

**I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY. 1:12—6:12**

**A. Experiments and Conclusions 1:12—2:26**

**1. Experiments 1:12—2:11**

**a. Unlimited resources for research 1:12**

**TEXT 1:12**

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

**THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:12**

16. How is "the Preacher" identified in this verse?
17. The Preacher should be identified, therefore, as what person?
18. Write down your own ideas as to what might be involved in the use of the past tense ("have been king") since Solomon is still king as he writes the book.

**PARAPHRASE 1:12**

I, the one who gathers together God's people in order to preach to them, became king over God's people, Israel.

**COMMENT 1:12**

v. 12 This verse is in harmony with 1:1 and restates the Preacher's position as king over Israel in Jerusalem. The experiments which immediately follow this verse, required great

wealth and resources. A close study of I Kings 1-11 is sufficient to establish the credibility of Solomon's claim to wealth and capabilities. He was in a position to propose and follow through on the ambitious goals of 1:13 and 2:1.

One major problem of this verse centers on the use of the past tense in reference to his reign over Israel.

The verb rendered "have been" could as easily mean "become," and thus the sentence would carry the idea that Solomon "became king" in Israel<sup>3</sup> (note the Paraphrase). However, the purport of the verse does not hinge on the tense of the verb, but rather on the question as to whether the one who is to make the experiments has sufficient wealth and resources to carry them through. He may be saying, "I have been king, and still am!" At any rate, as king he has the authority and financial affluence to pursue his objectives.

Those who would argue for a non-Solomonic authorship interpret the past tense in this verse as implying that the author personified Solomon, as Solomon would not have used the past tense at a time when he was still the king.

The Berleburger Bible conveys the meaning of the verb as a description of the past that stretches into the future, "I the preacher have been king thus far, and am one still."<sup>4</sup> There is a sense in which the past tense could be used in the latter part of Solomon's reign. The Lord took the kingdom from Saul while he still "looked" like a king. Samuel declared unto Saul, "I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." (Read I Samuel 15:24-35.) Even in Solomon's day the kingdom shook beneath him with unrest and discontent. Sacrifice to foreign deities took place on the sacred ground of Israel. Jeroboam and Rehoboam stood waiting to claim their respective sections of the kingdom when it divided. Indeed, the "handwriting was on the wall." It is reasonable,

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<sup>3</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1952), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

therefore, that Solomon could think of himself and the glory of the past as something that would never be reclaimed and thus in the last days of his reign to realize his control over Israel was indeed a thing of the past.

Another view concerning the tense of the verb is called the "citizen-king" concept. It maintains that Solomon speaks through two voices in the book. One voice is as king over Israel, and the other voice is that of a citizen who views "from afar" the happenings in Israel. It is believed that such a view explains the use of past tense in the verse.

Perhaps there is some basis for each of the views under consideration. At any rate, history records that Solomon reigned over Israel until his death. Perhaps the simplest explanation is to accept the possibility that Solomon is saying "I, the Preacher *became* king over Israel in Jerusalem."

#### FACT QUESTIONS 1:12

34. What major problem is suggested in this verse?
35. Give evidence that Solomon could easily have been the one who carried out the experiments proposed in 1:13 and 2:1.
36. Explain from the example of King Saul how Solomon could be spoken of as a king in the past tense while he is still reigning.
37. Explain the "citizen-king" explanation as it pertains to the tense of the verb in this verse.

- b. Wisdom is used exploring all that is done under heaven.  
1:13-18

#### TEXT 1:13-18

- 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.
- 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
  - 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.
  - 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."
  - 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.
  - 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

19. What is Solomon now determined to do?
21. What tool will he use with which to explore?
23. What is it that he wishes to explore?
24. What does he call the task?
25. Who gives such a task to men?
26. Once he had explored all the works, what conclusion did he reach?
27. Mention some things in life which are "crooked."
28. What are some things which are "lacking"?
29. Who could be compared to Solomon in regards to his increased wisdom?
30. In addition to observing wisdom, what other two things did he study?
31. Upon examining these things, what conclusion did he reach?
32. When one increases wisdom and knowledge "under the sun" what will he receive in return?

