to its place it speeds and there it rises.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises and the sun goes down; then it presses on to the place where it rises.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun rises, and the sun sets, and then it rushes back to the place where it will rise again.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun comes up and the sun goes down, and goes quickly back to the place where he came up.

- sun: Ge 8:22 Ps 19:4-6 89:36,37 104:19-23 Jer 33:20
- hasteth: Heb. panteth, Jos 10:13,14 Ps 42:1 Hab 3:11

## THE REPETITIOUS CYCLE OF THE SUN

**Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to** (NET - "hurries away"; Literally "panting" with fatigue) **its place it rises there again** - Remember that what Solomon is doing is defending his argument for the transient effect of our work in Ecc 1:3. While the earth remains, it too has cycles but they are the same day after day. The Hebrew word for "**hastening**" suggests a kind of panting or straining, as if even the sun is wearied by its endless circuit. It is as if the sun can hardly keep up with its daily cycle. And despite all its power and glory, the sun ends up right back where it started, every day. The image is beautiful but Solomon sees it as part of a cycle of futility. Even the greatest objects in nature are locked into repetitive routines. Play the famous Fiddler on the Roof Song "[Sun Rise, Sun Set.](#)"

**THOUGHT** - Don't just live day to day by the sun's rhythm alone, but live continually in the light of the Son's redemption and His Spirit renewal.

*Says the Preacher, take away its God, and creation no longer reflects His glory;  
it illustrates the weariness of mankind.*

As **Eaton** explains "These verses (Ec 1:5-7) amplify Ec 1:2-4 in terms of creation. Though a hubbub of activity, it is devoid of progress. There is no gain for man in his toil; similarly there is no gain for creation in her toil. Three examples are given: the repetitious cycles of the sun, like a runner on a circular track; the wind blowing round its circuits to no apparent purpose; the waters gushing into the seas without ever finding their task accomplished....But, says the Preacher, take away its God, and creation no longer reflects His glory; it illustrates the weariness of mankind. When Adam fell, creation fell (Ge 3:17-19+). If man is weary, creation is weary with him. If our outlook is merely 'under the sun', no doxology can arise to one who is 'in heaven' (Eccl. 5:2+).....**Hastens** (RSV) translates a verb meaning 'to gasp, pant, sniff'. It depicts the sun as weary, like 'a runner breathing heavily in the race. (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 58](#))

**NET NOTE on the sun rises** - The Hebrew text has a perfect verbal form, but it should probably be emended to the participial form, which occurs in the last line of the verse. Note as well the use of participles in vv. 4–7 to describe what typically takes place in the natural world. The participle זֹרֵאֵךְ (zoreakh, "to rise") emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle): the sun is continually rising (and continually setting) day after day.

**NET NOTE on the sun sets** - Heb "the sun goes." The participle בא' (ba', "to go") emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle): the sun is continually rising and continually setting day after day. The repetition of בא' in 1:4–5 creates a comparison between the relative futility of all human endeavor ("a generation comes and a generation goes [בא']") with the relative futility of the action of the sun ("the sun rises and the sun goes" [i.e., "sets," בא']).

**NET NOTE on hastening to its place** - Heb "hastens" or "pants." The verb שָׂאֵף (sha'af) has a three-fold range of meanings: (1) "to gasp; to pant," (2) "to pant after; to long for," and (3) "to hasten; to hurry" (HALOT 1375 s.v. שָׂאֵף; BDB 983 s.v. I שָׂאֵף). The related Aramaic root שָׂאֵף means "to be thirsty; to be parched." **The Hebrew verb is used of "gasp" for breath, like a woman in the travail of childbirth** (Isa 42:14); "panting" with eagerness or desire (Job 5:5; 7:2; 36:20; Ps 119:131; Jer 2:24) or "panting" with fatigue (Jer 14:6; Eccl 1:5). **Here שָׂאֵף personifies the sun, panting with fatigue, as it hastens to its destination** (BDB 983 s.v. I שָׂאֵף). The participle form depicts continual, uninterrupted, durative action (present universal use). **Like the sun, man—for all his efforts—never really changes anything; all he accomplishes in his toil is to wear himself out.**

**NET NOTE on rises** - The verb זֹרֵאֵךְ (zoreakh, "to rise") is repeated in this verse to emphasize that the sun is locked into a never changing, ever repeating monotonous cycle: rising, setting, rising, setting.

**Ecclesiastes 1:6 Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:6 νατ λλων ατς κε πορε εται πρς ντον κα κυκλο πρς βορρ ν κυκλο κυκλ ν πορε εται τ πνε μα κα π κ κλους α το πιστρ φει τ πνε μα

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:6 arising there it proceeds southward, and goes round toward the north. The wind goes round and round, and the wind returns to its circuits.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind goes to the south and circles around to the north; round and round the wind goes and on its rounds it returns.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:6 Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:6 Going unto the south, and turning round unto the north, turning round, turning round, the wind is going, and by its circuits the wind hath returned.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:6 Southward goes the wind, then turns to the north; it turns and turns again; then back to

its circling goes the wind.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:6 Blowing now toward the south, then toward the north, the wind turns again and again, resuming its rounds.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind blows toward the south and shifts toward the north. Round and round it blows. It blows in a full circle.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:6 The wind goes to the south, turning back again to the north; circling round for ever.

- The wind: Job 37:9,17 Ps 107:25,29 Jon 1:4 Mt 7:24,27 Joh 3:8 Ac 27:13-15

## GOING IN CIRCLES

**Blowing** (literally "going") **toward the south, Then turning ([sabab](#)) toward the north, The wind continues swirling ([sabab](#)) along; And on its circular courses (sabab) the wind (continually) returns - NET = "round and round the wind goes and on its rounds it returns." The wind follows a never-ending pattern, going south, turning north, circling, and returning, yet never arriving, never resting. It is in constant motion, but it accomplishes no lasting change. Solomon is using the wind to illustrate the cyclical, weary nature of labor and the vanity of labor under the sun. Even the wind, powerful and free, is caught in a repetitive loop. Just like the wind, human life can feel circular: working, aging, striving, but nothing ever seems to finally satisfy. The verse connects with verse 7 (rivers flowing) and verse 8 (weariness) all expressing a "cosmic treadmill" going in circles and in effect getting nowhere. Solomon isn't condemning nature but is showing how even nature reflects a kind of endless motion without meaning. But it also sets up the contrast, so just as the wind and waters follow divine design, so too must man look beyond the cycle temporal toil for eternal significance.**

**NET NOTE** on **swirling...** - The Hebrew root סָבַב ([sabab](#), "to circle around") is repeated four times in this verse **to depict the wind's continual motion**: "The wind **circles around** (סֹבֵב, sovev) ... **round and round** (סֹבֵב סֹבֵב) ... its **circuits** (סְבִיבוֹתָיו, sévivotayv)." **This repetition is designed for a rhetorical purpose—to emphasize that the wind is locked into a never ending cycle.** This vicious circle of monotonous action does not change anything. The participle form is used three times to emphasize continual, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). **Despite the fact that the wind is always changing direction, nothing really new ever happens. The constant shifting of the wind cannot hide the fact that this is nothing but a repeated cycle; nothing new happens here** (e.g., Ecc 1:9–10).

**NET NOTE** on **returns** - The use of שָׁב (shav, Qal active participle masculine singular from שׁוּב, shuv, "to return") creates a wordplay (paronomasia) with the repetition of סָבַב (savav, "to circle around"). The participle emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use).

**Tremper Longman III** The Heb. utilizes a literary device that is called [delayed identification](#). The subject "wind" is actually toward the end of the verse. Thus, as the verse describes something going south, north, and round and round, the reader is not certain until the end that the author is describing the wind. Such a device grabs the attention of readers and gets them involved, but, as with many Heb. literary devices, it is hard to reflect it in a modern translation without sounding wooden. (See [Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 264](#))

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**Turning** (05437) [sabab](#) means to go around, to surround; to turn around, to turn back, to change. It indicates a curving motion or an encircling motion of something, but it is used figuratively as well: to turn, to change direction (1Sa. 15:12); to encircle or flow around about, throughout (Ge 2:11, 13); to surround something (Ge 19:4); to gather people around a central person or object (G. 37:7); to travel round about (Ex. 13:18). It indicates a surrounding setting prepared by a jeweler to receive jewels, etc. (Ex. 28:11).

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### "The Wind Turns Still"

Blowing south, then north again,  
A restless breeze without an end,  
It dances high, then bows below,  
Yet finds no place it's meant to go.

It swirls and spins in silent grace,  
Yet never lands in any place.  
A power great, yet blind in aim,  
Its path returns — yet not the same.

So too, our lives beneath the sky,  
We strive and labor, laugh and cry.  
We chase the wind with hearts aflame,  
But wake to find it's still the same.

The seasons change, the tides recede,  
But nothing fills the soul's true need.  
The motion stirs, the silence stays—  
The weary wind outlasts our days.

O Spirit of God, come blow within,  
Dispel the weight of earthbound sin.  
Give purpose to our fleeting days,  
And turn our circles into praise.

**Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:7 π ντες ο χε μαρροι πορε ονται ε ς τ ν θ λασσαν κα θ λασσα ο κ σται μπιμπλαμ νη ε ς τ πον ο ο χε μαρροι πορε ονται κε α το πιστρ φουσιν το πορευθ ναι

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the rivers run into the sea; and yet the sea is not filled: to the place whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the streams flow into the sea, but the sea is not full, and to the place where the streams flow, there they will flow again.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. The streams are flowing to the place, and they flow there again.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:7 Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the streams are going unto the sea, and the sea is not full; unto a place whither the streams are going, thither they are turning back to go.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:7 Into the sea go all the rivers, and yet the sea is never filled, and still to their goal the rivers go.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:7 All rivers go to the sea, yet never does the sea become full. To the place where they go, the rivers keep on going.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:7 All streams flow into the sea, but the sea is never full. The water goes back to the place where the streams began in order to start flowing again.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the rivers go down to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers go,

there they go again.

- **the rivers run:** Job 38:10,11 Ps 104:6-9
- **return again:** Heb. return to go

## EVER FLOWING NEVER FILLING

**All the rivers** (continually) **flow** ([literally "walking"](#)) **into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they** (continually) **flow again** - Solomon would watch the Jordan River empty into the Dead Sea but the Dead Sea never overflowed! And as rivers poured into the Mediterranean Sea, the sea never overflowed. Solomon is alluding to the divinely ordained [hydrological cycle](#) of evaporation, rain, rivers, sea and then back again (See [outstanding picture depicting water cycle](#)). So like all of our daily toils ending in vanity, the natural world also appears busy and in motion, but its movement leads to no final arrival but only repetition.

**THOUGHT** - Solomon implies that human effort is like the river, constantly flowing but never fulfilling our expectations nor truly filling the heart unless connected to an eternal Source!