## PARAPHRASE 1:13-18

I was determined, assessing all my resources, employing all my energies, and guided by my mind, to ferret out and examine the roots, turning everything from side to side, until through wisdom I had explored all that has been done within the limits of the world. To examine and explore all things is a longing placed in man's heart by God Himself. However, it is a grievous, unrewarding task because what is discovered does not bring satisfaction or reward to man's mind. Everything the sun shines upon, I have seen. The conclusion I have reached is the same: nothing discovered upon the earth will fully satisfy man's longings; everything is as filling as feasting on the wind! Let me illustrate what I have just said: man tries to bring harmony to the overwhelming chaos of past and present events, but he despairs because it is a futile effort. Also, there are so many things lacking among the pieces of life that one cannot even count them, let alone find them! Speaking to myself I said, "Your effort was successful in that you expanded your wisdom far beyond that possessed by any who have ever ruled in Jerusalem. Your unlimited resources made it possible that you could examine heretofore unexplored areas of wisdom and knowledge." Certainly it is no secret to myself that I explored every facet of life. I was determined to learn about the disorder of proper thoughts and subsequent consequences. I was determined to learn about evil and wickedness as they are entreated by others. Once again, I concluded that such knowledge is as satisfying as feasting on the wind! As I expanded my understanding of the various aspects of wisdom and knowledge, I discovered that my capacity to suffer grief and pain had also been increased. Not only is this true, but the increased information actually increased my sorrow.

## COMMENT 1:13-18

vs. 13-18 Solomon's purpose is clearly defined. He wants

to explore all that is done under heaven. He will do it with his mind guided by wisdom. He sees it as a grievous task, vain and futile.

The term "mind" in verse 3 is a much better translation than "heart" which appears in the King James Version. Almost without exception the use of "heart" in the Old Testament should be thought of as the mental faculties. The idea here is to convey the fact that it is to be a mental procedure. He restates his determination to study and to know in 1:17 when he says, "I set my mind." He does not bring a bias to his work. Neither is he interested in simply accumulating facts. He desires to see the nature of "why" and "how" things work.

"Seek" and "explore" are not synonymous. "Seek" carries the idea of studying that which is near at hand while "explore" suggests taking a comprehensive overview of something at a greater distance. Or, as Barton has stated it: "'Search' means to investigate the roots of a matter; 'explore' to explore the subject on all sides."<sup>5</sup> He does not leave a stone unturned in his quest to discover all that has been done under heaven. He is dealing, however, with that which has felt the blow of Adam's fall. He explores everything that comes within his power to see or hear. He is faced with endless observations but his conclusion is that all of it is afflicted with the mark of the vanity of this world. He calls it a "grievous" task and "striving after wind."

Since the task is grievous and drives one to despair, why say that God has given this task to man?

That is just the point! God has not given it to other than man. Nothing in all of God's creation, except man, concerns itself with the "why" of the activities of our world. Man, however, is restless until he discovers the why. Augustine's admission to God was that men are restless until they find their rest in Him. This quest for God in all the things around us is a futile pursuit. The reason it is unfulfilling is that it is directed

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<sup>5</sup> Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

toward God's creation, and not toward the mind of God which interprets God's creation. In Jesus' day the mind of God was revealed to man in the fullest sense. It was under these circumstances that Jesus said, privately to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them" (Luke 10:23-24).

False gods are worshipped throughout the world. False idols are established in every land. Why? Because these are expressions of man's frustrations and despair. He is searching in harmony with the grievous task in his mind, yet his results are inconsistent and unrewarding. His ultimate frustration is depicted by the Athenians in their erecting an altar to an unknown god! We hear Solomon say that God "has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (3:11). It is an "affliction" because man is honest enough to admit that God is only longed for, not discovered. He must also admit, as Solomon does, that the mark of sin is so heavy upon both man and his world that nothing can really be changed, and that which is lacking in man and nature is still lacking. Man is not capable of remaking his world or himself. Cracks can be plastered, and cosmetically treated, but not healed. On our own, we can be pretenders and mask wearers, but we really can't make the crooked straight or add to man's account in order to make him acceptable before God.

Man is crooked and lacking, but God is not responsible for this. It was man who violated God's order, and thus suffers the consequences of sin. He and his world stand out of joint and in debt before God. God placed the curse upon both man and the world because of sin. In a sense it can be said that God bends things and people out of shape. But it is only in the sense that God made the righteous rules which were violated by men, and God placed the subsequent punishments upon that which violates the rules. It is in the light of this truth that

Solomon admonishes us, "consider the work of God. Who is able to straighten what he has bent?" (7:13). Man is in debt to God. Solomon in all his wisdom cannot help. Paul goes a step further and declares that even the world cannot help. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe . . . we preach Christ crucified . . . because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Corinthians 1:20-25).