**NET NOTE** on **flow** - Heb “**are going**” or “**are walking**.” The term הלכים (holékhim, Qal active participle masculine plural from הלך, halakh, “to walk”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). This may be an **example of personification**; this verb is normally used in reference to the human activity of walking. Qoheleth compares the flowing of river waters to the action of walking to draw out the comparison between the actions of man (Ec 1:4) and the actions of nature (Ec 1:5–11).

**NET NOTE** on **return** - Heb “there they are returning to go.” The term שבים (shavim, Qal active participle masculine plural from שוב, shuv, “to return”) emphasizes the continual, durative action of the waters. The root שוב is repeated in Eccl 1:6–7 to emphasize that everything in nature (e.g., wind and water) **continually repeats its actions. For all of the repetition of the cycles of nature, nothing changes; all the constant motion produces nothing new.**

**NET NOTE** This verse does not refer to the cycle of evaporation or the return of water by underground streams, as sometimes suggested. Rather, it describes the constant flow of river waters to the sea. For all the action of the water—endless repetition and water constantly in motion—there is nothing new accomplished

Forgive me for a touch of nostalgia but Solomon's words about the rivers flowing into the sea reminded me of an oldie, but goodie [Unchained Melody](#) by the Righteous Brothers that has this line...

Lonely rivers flow  
To the sea, to the sea  
To the open arms of the sea, yeah  
Lonely rivers sigh  
"Wait for me, wait for me"  
I'll be coming home, wait for me  
[Unchained Melody](#)

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### C H Spurgeon - Morning and Evening - Evening, October 26

“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” — Ecclesiastes 1:7

Everything sublunary is on the move, time knows nothing of rest. The solid earth is a rolling ball, and the great sun himself a star obediently fulfilling its course around some greater luminary. Tides move the sea, winds stir the airy ocean, friction wears the rock: change and death rule everywhere. The sea is not a miser's storehouse for a wealth of waters, for as by one force the waters flow into it, by another they are lifted from it. Men are born but to die: everything is hurry, worry, and vexation of spirit. Friend of the unchanging Jesus, what a joy it is to reflect upon thy changeless heritage; thy sea of bliss which will be for ever full, since God himself shall pour eternal rivers of pleasure into it. We seek an abiding city beyond the skies, and we shall not be disappointed. The passage before us may well teach us gratitude. Father Ocean is a great receiver, but he is a generous distributor. What the rivers bring him he returns to the earth in the form of clouds and rain. That man is out of joint with the universe who takes all but makes no return. To give to others is but sowing seed for ourselves. He who is so good a steward as to be willing to use his substance for his



Lord, shall be entrusted with more. Friend of Jesus, art thou rendering to him according to the benefit received? Much has been given thee, what is thy fruit? Hast thou done all? Canst thou not do more? To be selfish is to be wicked. Suppose the ocean gave up none of its watery treasure, it would bring ruin upon our race. God forbid that any of us should follow the ungenerous and destructive policy of living unto ourselves. Jesus pleased not himself. All fullness dwells in him, but of his fullness have all we received. O for Jesus' spirit, that henceforth we may live not unto ourselves!

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**F B Meyer - Ecclesiastes 1:7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. (R.V.)**

The complaint of this chapter is the tiresome monotony of existence. Always the same tedious routine! The jaded soul of the worldling, who has put God out of his life, sees nothing fresh or interesting anywhere, and yawns with weariness. King Solomon had everything that the world could give to make his years rich, glad, and useful. But his heart turned away from God to things, from the only true God to idols, from the spiritual to the sensual, from heaven to earth; and he became a jaded voluptuary, who records his experiences on these pages, to warn coming generations. His words remind us of Byron's lament at his life being in the sere and yellow leaf; of the closing sentence of "Vanity Fair"; and of entries in the journals of the world's greatest wits and courtiers.

All the rivers of earthly joy may be flowing into your heart, but they will never fill it. They may recede, or dry up, or ebb; but if not, still they will never satisfy. The pleasures of this world after a while become monotonous, and pall on our taste. The appetite grows with its food. But in Christ there is perennial interest. The water that He gives rises up to eternal life. In his love and service there is always satisfaction and blessedness. We need not go outside of Him for new delights; and to know Him is to possess a secret which makes all things new.

I know of a gentleman, who has everything that wealth can give, but who is kept in a perpetual state of irritation, because he cannot eradicate the daisies from his lawn. There is a freckle on every flower, a stain on every leaf, a drawback in every lot, that we may be driven to find perfect fruition in God only.

**Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:8 π ντες ο λ γοι γκοποι ο δυν σεται ν ρ το λαλε ν κα ο κ μπληρωθ σεται φθαλμ ς το ρ ν κα ο πληρωθ σεται ο ς π κρο σεως

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are full of labour; a man will not be able to speak of them: neither shall the eye be satisfied with seeing, neither shall the ear be filled with hearing.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:8 All this monotony is tiresome; no one can bear to describe it: The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever content with hearing.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are wearisome; man is unable to speak. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:8 Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:8 All these things are wearying; a man is not able to speak, the eye is not satisfied by seeing, nor filled is the ear from hearing.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are wearisome. No one can say that eyes have not had enough of seeing, ears their fill of hearing.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:8 All speech is labored; there is nothing man can say. The eye is not satisfied with seeing

nor is the ear filled with hearing.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:8 All of these sayings are worn-out phrases. They are more than anyone can express, comprehend, or understand.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are full of weariness; man may not give their story: the eye has never enough of its seeing, or the ear of its hearing.

- **All things are wearisome:** Ec 2:11,26 Mt 11:28 Ro 8:22,23
- **man:** Ec 4:1-4 7:24-26
- **the eye:** Ec 4:8 5:10,11 Ps 63:5 Pr 27:20 30:15,16 Mt 5:6 Rev 7:16,17

## INSATIABLE SENSES - WHEN NOTHING IS ENOUGH

**All things are wearisome** ([yagea](#)) - NLT - "Everything is wearisome beyond description" NET = "All this monotony is tiresome". The context is the description of the monotonous cyclical aspect of nature (sun, wind, rivers). The Hebrew of **wearisome** implies that everything is exhausting for life is full of repetition (as just illustrated in nature - Ec 1:5-7) and endless motion that wears us down and gets us nowhere. And this speaks not just physical weariness but existential, soul-deep tiredness.

**Alexander Maclaren** asks "What is the difference between a squirrel in a cage who only makes his prison go round the faster by his swift race, and the man who lives toilsome days for transitory objects which he may never attain?" ([Two views of Life](#))

**Michael Eaton** - The argument is taken a step further. Despite the fact that creation is active to the point of inexpressible exhaustion, it is incapable of providing secular man with any lasting satisfaction....The Preacher's point is that all this (**ED**: CREATION MANIFESTING THE GLORY OF GOD) is lost in an 'under the sun' viewpoint; all that is left is nature in a state of exhaustion. (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes](#), page 58)

**NET NOTE** on **things** - Heb "the things." The Hebrew term דְּבָרִים (dévarim, masculine plural noun from דָּבַר, davar) is often used to denote "words," but it can also refer to actions and events (HALOT 211 s.v. דָּבַר א; BDB 183 s.v. דָּבַר IV.4). Here, it means "things," as is clear from the context: "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done" (Ec 1:9). Here דְּבָרִים can be nuanced "occurrences" or even "[natural] phenomena."

**Man is not able to tell it** - NET - "no one can bear to describe it" It's too much to even explain — words fail to express the depth of weariness we experience. Solomon is saying, "Even if I tried to describe it, I couldn't do it justice."

**NET NOTE** says "The statement **no one can bear to describe it** probably means that Qoheleth could have multiplied examples (beyond the sun, the wind, and the streams) of the endless cycle of futile events in nature. However, no tongue could ever tell, no eye could ever see, no ear could ever hear all the examples of this continual and futile activity.

**The eye is not satisfied with seeing** - NLT = "No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied." Humans are never fully satisfied. We constantly seek new sights, new sounds, new experiences. This is an observation of our restless consumption and deep longing for fulfillment that created things cannot satisfy.

**Nor is the ear filled (male) with hearing.** - NET - 'nor is the ear ever content with hearing" NLT = "No matter how much we hear, we are not content."

**THOUGHT** - We live in a world that never stops offering — more screens, more views, more voices, more noise. But our hearts stay hungry. We scroll past beauty. We binge on entertainment. We listen endlessly. But somehow, we're still empty. Solomon isn't being cynical. He's being honest and in that honesty, he's doing us a favor. He is saying: "Your exhaustion makes sense. You're not broken, the world (without God) is!" In chapter 3 Solomon will tell us that we were made for eternity (Ecc 3:11+). Only when we reconnect with the eternal God can our eyes be satisfied, our ears be content, and our soul find true rest. Christ does not just silence the noise. He (and He Alone) satisfies the soul. May God grant each of us (we are all caught up to some degree in this "mad [godless] monotony") to obey His call (the first time so that we are born again [Jn 3:3-5+] and then every day) to "**Come** (command - see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "**Take** ([aorist imperative](#)) My yoke upon you and **learn** ([aorist imperative](#)) from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS**. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mt 11:28-30+)

**NET NOTE** on **filled** - The term מלא (male', "to be filled, to be satisfied") is repeated in Ec 1:7-8 to draw a comparison between the futility in the cycle of nature and human secular accomplishments: lots of action, but no lasting effects. In Ec 1:7 מלא מלא ('enenu male', "it is never filled") describes the futility of the water cycle: "All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never filled." (male'.) In Ec 1:8 מלא לא ימלא (vélo-timmale', "it is never satisfied") **describes the futility of human labor**: "the ear is never satisfied with hearing."

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**Wearisome** (03023) **yagea** from the verb **yagea** which means to work until one is tired and exhausted, emphasizing the toil of work and weariness that results from that toil. Thus yagea is an adjective meaning weary, tired, describing a state of weakness or exhaustion from physical exertion and oppression (Dt. 25:18; 2Sa 17:2). In Eccl. 1:8 yagea refers in general to the weariness, exhaustion, and monotony of the endless cycle of repetitiveness in the world.

**Complete Biblical Library** In Deut. 25:18, God urges Israel to remember the misdeeds of the Amalekites, who attacked the particularly weak and weary members of their group who lagged behind the main company in the desert after their escape from Egypt. These atrocities were to be remembered when Israel entered Canaan to serve as motivation for the total annihilation of Amalek (see 1 Sam. 15:1ff).

In 2 Sam. 17:2, Absalom is encouraged by the wise counselor Ahithophel to attack David and his men when they are weary and weak. This plan was frustrated by alternative advice from David's friend, Hushai the Arkite.

The author of Ecclesiastes explores the possibility of finding true happiness through wisdom, wealth and work, only to discover that if God is left out of life, all is meaningless and **wearisome** (literally, "full of labor," Ecc. 1:8). The last two verses of the Book make it clear that fearing God and keeping his commandments are essential to life (Eccl 12:13-14).