Another reason why the task is grievous has to do with the accomplishment of the very thing he started out to do. He wanted to explore all that had been done on the earth. He wanted to increase his wisdom and knowledge. He states that he accomplished this task to the degree that he (1) magnified and increased his wisdom more than any who had ruled over Jerusalem before him, and (2) his mind had observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. It is grievous because he admits that the more he learns, the greater his pain and grief. The deeper one penetrates the true nature of man, and the more knowledge one has concerning the inequities of life's struggle, the more disappointed he is with what he learns. His grief is actually compounded when he discovers that although he is a wise man, in this case greater than any who have lived before him, that he is still helpless and unable to bring justice to his own affairs. In addition, he is unable to correct the anomalies in the affairs of those about him.

In verse 17, he decides that he will also observe all he can concerning "madness" and "folly." These words are usually associated with wickedness and improprieties. He contrasts these with "wisdom" which he actually employs in his pursuit. One example of Solomon's observation of madness and folly is found in 10:12-13 where it is stated, "the lips of the fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness." He associates folly and madness



with the fool not the wise man. It is one thing to share in something, and something else to know of it through observation. It appears that Solomon is observing it rather than experiencing it. We read 7:25, "I directed my mind to know . . . the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness." Cf. 2:12.

Solomon's experiment was a success. That is, if he wanted merely to seek and explore by wisdom all that has been done under heaven. It was not successful if its objective was to bring him peace and satisfaction. His observations concerning it are (1) it is grievous, (2) it is an affliction, (3) it is vanity and striving after wind, (4) it increased my grief and my pain.

### FACT QUESTIONS 1:13-18

38. What is the goal of Solomon's first experiment?
39. Why is mind a better translation than heart (v. 13)?
40. What evidence is there that Solomon was determined?
41. What is the difference between "seek" and "explore"?
42. What happened in the world that makes the study of it a grievous task?
43. Why say that God gave this grievous task to man?
44. Idols and gods are evidence of what within man?
45. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that God does not intend for man to find out His work from observations under the sun.
46. What does "crooked" and "lacking" mean?
47. In what sense is God responsible for it?
48. Why was Solomon's increased wisdom also a matter of grief?
49. Why was his grief "compounded"?
50. What words are associated with madness and folly?
51. In what way was Solomon's first experiment a success?
52. In what way was it a failure?

A STUDY OF  
SOLOMON'S USE OF THE TERM GOD IN ECCLESIASTES

In 1:13, the reader is introduced for the first time to Solomon's own selection from the Hebrew language for God. It is of particular interest because there are numerous alternatives. That is, Solomon could have used other Hebrew terms than the one selected. The term for God appears forty-one times in the book. He also speaks of God as Creator and the Shepherd. He uses the pronouns "He," "His," and "Him" ten times. Thus, there are fifty-three direct references to God in the book.

Solomon selected the term Elohim for God. Never once did he employ the term Jehovah. There is a distinction that is often made between the two names. Jehovah is the name for God which communicates the idea that God covenants with His people, entering in a more personal relationship than what may be indicated in the use of Elohim. Elohim is the term used to speak of God as He is discovered, not in a covenant pact, but through the evidence of nature.

Perhaps one should exercise caution by reading more into the limited use of Elohim in the book than the author intended. There are two lines of reasoning, however, that are offered for his choice of the term Elohim to the exclusion of the term Jehovah. We shall discuss them separately.

The first one suggests that Solomon was growing old and lost the joy and closeness he once knew with God. It is argued that it would be inappropriate for him to choose the name for God that implies warmth and friendship. Solomon, it is thought, had forfeited this right.

The other argument appears to be more plausible. It speaks more to the intent and purpose of the book. It is reasoned that the name Jehovah speaks of the God of divine revelation and covenant relationships, and is, therefore, excluded from Solomon's writings because it is his purpose to discover truths on his own through his own wisdom and experimentation. It is not Solomon's intention to pretend that God does not exist,

## A STUDY OF WISDOM

or that God is not interested in His world and that which is contained in it. Quite the contrary, God's concern for man and man's need to be concerned about God is the conclusion of the whole book. It is Solomon's intention to demonstrate that man is hopelessly frustrated if all he has as his guide is the evidence of nature. Elohim is the God of providence and creation. He may be discovered in that sense by all men. God's glory is manifested through the work of His hands in both the heavens and the earth. Cf. Psalms 19:1.

The purpose of the book is best served by thinking of God as Creator rather than the revealer of propositional truth. If the choice of the word Elohim best does this, then perhaps this is the purpose behind the exclusive use of the name in Ecclesiastes.

### A STUDY OF WISDOM AS IT IS USED IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The Bible gives various meanings to our English word wisdom. The diagram on page 40 illustrates at least three different kinds. One can see that the wisdom "from above" involves revelation and speaks to the higher level of behavior that is characteristic of those who walk with God. The wisdom "from below" is just the opposite. It involves the individual in those activities associated with the one who carries out the will of the Devil. James speaks of this wisdom as "earthly, natural, demonic" (James 3:15). The wisdom discussed in Ecclesiastes is neither that which is from above, nor that which is from below. The wisdom pursued and employed by the Preacher (Solomon) is best described as that which is discovered "under the sun." This wisdom is discussed in the following passages: 1:13, 16, 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 21, 26; 7:11, 12, 19, 23, 25; 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16, 18; 10:1, 10.

According to the preacher, this wisdom is available to every man who is willing to pursue it. It is not evil of itself. It should

be learned and followed. Both the godly and the ungodly employ it (Cf. Diagram, page 40, I, III). However, it will not bring lasting satisfaction although it has certain advantages over other things which can be possessed. It is despised by some and sought after by others. It may be used to discover knowledge and can be magnified and increased. It strengthens, excels foolishness, protects its owner, causes the face to shine, and brings success. It is better than weapons of war and may deliver one from the hands of his enemy. It will increase the ability to use an inheritance for good. It is limited in its usefulness to this world and cannot be found in the grave. Because it is so identified with the futility of this world, of which it, too, is a part, there is the logical conclusion that in much wisdom is much grief.

Solomon's experiments explained in the first two chapters were not independent of his life-long work. What we see in these two sections are the detailed procedures and the motivating forces behind his work. He is speaking of his pursuit under heaven and under the sun of all that has been done. It was written of him that "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" (I Kings 4:33).

In what sense does Solomon stand in first place in respect to the possession of wisdom? There can be little doubt that he does! (I Kings 3:12) His wisdom is a testimony to his amount of knowledge, not that he was the most righteous or morally sound man who ever lived. The poor of necessity looked up to him. They had neither the resources nor opportunities for such pursuit. However, kings and queens also looked up to him and marveled over his wisdom and knowledge.

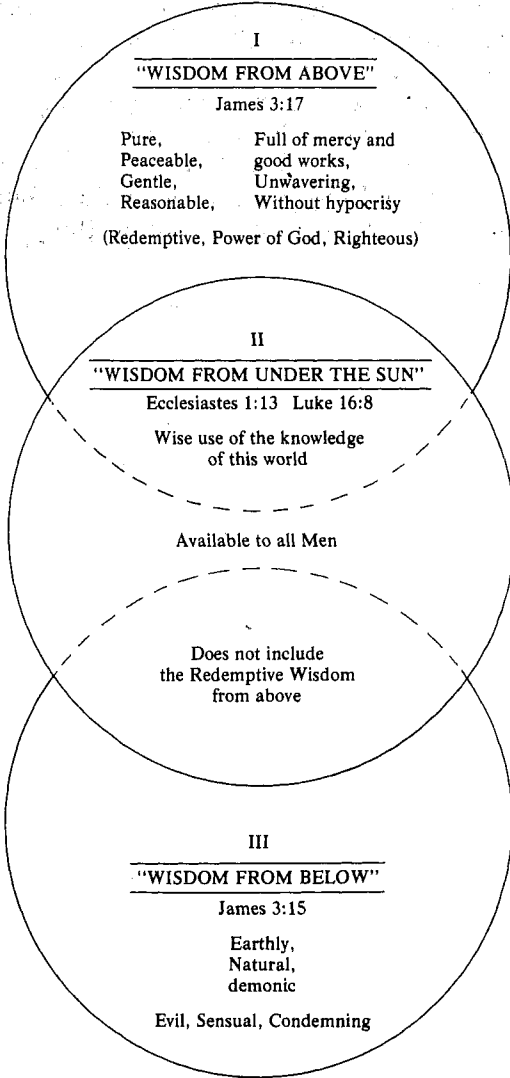
Solomon's reputation as a wise man became the talk of the East country and Egypt. It is written that his "fame was known in all the surrounding nations" (I Kings 4:31). So extensive was his fame that "all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart" (I Kings 10:24).

## A STUDY OF WISDOM

The wisdom discovered "under the sun" is available to both the Christian as well as the non-Christian. At times the unbeliever demonstrates better use of such wisdom, often referred to as common sense, than does the believer. It is in this context that Jesus said, ". . . the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). The ideal Christian would avoid the wisdom from below, he would accept and follow the wisdom from above, and he would skilfully employ the wisdom found "under the sun" to the best of his advantage and to the glory of God.