**YAGEA - 3V** - Deut. 25:18; 2 Sam. 17:2; Eccl. 1:8

**Ecclesiastes 1:9 That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:9 τ τ γεγον ς α τ τ γενησ μενον κα τ τ πεποιημ νον α τ τ ποιηθησ μενον κα ο κ σιν π ν πρ σφατον π τ ν λιον

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:9 What is that which has been? the very thing which shall be: and what is that which has been done? the very thing which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:9 What exists now is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing truly new on earth.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:9 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:9 What is that which hath been? it is that which is, and what is that which hath been done? it is that which is done, and there is not an entirely new thing under the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:9 What was, will be again, what has been done, will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun!

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:9 What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new

under the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:9 Whatever has happened before will happen again. Whatever has been done before will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun.

- **that:** Ec 3:15 7:10 2Pe 2:1
- **there:** Isa 43:19 Jer 31:22 Rev 21:1,5

## **ROUND AND ROUND WE GO... SAME STORY, DIFFERENT NAMES**

**That which has been is that which will be And that which has been done is that which will be done-** NLT = "History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before." Solomon expresses the repetitive and cyclical nature of life under the sun. What has already happened in the past is likely to happen again in the future. In effect, the human story is often less like a line and more like a circle.

**NET NOTE** on **has been** - Heb "what is." The Hebrew verbal form is a perfect. Another option is to translate, "What has been." See the next line, which speaks of the past and the future.

**So there is nothing new under the sun** - Remember that this phrase under the sun views all things without allowing God into the picture. It views life apart from God, confined to the temporal, ignoring the eternal. While technologies and tools evolve, the core experiences of humanity remain the same - Longing, envy, injustice, joy, toil, love, mortality. The appearance of newness is deceptive but at the root, it's a repetition of old patterns.

Have you ever noticed how things you buy new are stimulating for a while but soon they grow old and then you want another "new" thing?

While Solomon does not say it here, from the rest of Scripture we learn that you cannot escape the cycle of "what has been" unless you connect with the God Who makes all things new in time (2Co 5:17) and eternity (Rev. 21:5).

**Michael Eaton** remarks that "If God is left aside, and life viewed 'under the sun', there can be nothing new; history is a closed circuit."...(ED: BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT ) History is travelling to a goal, the Day of the Lord, when he will complete his purpose, redeem his people and judge his enemies. (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page )

**David Guzik** - There may be nothing new under the sun; but thankfully the followers of Jesus – those born again by God's Spirit – don't live under the sun in that sense. Their life is filled with new things.

- A new name (Isaiah 62:2, Revelation 2:17)
- A new community (Ephesians 2:14)
- A new help from angels (Psalm 91:11)
- A new commandment (John 13:34)
- A new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33, Matthew 26:28)
- A new and living way to heaven (Hebrews 10:20)
- A new purity (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- A new nature (Ephesians 4:24)
- A new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- All things become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 21:5)

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**Norman Geisler - ECCLESIASTES 1:9-10—Isn't it false to claim there is nothing new under the sun? - [When Critics Ask](#)**

**PROBLEM:** Solomon declared here that "there is nothing new under the sun." But not only is this contrary to science and human history, but it is opposed by other verses of Scripture (cf. Isa. 43:19; Jer. 31:22) where God says He will do "a new thing."

**SOLUTION:** Of course there are new inventions, and God does new things. Solomon is not speaking about these, but as to how a human being can be satisfied "under the sun" (v. 8). All the regular means of wine, wealth, wisdom, and works (see Ecc. 2) have already been tried and found wanting.

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**Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:10 ς λαλ σει κα ρε δ το το καιν ν σπιν δη γ γονεν ν το ς α σιν το ς γενομ νοις π μπροσθεν μ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:10 Who is he that shall speak and say, Behold, this is new? it has already been in the ages that have passed before us.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there anything about which someone can say, "Look at this! It is new!"? It was already done long ago, before our time.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:10 Can one say about anything, "Look, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:10 Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:10 There is a thing of which one saith: 'See this, it is new!' already it hath been in the ages that were before us!

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:10 Take anything which people acclaim as being new: it existed in the centuries preceding us.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has already been, in the ages before us.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:10 Even the thing of which we say, "See, this is new!" has already existed in the ages that preceded us.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:10 Can you say that anything is new? It has already been here long before us.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:10 Is there anything of which men say, See, this is new? It has been in the old time which was before us.

- **Already it has existed:** Mt 5:12 23:30-32 Lu 17:26-30 Ac 7:51 1Th 2:14-16 2Ti 3:8

## THE ILLUSION OF INNOVATION

In a world obsessed with upgrades, innovation, and reinvention, Solomon gently pulls back the curtain. He shows us that what seems new is often recycled. Humanity loops through trends, beliefs, wars, dreams — always hoping the next version will finally fulfill. But the only thing truly new is what God creates: A new heart (Ezek. 36:26+) A new spirit (Psalm 51:10+) A new creation (2 Cor. 5:17+) A new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1+) Solomon's point is that we will never find "new" **under the sun** but ultimately only in the Son, for in Christ we can become something the world has never seen before, a new ([kainos](#)) creation (2Cor 5:17+).

**Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"?** Solomon anticipates the reader will in effect say now "What a minute. I can think of many things that are new in 2025!" Solomon asks the question for them rhetorically where the implied answer is "No!" It is interesting that every generation thinks it's unique but patterns recur

**Already it has existed for ages Which were before us** - Solomon replies "It was already done long ago, before our time." (NLT). Solomon's point is that the truly new, the newness that satisfies the soul, cannot be found **under the sun** (in a world without God). Only God creates transcendent newness as in "new creatures" in 2Cor 5:17+ were "new" is the word [kainos](#) which describes

that which is **new** in kind (unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of). It relates to being not previously present. **Kainos** is something that not only is recent and different but extraordinary"!

**NET NOTE** - This does not deny man's creativity or inventiveness, only the ultimate newness of his accomplishments. For example, there is no essential difference between the first voyage to the moon and the discovery of America (different point of arrival, different vehicles of travel, but the same essential action and results).

**Donald Glenn**- As several commentators note, Solomon did not intend by this to deny human creativity but to deny the complete newness of people's accomplishments. For example, man's journey to the moon and the discovery of America, though different, were both explorations of distant places, involving adventure and risk. And the invention of dynamite and of the atomic bomb shared the element of discovering an "explosive." Thus what is true in the realm of nature—the constant repetition of previous accomplishments—is in essence true of the activity of people and is included in the observation that all things produce only indescribable weariness and lack of satisfaction (all things **are wearisome**, v. 8). (See [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 980](#))

**J Stafford Wright** - Obviously, there have been many inventions; but in the context the Teacher probably has in mind any invention that enables man to break out of nature and the succession of history into meaning which transcends the sense of futility. Man has not found it; and each generation, regarding itself as the greatest, still reaches no conclusion. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Page 240](#))

**Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:11 ο κ σπιν μν μη το ς πρ τοις κα γε το ς σχ τοις γενομ νοις ο κ σται α το ς μν μη μετ τ ν γενησομ νων ε ς τ ν σχ την

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no memorial to the first things; neither to the things that have been last shall their memorial be with them that shall at the last time.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:11 No one remembers the former events, nor will anyone remember the events that are yet to happen; they will not be remembered by the future generations.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:11 We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is not a remembrance of former generations; and also of the latter that are, there is no remembrance of them with those that are at the last.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:11 No memory remains of the past, and so it will be for the centuries to come -- they will not be remembered by their successors.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:11 The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of the men of old; nor of those to come will there be any remembrance among those who come after them.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:11 Nothing from the past is remembered. Even in the future, nothing will be remembered by those who come after us.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no memory of those who have gone before, and of those who come after



there will be no memory for those who are still to come after them.

- **There is:** Ec 2:16 Ps 9:6 Isa 41:22-26 42:9

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 2:16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

## FADING FOOTPRINTS ERASED BY TIME

**There is no remembrance of earlier things** - Note some translations favor "things" and some favor "people." E.g., NAB renders it "There is no remembrance of the men of old." Even great accomplishments, great names, and great stories of the past are eventually forgotten. History moves on and most people are not remembered beyond a few generations.

**David Guzik** - The futility of life seems to extend in both directions, both into the past and into the future. Man works hard, yet it never seems to make a lasting difference and all is simply forgotten.

**Eaton** - [Nihilism](#) (ED: philosophical perspective that denies the existence of objective meaning, truth, or value in the world) not only dominates his outlook, it also works itself out in life. Past events are forgotten; future events will be forgotten...Nehemiah's prayer 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' (Neh. 13:31) pleads that God's actions may arise out of his past promises (cf. Gen. 40:14; Exod. 20:8). (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 60](#))

**NET NOTE** - Heb "There is no remembrance of former things." The term רִשְׁוֹנִים (ri'shonim, "former things") is the masculine plural form of the adjective רִשְׁוֹן (ri'shon, "former, first, chief"; BDB 911 s.v. רִשְׁוֹן). When used in a temporal sense, the singular denotes "former" in time (BDB 911 s.v. 1.a) or "first" in time (BDB 911 s.v. 2.a). The plural form is only used to denote "former" in time: "former persons," i.e., ancestors, men of old (e.g., Lev 26:45; Deut 19:14; Job 18:20; Isa 61:4; Ps 79:8; Sirach 4:16) or "former things," i.e., past events (e.g., Isa 41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 18; 46:9; 48:3). See BDB 911 s.v. 1.a, which suggests that this usage refers to "former persons." This approach is adopted by several translations: "men of old" (NEB, NAB, NIV, Moffatt), "people of long ago" (NRSV), "earlier ones" (NJPS), and "former generations" (ASV). On the other hand, this Hebrew phrase may be nuanced "former things" or "earlier things" (HALOT 1168 s.v. רִשְׁוֹן(1)). This is adopted by some translations: "former things" (KJV, RSV) and "earlier things" (NASB). Although future generations are mentioned in Ec 1:11, what they will not remember is the past events. The context of Ec 1:3–11 focuses on human achievement, that is, former things.

**And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.** - The same fate awaits the present and future even today's "big moments" will fade. Human memory is short. What seems monumental now will one day be forgotten. Only what is done in Christ for God lasts beyond time and even if the world forgets, God never forgets (Mal. 3:16; Heb. 6:10)

**Tremper Longman III** - What we do today seems new and exciting to us, but it is not really new and will not be remembered in the future. Such an insight takes all the steam out of living and so-called creativity. The present loses out to the past and the future. (See [Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 265](#))

**NET NOTE** - The Hebrew terms translated **former events** and **future events** create a merism (two polar extremes encompass everything in between). This encompasses all secular achievements in human history past to future things yet to be done. According to Qoheleth, nothing new really happens under the sun (Ec 1:9). Apparent observations of what appears to be revolutionary are due to a lack of remembrance by subsequent generations of what happened long before their time in past generations (Ec 1:10–11a). And what will happen in future generations will not be remembered by the subsequent generations to arise after them (Ec 1:11b).

#### Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:12 γ κλησιασ τ γεν μην βασιλε τ π Ισραηλ ν Ιερουσαλημ

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, a preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, Qoheleth, have reigned over Israel in Jerusalem.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem,

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem,

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the spokesman, have been king of Israel in Jerusalem.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

- Ec 1:1 1Ki 4:1-19

## THE PREACHER IS KING OVER ISRAEL

**I, the Preacher** (qoheleth; Lxx - ekklesiastes), **have been king over Israel in Jerusalem** - Solomon repeats much of what we find in Ec 1:1 but now adds he is **king over Israel**, again leaving no doubt that Solomon is the author. Solomon had unmatched wisdom (1 Kings 3:12), wealth, and opportunity and is therefore uniquely qualified to explore life's meaning. Before offering conclusions, Solomon reminds us he speaks not from speculation but from firsthand experience. This verse launches his personal experiment with wisdom, pleasure, and toil.

So many of us chase meaning in success, status, or knowledge — thinking “If I could just achieve more, then I'd understand life.” But here stands Solomon — the most powerful man of his day, in the holiest city, with wisdom granted directly by God — and he opens with: “All is vanity.” This verse reminds us that you can sit on the throne and still feel lost. You can have everything and still lack peace. You can know much and still not find rest. I think of Solomon painting us into a corner, forcing us to realize we are trapped by our own efforts (in this picture by painting). He is building toward his conclusion in Eccl 12:13-14. By chapter 12 we should be so frustrated with all the other options in life that we take the only option that leads to eternal life!

**Michael Eaton** points out that with Solomon's designation as king “Solomon, of all men, had the resources to make the investigations documented; we are exploring his story.” (Borrow Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes)

**Donald Glenn** entitles Eccl 1:12-6:9 **The Futility of Human Achievement Empirically Demonstrated** explaining that “This long section is united by the repetition of the phrase “meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” Apart from its occurrence at Eccl 4:4 where it seems to introduce a new section, this formula stands near the end of each of several sections and announces Solomon's verdict on the value of human achievement (Eccl 1:12-15), human wisdom (Eccl 1:16-18; 2:12-17), pleasure-seeking (Eccl 2:1-11), and toil or labor (Eccl 2:18-6:9).

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**Eric Orlund - Qohelet's Three Searches** (Ec 1:12–18; 2:1–11, 12–26) Excerpt from Themelios article [Laboring in Hopeless Hope: Encouragement for Christians from Ecclesiastes](#)

Qohelet's first search is described in Ec 1:12–13: it concerns “everything that is done under heaven,” i.e., Qohelet comprehensively examines human activity, institutions, and behavior. For such a broad search, the conclusion comes quickly: “I saw all the things that are done under the sun, and behold, everything is vanity [הַבָּל] and chasing after the wind” (v. 14). The next verse gives Qohelet's reason for this conclusion:

מַעֲטָה לֹא-יִוָּכַל לִתְקַן וְחִסְרוֹן לֹא-יִוָּכַל לְהַמְנוֹת

What is twisted cannot be straightened, what is lacking cannot be counted. (Ec 1:15)

There is an irreducible twisting or disjointedness to life under the sun, which we cannot rectify—so Qohelet claims in the first clause of this verse. The second clause implies not just that we do not have all the pieces we need to put the whole picture together but that we do not even know how many pieces we are missing.

Reading Ecclesiastes can be a strange experience because one often wants to argue with the shocking things Qohelet says, but the more one engages with Qohelet's argument, the more difficult it becomes to keep disagreeing. I doubt many of us drive to work in the morning consciously thinking that the next eight hours will be spent chasing the wind. But on the other hand, who can deny the disjointedness against which we struggle in our work and relationships? And surely each one of us has had those surreal moments when we face the profound limitations of our understanding of ourselves, our situation, and our world—and, further, that surreal sense that we cannot even identify what we are missing? But if that is the case, it becomes difficult to avoid Qohelet's claim in v. 14. Given this twistedness, how can our work escape the contamination of *לִּפְנֵי*? Given the limits on our understanding and our ability to control our lives, how could it be otherwise? Our ambitions and goals will always outstrip what we can produce, and whatever we do produce will not last long. In an important sense, from an "under the sun" perspective, we are chasing the wind. And this is the case even though God himself has given us this work to do (v. 14). Unfortunate a business as it may be, everything done under the sun is given to man by God.

Things do not get better in the final three verses of the chapter, in which Qohelet reflects on his own investigation in vv. 12–15. After stating that he was in a position to make the sort of claims he did (vv. 16–17a), he calls his investigation yet one more act of wind-chasing (v. 17b). Qohelet's recognition of vanity is itself subject to that vanity. Verse 18 gives the reason for this: as Qohelet increased in wisdom (v. 16), so the level of pain and stress and frustration in his life increased. When I teach Ecclesiastes, I tell my students that if their degree from Briercrest makes their lives easier, then the institution has failed them. Growth in wisdom necessitates deeper levels of pain because the twistedness, the disjointedness, the frustration of creation becomes all the more evident.

**Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:13 καὶ ἔδωκα τὴν καρδίαν μου τὸ κζητῆσαι καὶ τὸ κατασκαψασθαι ὑπὸ σοφίαν περὶ πάντων τῶν γινόμενων ὑπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἵνα περισπασμὸν ἴσθω ὡς ἔδωκεν θεὸς τοῖς υἱοῖς τοῦ νῆρου τοῦ περισπᾶσθαι ἕνα τῶν υἱῶν

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I applied my heart to seek out and examine by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven, for God has given to the sons of men an evil trouble to be troubled therewith.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:13 I decided to carefully and thoroughly examine all that has been accomplished on earth. I concluded: God has given people a burdensome task that keeps them occupied.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:13 I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:13 I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I have given my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that hath been done under the heavens. It is a sad travail God hath given to the sons of man to be humbled by it.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:13 Wisely I have applied myself to investigation and exploration of everything that happens under heaven. What a wearisome task God has given humanity to keep us busy!

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:13 applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:13 and I applied my mind to search and investigate in wisdom all things that are done under the sun. A thankless task God has appointed for men to be busied about.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:13 With all my heart I used wisdom to study and explore everything done under heaven. Mortals are weighed down with a terrible burden that God has placed on them.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I gave my heart to searching out in wisdom all things which are done under heaven: it is a hard thing which God has put on the sons of men to do.

- **set my mind** : Ec 1:17 Eccl 7:25 Eccl 8:9,16,17 Ps 111:2 Pr 2:2-4 4:7 18:1,15 23:26 1Ti 4:15
- **It is a grievous task** Ec 3:10 4:4 12:12 Ge 3:19

#### Related Passages:

1 Kings 4:29-34 Now God gave Solomon **wisdom** and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. 30 Solomon's **wisdom** surpassed the **wisdom** of all the sons of the east and all the **wisdom** of Egypt. 31 For **he was wiser than all men**, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. 32 He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. 33 He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. 34 Men came from all peoples to hear the **wisdom** of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his **wisdom**.

### THE SEARCH THAT TIRED THE KING

**And I set my mind** ([leb](#) - literally heart - seat of affections, understanding, intellect) **to seek** ([darash](#); [ekzeteo](#) - diligently investigate) **and explore** ([tur](#); Lxx - [kataskopeo](#) - view closely) **by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven** - NET - " I decided to carefully and thoroughly examine all that has been accomplished on earth" Note the three verbs **set**, **seek** and **explore** indicating that Solomon was leaving "**no stone unturned**" in his hunt for wisdom to give meaning to life. He adds that he is aided in this quest by his divinely given great wisdom ([see 1Ki 4 passage above](#)).

What did Solomon seek? All manner of human activity and specifically things **under heaven**, not above heaven. He uses **under heaven** in this context with same sense as "under the sun" and is speaking of **heaven** simply as a reference to the sky above the earth. God's **heaven** is not intended here. Solomon sought answers that relates to this present world, not to the world to come!

**William John Deane** writes on **set** and **seek** - "The two words are not synonymous. The former verb implies penetrating into the depth of an object before one; the other word taking a comprehensive survey of matters further away; so that two methods and scopes of investigation are signified....**Wisdom** was the means or instrument by which he carried on his researches, which were directed, not merely to the collecting of facts, but to investigating the causes and conditions of things ([Ecclesiastes - Page 6](#))

**J Stafford Wright** - God has given something to man that he has denied to the rest of the animal world: the constant, though often worrying, urge to make sense of life and to work toward a transcendent ideal. An animal lives within the circle of its instincts and drives. Man, in the likeness of God, looks for meanings so that he can control and direct his instinctive desires. Someone has said that it is better to be Socrates discontented (because he cannot solve his problems) than a contented pig. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

NET NOTE on **I set my mind** - Heb "I gave my heart" or "I set my mind." The term לִבִּי (libbi, "my heart") is an example of synecdoche of part (heart) for the whole (myself). Qoheleth uses this figurative expression frequently in the book. On the other hand, in Hebrew mentality, the term "heart" is frequently associated with one's thoughts and reasoning; thus, this might be a metonymy of association (heart = thoughts). The equivalent English idiom would be "I applied my mind." Heb "**with wisdom**," that is, with careful reflection in light of principles observed by the sages.

*This wisdom has no true answer to the meaninglessness of life.  
It only shows us how to live our meaningless lives better!*

**David Guzik** makes a good point that "Solomon was internationally famous for his great wisdom. If the answers to the seeming emptiness of life could be found by **wisdom**, Solomon was the one to find them....This is the **wisdom** of those who guide us to a better life in the here-and-now; how to live a healthier, happier, more prosperous life. This **wisdom** certainly has value, and many lives would be better for following it. Yet if it excludes a true appreciation of eternity and our responsibilities in the world to come, this **wisdom** has no true answer to the meaninglessness of life. It only shows us how to live our meaningless lives better!

**It is a grievous task** ("bad or unpleasant task" "a miserable business") - Solomon's conclusion was that his search was a wearisome, unpleasant, miserable business. Solomon had the time, power, intellect, and resources to explore life's hardest questions. And he did. He investigated work, wisdom, pleasure, success, sorrow — everything **under heaven** (under the sun). But

instead of finding peace, he found it to be a heavy burden. That's what happens when we try to find ultimate meaning in temporary things and not in God.

**NET NOTE on grievous task** - The phrase עֲנֵן רָע ('inyan ra', "rotten business, grievous task") is used only in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:13; 2:23, 26; 3:10; 4:8; 5:2, 13; 8:16). It is parallel with הֶבֶל (hebel) "futile" in Ec 4:8, and describes a "grave misfortune" in Ec 5:13. The noun עֲנֵן ('inyan, "business") refers to something that keeps a person occupied or busy: "business; affair; task; occupation" (HALOT 857 s.v. עֲנֵן; BDB 775 s.v. עֲנֵן). The related verb עָנָה ('anah) means "to be occupied, to be busy with" (with the preposition בְּ, bet), e.g., Eccl 1:13; 3:10; 5:19 (HALOT 854 s.v. III עָנָה; BDB 775 s.v. II עָנָה). The noun is from the Aramaic loanword עֲנִינָא ('inyana, "concern, care"). The verb is related to the Aramaic verb "to try hard," the Arabic verb "to be busily occupied; to worry to be a matter of concern," and the Old South Arabic root "to be troubled; to strive with" (HALOT 854 s.v. III עָנָה). The phrase עֲנֵן רָע is treated creatively by English translations: "sore travail" (KJV, ASV), "sad travail" (YLT), "painful occupation" (Douay), "sorry business" (NEB), "sorry task" (Moffatt), "thankless task" (NAB), "grievous task" (NASB), "trying task" (MLB), "unhappy business" (RSV, NRSV, NJPS), and "heavy burden" (NIV).

**Which God (Elohim) has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with** - CSB = "God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied." Solomon uses the name **God (Elohim)** but never uses the covenant name **Jehovah (Yahweh)** in this book. Solomon concluded that God was the Giver of the futility of life. Of course that was not God's original plan for God saw that His creation was very good (Ge 1:31+). But when sin entered the world it immediately became very bad and sin brought affliction and God's curse in Ge 3:16-19+. Paul adds that **"the creation was subjected to futility**, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." (Ro 8:20+)

**NET NOTE on afflicted with** - Or "that keeps them occupied" or "that busies them." The verb II עָנָה ('anah, "to be occupied with") is related to the noun עֲנֵן ('inyan, "business, task, occupation") which also occurs in this verse. The verb עָנָה means "to be occupied, to be busy with" (with the preposition בְּ, bet), e.g., Eccl 1:13; 3:10; 5:19 (HALOT 854 s.v. III עָנָה; BDB 775 s.v. עָנָה). The Hebrew verb is related to the Aramaic verb "to try hard," the Arabic verb "to be busily occupied; to worry; to be a matter of concern," and the Old South Arabic root "to be troubled; to strive with" (HALOT 854). The **Septuagint** helps give us a picture of what Solomon means by **afflicted with** as it is translated using the verb **perispáo** which literally means to be pulled or dragged from all around; figuratively be or become distracted, be anxious (Lk 10.40)

**Guzik** points out that "God has deliberately built a system (ED: I WOULD ADD THE QUALIFIER THAT IT WAS THE RESULT OF SIN ENTERING THE CREATION) where life seems meaningless and empty without the understanding of a living, active God to whom we must give account. It may seem cruel of God to devise such a system, but it is actually evidence of His great love and mercy. He built within us the desire and need for that which brings meaning and fulfillment to life. As Augustine wrote, the Creator made a God-shaped space in each of us, which can only be filled with Him.

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**Seek** (search)(01875) **darash** means to seek, to inquire of, to examine, to require, consult, ask. One of the most frequent uses of this word is in the expression "to inquire of God," which sometimes indicates a private seeking of God in prayer for direction (Gen. 25:22), and often it refers to the contacting of a prophet who would be the instrument of God's revelation (1 Sam. 9:9; 1 Kings 22:8). At other times this expression is found in connection with the use of the Urim and Thummim by the high priest as he sought to discover the will of God by the throwing of these sacred stones (Nu 27:21). We can get a good sense of one aspect of the meaning of **darash** when God says "You will **seek** (**baqas**; Lxx = **ekzeteeo** intense seeking) Me and find Me when you search (**darash**; Lxx = **zeteo**) for Me **with all your heart**." (Jer. 29:13) What is the condition of seeking Yahweh and finding Him? It is seeking with one's whole heart! We see a similar nuance in Dt 4:29+ "But from there you will seek (**baqas**; Lxx = **zeteo**) the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search (**darash**; Lxx = **ekzeteeo** intense seeking) for Him **with all your heart and all your soul**." Notice the importance of the heart in

**Explore** (08446) **tur** means to seek out, spy out, explore. It has the basic idea of "to move about" in various directions. "Careful examination" would thus seem to capture the basic meaning of the root, a meaning that is especially clear in Eccles. 1:13; Eccles. 2:3; Eccles. 7:25, where an intense search for wisdom is such an important preoccupation in the mind of the author. Tur depicts persons following their own hearts or desires, seeking them out to pursue them rather than the Lord's will (Nu 15:39). It refers to merchants, those who seek out wares (1Ki. 10:15; 2Ch 9:14). It is used of the instincts and inclinations of an animal to search out its habitat (Job 39:8). It refers to a person serving as a guide who explores the way for others (Pr 12:26).

**TUR - 23V - explore(1), explored(1), explores(1), follow(1), guide(1), investigate(1), seek(2), selected(1), spied(5), spy(6), spying(2), traders\*(2).** Num. 10:33; Num. 13:2; Num. 13:16; Num. 13:17; Num. 13:21; Num. 13:25; Num. 13:32; Num. 14:6; Num. 14:7; Num. 14:34; Num. 14:36; Num. 14:38; Num. 15:39; Deut.

**Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:14 ε δον σ ν π ντα τ ποι ματα τ πεποιημ να π τ ν λιον κα δο τ π ντα μαται της κα προα ρεσις πνε ματος

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:14 I beheld all the works that were wrought under the sun; and, beheld, all were vanity and waywardness of spirit.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:14 I reflected on everything that is accomplished by man on earth, and I concluded: Everything he has accomplished is futile— like chasing the wind!

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:14 I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless-- like chasing the wind.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works that have been done under the sun, and lo, the whole is vanity and vexation of spirit!

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun: how futile it all is, mere chasing after the wind!

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a chase after wind.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun. Look at it! It's all pointless. It's like trying to catch the wind.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works which are done under the sun; all is to no purpose, and desire for wind.

- Ec 1:17,18 2:11,17,26 1Ki 4:30-32 Ps 39:5,6



## THE CHASE THAT NEVER ENDS: THE WIND IN MY HANDS

**I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun-** Solomon must have been the ancient equivalent of "AI!" examining everything that people did, doing so with a thorough search so that he is not offering guesses but sound conclusions. While there is clearly a touch of hyperbole (Solomon never saw Eskimos building igloos, etc), he has surely seen as much as any other man. **Under the sun** of course means on earth, the things visible on earth. And of course **under the sun** implies he is focused on the natural things and not the supernatural or things "above the heaven" so to speak.

**Henry Morris** - King Solomon, the Preacher, had the greatest wealth, the greatest wisdom, the greatest power, the greatest sensual



pleasures and comforts, of just about any man who ever lived. Yet when these works were done only "under the sun" (and this is the recurring theme of Ecclesiastes) it was soon found by him all to be done in vain, and merely vexed his spirit, rather than satisfying it. Under the sun is life viewed from an earthly perspective, without reference to eternity or God, but life as it appears in this world alone, temporal, repetitive, and often futile.

**And behold, all is vanity** (**hebel**; Lxx - **mataiotes**) **and striving after wind** (**ruah/ruach**; Lxx - **pneuma**) - All refers to all the works he had seen and his conclusion is the works are like a vapor, a mist, a breath, pointing the transitory nature and lack of permanence. Try to grasp the wind with your hand. It is impossible. **Striving after wind** is a vivid image of futility, chasing what cannot be caught. This is not **nihilism** — it's realism! Life without God is like grasping smoke: impressive at first glance, but vanishing on contact. It's like trying to catch bubble which burst the moment they are touched!

**STRIVING AFTER WIND** - 9X/9V- Eccl. 1:14,17; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9

**NET NOTE** on **all** - As mentioned in the note on "everything" in Ec 1:2, the term הַכֹּל (hakkol, "everything") is often limited in reference to the specific topic at hand in the context (e.g., BDB 482 s.v. כָּל). The argument of Ec 1:12–15, like Ec 1:3–11, focuses on secular human achievement. This is clear from the repetition of the root עָשָׂה ('asah, "do, work, accomplish, achieve") in Ec 1:12–13.

*Despite everything that man has accomplished in history,  
it is ultimately futile because nothing on earth really changes.*

**NET NOTE** on **vanity** - This usage of הֶבֶל (**hebel**; Lxx - **mataiotes**) denotes "futile, profitless, fruitless" (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:15; Ps 78:33; Prov 13:11; 21:6; Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:1, 14–15; 4:8; Jer 2:5; 10:3; Lam 4:17; see HALOT 236–37 s.v. הֶבֶל; BDB 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל). The term is used with the simile "**like striving after the wind**" (רְעוּת רוּחַ, ré'ut ruakh)—**a graphic picture of an expenditure of effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it** (e.g., Eccl 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9; 7:14). When used in this sense, the term is often used with the following synonyms: לְתוֹהוּ (létohu, "for nothing, in vain, for no reason"; Isa 49:4); רִיק (riq, "profitless; useless"; Isa 30:7; Eccl 6:11); לֹא הוֹנֵעִיל ("worthless, profitless"; Is 30:6; 57:12; Jer 16:19); "what profit?" (מַה־יִּתְרוֹן, mah-yitron); and "no profit" (אֵין יִתְרוֹן, en yyitron; e.g., Eccl 2:11; 3:19; 6:9). It is also used in antithesis to terms connoting value: טוֹב (tov, "good, benefit, advantage") and יִתְרוֹן (yotéron, "profit, advantage, gain"). Despite everything that man has accomplished in history, it is ultimately futile because nothing on earth really changes.

**Richard DeHaan** points out, "The failure of man's wisdom is vividly expressed by Solomon in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. After unsuccessful attempts to find God and spiritual satisfaction in a study of nature and history, he turned to the literature of his day. Again he was frustrated. 'I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven. This severe travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit. For in such wisdom is much grief. And he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.'"

**Warren Wiersbe**: Both the workaholic and the alcoholic are running away from reality and living on substitutes, and one day the bubble of illusion will burst. We only make life harder when we try to escape. Instead of running away from life, we should run to God and let Him make life worth living.

**THOUGHT** - What are you chasing after? If we are all honest we would admit we chase so many things -- Promotions. Applause. Possessions. Pleasure. Influence. Etc. We imagine that just one more step — one more success — will bring the deep peace and contentment we desperately seek. Solomon chased harder and further than anyone. He reached the summit of achievement, pleasure, and wisdom. But his conclusion? "It's like chasing the wind." Wind is beautiful, mysterious, even powerful but you can't hold it. You cannot contain it. That is a perfect picture of life without Christ: attractive, even intoxicating, but ultimately unsatisfying. Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Mt. 16:26+). Stop chasing the wind. Chase the One who rules the world and the world to come! In Christ Alone there is rest (Mt 11:29+) and life (Col 3:4+). Play Steve Green's song [Chasing the Wind](#).

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**Behold** (02009) **hinneh** is an interjection meaning behold, look, now; if. "It is used often and expresses strong feelings, surprise, hope, expectation, certainty, thus giving vividness depending on its surrounding context." (Baker) **Hinneh** generally directs our mind to the text, imploring the reader to give it special attention. In short, the Spirit is trying to arrest our attention! And so **hinneh** is used as an exclamation of vivid immediacy (e.g., read Ge 6:13)!

**Spurgeon** reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

**Hinneh** is translated in the **Septuagint** with the interjection **idou** (strictly speaking a command in the second person **arist imperative, middle voice**) a demonstrative particle (used 1377 times in the Septuagint and NT) which is found especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke "and giving a peculiar vivacity to the style by bidding the reader or hearer to attend to what is said: "**Behold! See! Lo!**" (Thayer) The command is calling for urgent attention. Do this now! Don't delay! It could be loosely paraphrased "Pay attention!" or "Listen up!" to arouse attention and introduce a new and extraordinary fact of considerable importance.

**Striving** (07469) reuth means longing, striving, vexation. Baker says it is "It refers to a person's efforts to attain something, to achieve or master something, to find out all about the world and its purposes. In Ecclesiastes, these efforts are considered vain (Eccl. 1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9). All striving ends up being a striving after nothing, the wind."

REUTH - Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:6; Eccl. 6:9

**Wind** (07307) ruah/ruach means breath, wind, spirit (76x to the Spirit), air; breeze; ; courage; temper; **Ruah/ruach** refers to the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11; Ps 106:33; Isa. 63:10, 11), who inspired the prophets (Nu 11:17, 25; 1Sa 10:6; 19:20), moved the prophets in time and space (Elijah (1 Ki. 18:12 cf Ezekiel in Ezek. 2:2). **Ruah/ruach** can refer to an evil spirit from the Lord (1Sa. 16:15, 16; 1Ki. 22:22, 23). David was inspired to speak as a prophet by the Spirit (2Sa 23:2). The Spirit was present among the returned exiles in Jerusalem (Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6); and will be poured out in the latter days on all flesh, imparting prophecy, dreams, and visions (Joel 2:28). The Spirit of God was grieved by the rebellion of God's people (Isa. 63:10).

**Vine** - give a good summary of the various meanings of RUACH in the Old Testament.

**(1) First, this word means "breath," air for breathing, air that is being breathed.** This meaning is especially evident in Jer. 14:6: "And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons...." When one's "breath" returns, he is revived: "...When he [Samson] had drunk [the water], his spirit [literally, "breath"] came again, and he revived..." (Judg. 15:19). Astonishment may take away one's "breath": "And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, And the meat of his table,... there was no more spirit in her [she was overwhelmed and breathless]" (1 Kings 10:4-5). Rûaḥ may also represent speaking, or the breath of one's mouth: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Psa. 33:6; cf. Exod. 15:8; Job 4:9; Job 19:17).

**(2) Second, this word can be used with emphasis on the invisible, intangible, fleeting quality of "air":** "O remember that my life is wind: mine eyes shall no more see good" (Job 7:7). There may be a suggestion of purposelessness, uselessness, or even vanity (emptiness) when rûaḥ is used with this significance: "And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them ..." (Jer. 5:13). "Windy words" are really "empty words" (Job 16:3), just as "windy knowledge" is "empty knowledge" (Job 15:2; cf. Eccl. 1:14, 17, "meaningless striving"). In Prov. 11:29 rûaḥ means "nothing": "He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind...." This nuance is especially prominent in Eccl. 5:15-16: "And he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?"

**(3) Third, rûaḥ can mean "wind."** In Gen. 3:8 it seems to mean the gentle, refreshing evening breeze so well known in the Near East: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool [literally, "breeze"] of the day...." It can mean a strong, constant wind: "... And the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night ..." (Exod. 10:13). It can also signify an extremely strong wind: "And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind ..." (Exod. 10:19). In Jer. 4:11 the word appears to represent a gale or tornado (cf. Hos. 8:7). God is the Creator (Amos 4:13) and sovereign Controller of the winds (Gen. 8:1; Num. 11:31; Jer. 10:13).

**(4) Fourth, the wind represents direction.** In Jer. 49:36 the four winds represent the four ends of the earth, which in turn represent every quarter: "And upon Elam will I bring the four winds [peoples from every quarter of the earth] from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come." Akkadian attests the same phrase with the same meaning, and this phrase begins to appear in Hebrew at a time when contact with Akkadian-speaking peoples

was frequent.

**(5) Fifth, *rûaḥ* frequently represents the element of life in a man, his natural "spirit":** "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth,... All in whose nostrils was the breath of life ..." (Gen. 7:21-22). In these verses the animals have a "spirit" (cf. Psa. 104:29). On the other hand, in Prov. 16:2 the word appears to mean more than just the element of life; it seems to mean "soul": "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits [nasb, "motives"]." Thus, Isaiah can put *nepesh*, "soul," and *rûaḥ* in synonymous parallelism: "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early ..." (Isa. 26:9). It is the "spirit" of a man that returns to God (Eccl. 12:7).

**(6) Sixth, *rûaḥ* is often used of a man's mind-set, disposition, or "temper":** "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psa. 32:2). In Ezek. 13:3 the word is used of one's mind or thinking: "Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirits, and have seen nothing" (cf. Prov. 29:11). *Rûaḥ* can represent particular dispositions, as it does in Josh. 2:11: "And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you ..." (cf. Josh. 5:1; Job 15:13). Another disposition represented by this word is "temper": "If the spirit [temper] of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place ..." (Eccl. 10:4). David prayed that God would "restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit" (Psa. 51:12). In this verse "joy of salvation" and "free Spirit" are parallel and, therefore, synonymous terms. Therefore, "spirit" refers to one's inner disposition, just as "joy" refers to an inner emotion.

**(7) Seventh, the Bible often speaks of God's "Spirit," the third person of the Trinity.** (76 uses in OT) This is the use of the word in its first biblical occurrence: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Isa. 63:10-11 and Psa. 51:12 specifically speak of the "holy or free Spirit."

**(8) Eighth, the non-material beings (angels) in heaven are sometimes called "spirits":** "And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him" (1 Kings 22:21; cf. 1 Sam. 16:14).

**(9) Ninth, the "spirit" may also be used of that which enables a man to do a particular job or that which represents the essence of a quality of man:** "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him ..." (Deut. 34:9). Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his "spirit" (2 Kings 2:9) and received it.

**[Complete Biblical Library](#)** - The basic idea of *rûach* is air in motion—"breath" or "wind." It is the major word for wind in the OT. From this meaning, it came to be used of enabling or empowering for action. It is also used to refer to invisible, powerful, supernatural beings—God, angels and evil spirits. Finally, it often refers to the inner person of humans, especially their deepest emotions, motivations and dispositions, the source of willpower.

In Gen. 3:8, the phrase "in the cool of the day" seems to denote air in motion. It is probably referring to the cool breezes the lands of the Near East enjoy in the evening. Wind is clearly the meaning in Gen. 8:1, and in Exo. 15:8, God is pictured as blasting air out his nostrils to part the Red Sea. *Rûach* came to be used of directions or sides of something from the idea of "the four winds" (1 Chr. 9:24; Zech. 2:6).

The invisible power of the wind made it a good term for invisible, powerful spirit beings. To reassure Israel, God said the horses of the Egyptians were flesh, not spirit. This is in parallel with God (Isa. 31:3). Job sensed something frightening pass by his face, which he described by using *rûach* (Job 4:15). Evil spirits were sometimes sent in judgment on people (1 Sam. 16:14), but otherwise they are not mentioned often in the OT. In these few contexts, they do seem to be some kind of invisible being with limited power under God's sovereign control. In the OT, these references may be to agents of Satan used by God indirectly for judgment, or they may be some kind of angel (Ps. 104:4) used directly to bring judgment on rebellious people ("evil" can refer to the pain of judgment). One time, in Zech. 13:2, there is reference to "the unclean spirit" in the land, but it is uncertain whether they understood it as a being or more of a prevailing spiritual attitude and moral quality of the people. The latter is probably the idea in the description of Israel having "the spirit of whoredoms," which lead them away from God (Hos. 4:12; 5:4). From later revelation, it is evident that such a pervasive evil reputation would be caused by the work of agents of Satan on the people's hearts.

The Spirit of God (or Spirit of the Lord) is often named. (The combination "Holy Spirit" is only used in Ps. 51:11 and Isa. 63:10f in the OT.) When the OT writers spoke of the Spirit of God, the reference always included God's presence and acting power in this world. In Gen. 1:2, his Spirit hovered over the creation, preparing for further development. The Spirit of God gives life to all (Gen. 6:17; Ps. 104:29f), especially humans (Job 33:4),

and it is paralleled to the breath of God. The Spirit actively works in and among people until God decides He has had enough of their sin and resistance to Him (Gen. 6:3). The Spirit of God is equated with the presence of God by the psalmist (Ps. 51:11). Job said a spirit in people, the breath of the Almighty, gives them understanding (Job 32:8). Pharaoh recognized that Joseph's understanding was from the Spirit of God in him (Gen. 41:38). The Lord says in Exo. 31:3 that He filled Bezalel with skill, knowledge and the ability to do the craftsmanship for the Tabernacle. People live and function in the image of God by the work of God's Spirit, in his general providence. God's people enjoy the fullness of what He wants to do in their lives by the special work of his Spirit received by faith.

God puts his Spirit upon his leaders to enable them to lead his people. When Moses cried out for help, He put the same Spirit who was on Moses on the seventy elders (Num. 11:17, 25). All could see that He was empowering them because the Spirit caused them to prophesy (vv. 26, 29). In the latter verse, Moses wished all God's people would be prophets; Joel later predicted that this would happen in the latter days (Joel 2:28f). These references to the Spirit of God emphasized the immediate presence of God's working through the leaders of his people. The judges are often described as empowered, even filled (literally "clothed") with the Spirit, to accomplish God's deliverance of his people (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 14:6; 15:14). Saul and David both had the Spirit come upon them at their anointings as king (1 Sam. 10:6; 16:13). The leadership of the Messiah would be empowered by the Spirit of God, according to Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1. Elijah's God-empowered ministry was referred to by Elisha as "your spirit" (2 Ki. 2:9). He asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, which meant he wanted to be Elijah's heir and so carry on his ministry.

Prophetic ministry in which God speaks to his people, especially the leaders, about their relationship to Him, is often described as his Spirit coming upon the prophet (1 Ki. 22:24; 2 Chr. 24:20; Neh. 9:30; Mic. 3:8). The prophet is even called "the man of the Spirit" in Hos. 9:7. David said that the Spirit of the Lord spoke through him in his last words to Solomon and Israel (2 Sam. 23:2). The writer of Chronicles said that the plans for the Temple were put in the mind of David by the Spirit (1 Chr. 28:12).

Zechariah 4:6 gives the well-known principle that God's work is not accomplished from human effort, ability or resources, but by the Spirit of the Lord. God's people must learn to yield to the presence and the power of God working within them for their strength, wisdom and motivation to accomplish his purposes.

Rûach, as used of people, can overlap with *l'viv* (HED #3949), "heart," and *nephesh* (HED #5497), "soul." In fact, according to Gen. 2:7, God made Adam a living person, or *nephesh*, by breathing into flesh, formed from the ground, with his breath of life (HED #5580), which is parallel to "spirit" in 7:15, 22. Therefore, according to the OT, people have a spirit from God and become a person (a "soul" in KJV).

The spirit of humans is what gives them their most intense inner feelings, such as grief (Gen. 26:35), jealousy (Num. 5:14), anger (Judg. 8:3), deep emotional pain or sorrow (1 Sam. 1:15), longing for God's intervention (Isa. 26:9) and lust and faithfulness (Mal. 2:16). It involves the will and mind working in unison to motivate a person to a course of action (Exo. 35:21). The spirit also is involved in patience, pride and self-control (Prov. 16:32).

God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let the Jews return from captivity (2 Chr. 36:22). Not to have spirit is not to have any courage or will to act (Josh. 2:11); indeed, a person with a crushed spirit has no motivation, energy or hope (Prov. 17:22; 18:14). However, there is a brokenness of one's self-will against God that is part of true repentance (Ps. 51:17). There is a lowliness of spirit which describes a person's whole disposition and attitude as humbled before the awesome holiness and sovereignty of God. This person's spirit the Lord revives, breathing new life and motivation into him to live in harmony with the Holy God (Isa. 57:15). However, for those who continually reject the Lord, He hardens their spirits so that they stubbornly force their way into his judgment (Deut. 2:30). God promised to pour out "a spirit of grace and supplication" on his people, meaning He would work within them to cause them to have deep feelings of gratefulness, compassion and desire to pray for God's gracious blessings. Prophets were not to speak from their own spirits (their own thoughts and motivations), but from God's Spirit (Ezek. 13:3).

God's Spirit interfaces with and works through the person's spirit. In fact, when a person comes into relationship with God through faith in the promised Savior, God gives a new spirit and a new heart (Ezek. 36:26f). God's Spirit in our spirits motivates us to live for Him.

The use of the word "spirit" in the OT reminds us that we are more than physical material and biology. We have a connection to the spiritual realm and the supernatural, with a capacity and a need to commune with God. Furthermore, God wants to fill our lives and empower us to accomplish his purpose in this world through

his gift of the presence of his Holy Spirit, given by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

**RUACH - 346V** - air(2), anger(1), blast(2), breath(31), breathless\*(1), cool(1), courage(1), despondency\*(1), exposed(1), grief\*(1), heart(1), inspired(1), mind(3), motives(1), points(1), quick-tempered\*(1), side(4), sides(2), **Spirit(76)**, **spirit(127)**, spirits(3), strength(1), temper(2), thoughts\*(1), trustworthy\*(1), wind(98), winds(7), windy(2), wrath(1). Gen. 1:2; 3:8; 6:3,17; 7:15,22; 8:1; 26:35; 41:8,38; 45:27; Exod. 6:9; 10:13,19; 14:21; 15:8,10; 28:3; 31:3; 35:21,31; Num. 5:14,30; 11:17,25-26,29,31; 14:24; 16:22; 24:2; 27:16,18; Deut. 2:30; 34:9; Jos. 2:11; 5:1; Jdg. 3:10; 6:34; 8:3; 9:23; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14,19; 1 Sam. 1:15; 10:6,10; 11:6; 16:13-16,23; 18:10; 19:9,20,23; 30:12; 2 Sam. 22:11,16; 23:2; 1 Ki. 10:5; 18:12,45; 19:11; 21:5; 22:21-24; 2 Ki. 2:9,15-16; 3:17; 19:7; 1 Chr. 5:26; 9:24; 12:18; 28:12; 2 Chr. 9:4; 15:1; 18:20-23; 20:14; 21:16; 24:20; 36:22; Ezr. 1:1,5; Neh. 9:20,30; Job 1:19; 4:9,15; 6:4,26; 7:7,11; 8:2; 9:18; 10:12; 12:10; 15:2,13,30; 16:3; 17:1; 19:17; 20:3; 21:18; 26:13; 28:25; 30:15,22; 32:8,18; 33:4; 34:14; 37:21; 41:16; Ps. 1:4; 11:6; 18:10,15,42; 31:5; 32:2; 33:6; 34:18; 35:5; 48:7; 51:10-12,17; 55:8; 76:12; 77:3,6; 78:8,39; 83:13; 103:16; 104:3-4,29-30; 106:33; 107:25; 135:7,17; 139:7; 142:3; 143:4,7,10; 146:4; 147:18; 148:8; Prov. 1:23; 11:13,29; 14:29; 15:4,13; 16:2,18-19,32; 17:22,27; 18:14; 25:14,23,28; 27:16; 29:11,23; 30:4; Eccl. 1:6,14,17; 2:11,17,26; 3:19,21; 4:4,6,16; 5:16; 6:9; 7:8-9; 8:8; 10:4; 11:4-5; 12:7; Isa. 4:4; 7:2; 11:2,4,15; 17:13; 19:3,14; 25:4; 26:9,18; 27:8; 28:6; 29:10,24; 30:1,28; 31:3; 32:2,15; 33:11; 34:16; 37:7; 38:16; 40:7,13; 41:16,29; 42:1,5; 44:3; 48:16; 54:6; 57:13,15-16; 59:19,21; 61:1,3; 63:10-11,14; 64:6; 65:14; 66:2; Jer. 2:24; 4:11-12; 5:13; 10:13-14; 13:24; 14:6; 18:17; 22:22; 49:32,36; 51:1,11,16-17; 52:23; Lam. 4:20; Ezek. 1:4,12,20-21; 2:2; 3:12,14,24; 5:2,10,12; 8:3; 10:17; 11:1,5,19,24; 12:14; 13:3,11,13; 17:10,21; 18:31; 19:12; 20:32; 21:7; 27:26; 36:26-27; 37:1,5-6,8-10,14; 39:29; 42:16ff; 43:5; Dan. 2:1,3; 8:8; 11:4; Hos. 4:12,19; 5:4; 8:7; 9:7; 12:1; 13:15; Joel 2:28-29; Amos 4:13; Jon. 1:4; 4:8; Mic. 2:7,11; 3:8; Hab. 1:11; 2:19; Hag. 1:14; 2:5; Zech. 2:6; 4:6; 5:9; 6:5,8; 7:12; 12:1,10; 13:2; Mal. 2:15-16

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#### **C H Spurgeon - Morning and Evening - "Behold, all is vanity." —Ecclesiastes 1:14**

Nothing can satisfy the entire man but the Lord's love and the Lord's own self. Saints have tried to anchor in other roadsteads, but they have been driven out of such fatal refuges. Solomon, the wisest of men, was permitted to make experiments for us all, and to do for us what we must not dare to do for ourselves. Here is his testimony in his own words: "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. 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 labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What! the whole of it vanity? O favoured monarch, is there nothing in all thy wealth? Nothing in that wide dominion reaching from the river even to the sea? Nothing in Palmyra's glorious palaces? Nothing in the house of the forest of Lebanon? In all thy music and dancing, and wine and luxury, is there nothing? "Nothing," he says, "but weariness of spirit." This was his verdict when he had trodden the whole round of pleasure. To embrace our Lord Jesus, to dwell in his love, and be fully assured of union with him—this is all in all. Dear reader, you need not try other forms of life in order to see whether they are better than the Christian's: if you roam the world around, you will see no sights like a sight of the Saviour's face; if you could have all the comforts of life, if you lost your Saviour, you would be wretched; but if you win Christ, then should you rot in a dungeon, you would find it a paradise; should you live in obscurity, or die with famine, you will yet be satisfied with favour and full of the goodness of the Lord.

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#### **Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:15 διεστραμμνον ο δυν σεται το πικροσηθη και σπημα ο δυν σεται το ριθμηθη και

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and deficiency cannot be numbered.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is bent cannot be straightened, and what is missing cannot be supplied.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be recovered.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:15 A crooked thing one is not able to make straight, and a lacking thing is not able to be numbered.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is twisted cannot be straightened, what is not there cannot be counted.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is missing cannot be supplied.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:15 No one can straighten what is bent. No one can count what is not there.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:15 That which is bent may not be made straight, and that which is not there may not be numbered.

- **crooked:** Ec 3:14 7:12,13 Job 11:6 34:29 Isa 40:4 La 3:37 Da 4:35 Mt 6:27

## WHAT CANNOT BE FIXED BY WISDOM

**What is crooked cannot be straightened** - What is crooked cannot be straightened” means that life, left to itself, contains unsolvable problems, deep injustice, and irreversible loss and human power alone cannot make it all right. This passage confirms the conclusion in Eccl 1:14 that all is vanity and striving after the wind. **Crooked** symbolizes things that are flawed, distorted, or unjust. Solomon is observing that no amount of intellect or human effort can fully correct or reverse these the deep flaws of life. It’s a humbling admission that some things are beyond human repair. Even the wisest person cannot fix everything — because the world is not just intellectually challenging, it is spiritually fallen. You can’t reason away grief. You can’t legislate a perfect society. You can’t educate away sin.

**Eric Ortlund on crooked** - There is an irreducible twisting or disjointedness to life under the sun, which we cannot rectify—so Qohelet claims in the first clause of this verse. The second clause (**cannot be counted**) implies not just that we do not have all the pieces we need to put the whole picture together but that we do not even know how many pieces we are missing. ([Laboring in Hopeless Hope: Encouragement for Christians from Ecclesiastes](#))

**John MacArthur** - With no necessarily moral implications being made, these words measure wisdom as the ability to resolve issues in life. In spite of man’s grandest efforts, some crooked matters will remain unstraightened. (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**And what is lacking cannot be counted. NLT** -What is missing cannot be recovered." **NAB** = "what is missing cannot be supplied." You can’t add up what’s missing — if the substance isn’t there, no calculation or philosophy can make it appear. We cannot straighten the world’s deepest problems with intellect alone for we need divine intervention.

**Michael Eaton** - “The third conclusion explains why the ‘under the sun’ thinker is so frustrated. It is because there are twists (**what is crooked**) and gaps (**what is lacking**) in all thinking. No matter how the thinker ponders, he cannot straighten out life’s anomalies, nor reduce all he sees to a neat system. (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 62](#))

**Temper Longman III** - There is something wrong with the world, and it cannot be fixed no matter how hard we try. (See [Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 267](#))

**J Stafford Wright** - (See [The Expositor’s Bible Commentary](#)) Efforts to straighten things out and supply what seems to be lacking are continually disappointed (v. 15). Today we have straightened out many of the twists of the past and added many comforts to life; but as many of us have seen in our lifetime, in one moment a whole generation or some dominant group of rulers can revive the horrors of the past and destroy what is truly good and meaningful in life.

**NET NOTE on crooked** - The term תְּעוּבָה, mé’uvvat (Pual participle masculine singular from עָוָה, ’avat, “to bend”) is used substantively (“what is bent; what is crooked”) in reference to irregularities in life and obstacles to human secular achievement accomplishing anything of ultimate value.

**NET NOTE on lacking** - The Hebrew noun חֶסְרוֹן (khesron) is used in the OT only here and means “**what is lacking**” (as an antonym to יִתְרוֹן [yitron], “what is profitable”; HALOT 339 s.v. חֶסְרוֹן; BDB 341 s.v. חֶסְרוֹן). It is an Aramaic loanword meaning “deficit.” The related verb חָסַר (khasar) means “to lack, to be in need of, to decrease, to lessen [in number]”; the related noun חֹסֵר (khaser) refers to “one in want of”; and the noun חֶסֶר (kheser) means “poverty, want” (HALOT 338 s.v. חֶסֶר; BDB 341 s.v. חֶסֶר). It refers to what is absent (zero in terms of quantity) rather than what is deficient (poor in terms of quality). The LXX misunderstood the term and rendered it as ὑστερήματα (usterēmata, “deficiency”): “deficiency cannot be numbered.” It is also misunderstood by a few English versions: “nor can you count up the defects in life” (Moffatt); “the number of fools is infinite” (Douay). **However, most English**



versions correctly understand it as referring to what is lacking in terms of quantity: “what is lacking” (RSV, MLB, NASB, NIV, NRSV), “a lack” (NJPS), “that which is wanting” (KJV, ASV), “what is not there” (NEB), and “what is missing” (NAB).

**NET NOTE on counted** - Heb “cannot be counted” or “cannot be numbered.” The term חִמְמָנוֹת (himmanot, Niphal infinitive construct from חָנַן, manah, “to count”) is rendered literally by most translations: “[cannot] be counted” or “[cannot] be numbered” (KJV, ASV, RSV, MLB, NEB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, JPS, NJPS). However, the nuance “count” might function as a metonymy of effect for cause, that is, “to supply.” What is absent cannot be supplied (cause) therefore, it cannot be counted as present (effect). NAB adopts this approach: “what is missing cannot be supplied.”

**Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.”**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:16 λησα γ ν καρδ μου τ λγειν γ δο μεγαλ νθην κα προσθηκα σοφ αν π π σι ο γ νοντο μπροσθ ν μου ν Ιερουσαλημ κα καρδ α μου ε δεν πολλ σοφ αν κα γν σι ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:16 I spoke in my heart, saying, Behold, I am increased, and have acquired wisdom beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem: also I applied my heart to know wisdom and knowledge.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:16 I thought to myself, "I have become much wiser than any of my predecessors who ruled over Jerusalem; I have acquired much wisdom and knowledge."

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said to myself, "Look, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge."

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:16 I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge."

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them."

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:16 I -- I spake with my heart, saying, 'I, lo, I have magnified and added wisdom above every one who hath been before me at Jerusalem, and my heart hath seen abundantly wisdom and knowledge.

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:16 I thought to myself: I have acquired a greater stock of wisdom than anyone before me in Jerusalem. I myself have mastered every kind of wisdom and science.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:16 Though I said to myself, "Behold, I have become great and stored up wisdom beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem, and my mind has broad experience of wisdom and knowledge";

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:16 I thought to myself, "I have grown wiser than anyone who has ruled Jerusalem before me. I've had a lot of experience with wisdom and knowledge."

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:16 I said to my heart, See, I have become great and am increased in wisdom more than any who were before me in Jerusalem -- yes, my heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge.

- communed: 2Ki 5:20 Ps 4:4 77:6 Isa 10:7-14 Jer 22:14 Eze 38:10,11 Da 4:30
- Lo: Ec 2:9 1Ki 3:12,13 4:30 10:7,23,24 2Ch 1:10-12 2:12 9:22,23
- great experience of: Heb. seen much, Heb 5:14

#### Related Passages:

1 Kings 4:29-34+ Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the

sand that is on the seashore. 30 Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. 32 He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. 33 He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. 34 Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

## WHEN KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM IS NOT ENOUGH

**I said to myself** (lit "spoke with my heart"), "**Behold** ([hinneh](#)) **I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me** - See above for Solomon's **magnified and increased wisdom**. Solomon reflects on his unparalleled pursuit of wisdom — not just in scale, but in intensity. He accumulated more understanding than any king before him — politically, philosophically, scientifically, and theologically.

**And my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge** - Solomon applied his observational powers — thinking deeply, analyzing life from every angle. The Hebrew emphasizes careful, intentional contemplation so that this was no casual learning. His wisdom, like a telescope pointed at the stars, saw the vastness of life but couldn't bring him closer to peace. The wisest man in history discovered that information without transformation is just weight on the soul.

**Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:17 καὶ ὤκακα καρδίαν μου τὸ γινῶναι σοφίαν καὶ γινῶσιν παραβολὰς καὶ πιστῆμην γινῶν τι καὶ γέτο τὸ σπιν προαρεσίς πνεύματος

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:17 And my heart knew much-- wisdom, and knowledge, parables and understanding: I perceived that this also is waywardness of spirit.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:17 So I decided to discern the benefit of wisdom and knowledge over foolish behavior and ideas; however, I concluded that even this endeavor is like trying to chase the wind!

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:17 So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I give my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I have known that even this is vexation of spirit;

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:17 I have applied myself to understanding philosophy and science, stupidity and folly, and I now realise that all this too is chasing after the wind.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:17 yet when I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly, I learned that this also is a chase after wind.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:17 I've used my mind to understand wisdom and knowledge as well as madness and stupidity. Now I know that this is like trying to catch the wind.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I gave my heart to getting knowledge of wisdom, and of the ways of the foolish.

And I saw that this again was desire for wind.

- **I set my mind:** Ec 1:13 2:3,12 7:23-25 1Th 5:21
- **I realized :** Ec 2:10,11

## FULL SPECTRUM OF FUTILITY WISDOM AND MADNESS

**And I set my mind** (lit I give my heart) **to know wisdom and to know madness and folly** - **NET** - "So I decided to discern the benefit of wisdom and knowledge over foolish behavior and ideas." **Set my mind** speaks of an intentional, deliberate pursuit, not a passing curiosity. Solomon didn't just study the heights of wisdom, but he also plunged into the chaos of foolishness. Why? To find out if anything under the sun could bring lasting fulfillment.

**Michael Eaton** - This raises the question of the apparently arbitrary introduction of *madness and folly*. The point is probably that, as the Preacher thought about wisdom and knowledge, he kept one eye on the alternatives. Thus the next section on pleasure-seeking is anticipated. (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 68](#))

**ESV Study note** - It is not that he seriously considers these to be viable alternatives to the path of wisdom (cf. Ecc 2:13-14; 9:3; 10:1, 13). Rather, his intent is to come to a better understanding of wisdom by simultaneously examining wisdom's opposite (foolishness); cf. the Lord's knowledge of "good and evil" (Gen. 3:22; see also Gen. 2:9, 17).

**I realized that this also is striving after wind** - He concludes he was chasing something he could not catch. After exploring both intellect and indulgence, he reaches the same conclusion: It's all futile apart from God.

**Ecclesiastes 1:18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

BGT Ecclesiastes 1:18 τι ν πλθει σοφας πλθος γνσεως κα προσπιθε ς γνσιν προσθσει λγημα

LXE Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in the abundance of wisdom is abundance of knowledge; and he that increases knowledge will increase sorrow.

NET Ecclesiastes 1:18 For with great wisdom comes great frustration; whoever increases his knowledge merely increases his heartache.

CSB Ecclesiastes 1:18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

NIV Ecclesiastes 1:18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

NLT Ecclesiastes 1:18 The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

YLT Ecclesiastes 1:18 for, in abundance of wisdom is abundance of sadness, and he who addeth knowledge addeth pain.'

NJB Ecclesiastes 1:18 Much wisdom, much grief; the more knowledge, the more sorrow.

NRS Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.

NAB Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom there is much sorrow, and he who stores up knowledge stores up grief.

GWN Ecclesiastes 1:18 With a lot of wisdom comes a lot of heartache. The greater your knowledge, the greater your pain.

BBE Ecclesiastes 1:18 Because in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow.

- **Because:** Ec 2:15 7:16 12:12,13 Job 28:28 1Co 3:18-20 Jas 3:13-17

## **KNOWING MORE IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER**

**Because** - Term of explanation. What is Solomon explaining? He has just realized that in all of his seeking for wisdom the result was chasing after the wind and now he explains the futility (much grief...increasing pain).

**in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain** - Wisdom and knowledge brought grief and pain as he gained a clearer view of the problems in a world cursed by sin.

**David Guzik** - The more the Preacher understood life under the sun, the greater his despair. The more he learned, the more he realized what he didn't know. The more he knew, the more he knew life's sorrows.

**Michael Eaton** - The attempt to solve the problem of life by wisdom in fact only enlarged the problem (v. 18). So long as wisdom is restricted to the realm 'under the sun', it sees the throbbing tumult of creation, life scurrying round its ever-repetitive circuits, and nothing more. 'The more you understand, the more you ache' (Moffatt). (Borrow [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Ecclesiastes page 68](#))

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**Norman Geisler - ECCLESIASTES 1:18—Is wisdom the source of happiness, or the means of sorrow? -[When Critics Ask](#)**

**PROBLEM:** Solomon affirms here that "in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." However, Proverbs asserts that "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding" (Prov. 3:13). Does wisdom bring sorrow or happiness?

**SOLUTION:** It all depends on the purpose for which wisdom or knowledge are sought. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is seeking wisdom "under the sun" (cf. 1:3), that is, apart from God, as the source of happiness. This he rightly concludes is "vanity and grasping for the wind" (1:14). However, if wisdom is viewed as based in "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7), then it is the very means of obtaining true happiness. Indeed, Solomon came to this very conclusion in Ecclesiastes (see 8:12; 12:13). Also, the OT understanding of wisdom is not the accumulation of great amounts of knowledge. For Solomon, wisdom is first and foremost living a successful life of righteousness and peace in obedience to God. Knowledge alone does not bring wisdom. Indeed, the message of Ecclesiastes is that knowledge alone brings only sorrow. Wisdom is the accumulation of the right kind of knowledge coupled with a life that is in harmony with God's commands and at peace with Him.

**SOLUTION:**