ECCLESIASTES

DIAGRAM "A"  
THREE KINDS OF WISDOM AVAILABLE TO MAN



c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure.

2:1-11

TEXT 2:1-11

- 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility.
- 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"
- 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.
- 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;
- 5 I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;
- 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
- 7 I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.
- 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.
- 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.
- 10 And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.
- 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

33. How many times do the words "I," "my," and "myself" appear in this passage (vs. 1-11)?
34. What obvious conclusion is drawn from this observation?
35. How many times in this same passage does Solomon indicate that his plans and great works were for the enjoyment of others?
36. Solomon now turns to what specific area of activity (v. 1)?
37. After experiencing laughter and pleasure, what is Solomon's conclusion?
38. He is still searching for the answer to what question (v. 3)?
39. Give proof from two different verses in this section that all of his activities were guided by wisdom.
40. List five of the works which he built and/or enlarged.
41. What two distinctive categories of slaves did he possess?
42. What did he say concerning the proportion of his livestock in comparison to others who owned flocks and herds?
43. Name the items of personal pleasure mentioned in verse eight.
44. What did Solomon claim as his reward for all his labor?
45. Upon reviewing all of his activities (v. 11), list the three attitudes he has toward them.

## PARAPHRASE 2:1-11

Addressing myself, I said, "Look, let me experiment with all the pleasures which appeal to my senses, and see the good that can bring me enjoyment." What enjoyment did it bring me? That which came of it was as satisfying as feasting on the wind. I had something to say concerning the laughter and merrymaking which came of my experiment with pleasure: "It is madness." And of pleasure itself I said, "It does not accomplish a thing." I extended my experiment to the pleasures of the table. I stimulated my body with wine and yet my mind always remained in control of every situation. I thought



fulfillment could be found in silliness, the opposite of wisdom, so I put my hand to folly and asked, "What good is there for the sons of men to do during the few days of their short lives as they lived them under heaven?" I planned and carried out great undertakings. I planned them for myself. I was not satisfied with building just one house for myself, so I built houses. I planted vineyards for my own personal gratification and enjoyment. I designed and constructed a paradise of shade trees and winding paths where I could enjoy their beauty and the relaxing benefits of my parks. Throughout my gardens and parks, I planted all kinds of fruit trees. I needed to irrigate a forest of growing trees, so I constructed pools for myself. I owned many servants. Some I purchased for myself, both male and female. Others I had born in my own house and considered them in a special way as sons of the house. I collected large amounts of silver and gold. I gathered it together for myself. I also amassed treasures typical of kings and rulers of provinces. I provided male and female singers for my own enjoyment and satisfaction. I indulged myself with the pleasure of men—concubine after concubine. None could boast of the possessions and luxuries at my command. I was greater than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I surveyed the purpose of it all through the eyes of the wisdom which is under the sun. This kind of wisdom I retained as a constant companion. I did not deny my eyes anything they wished to see. If my thoughts ran to embrace any pleasure, and I desired it, I provided it for myself. Did I receive a reward from all that I had done? Yes. My heart was delighted that I had accomplished for myself everything that I proposed—this was my reward. Now I must return to my original question: What good is there for the sons of men to do the few days of their short lives that they live under heaven? I kept that question in mind and considered all the things that I had done and the energy I expended, and my conclusion is that all of it is unfulfilling, futile, and striving for the wind. None of it is profitable for the man who lives under the sun.

## COMMENT 2:1-11

What good is there for the sons of men to do under heaven? This is the question that troubles Solomon (1:13; 2:3). His desire to know the answer is insatiable. In his first experiment he set his mind, guided by wisdom and knowledge, to discover the causes and results of all that had been done under heaven. His experiment was successful, it just did not yield satisfaction. He discovered that his reward was mental pain and sorrow rather than the desired mental health and peace. He now considers the possibility of the answer coming from another area of research "under the sun." It is "pleasure" that now intrigues him. He is not unlike the rest of us in his desire to experience the pleasures of life. The motivation behind Solomon is one of personal gratification. Nothing of the loving, philanthropic nature of concern colors his activities. It is indeed misanthropy. His self-centered desire is a matter of record. He states, "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.'" The grammatical construction "dative of interest" (for myself) appears eight times in these eleven verses. In addition, there are thirty references to the pronouns "I" and "my" in this limited summary of his pursuit of pleasure. It is manifestly evident that if the answer to his question is to be found in this area of life, he intends to discover it.

One should not be unduly critical of Solomon. His experiments are not hedonistic. He is not sensually lusting after base and inordinate things. He wishes only to come alive to the pleasures to be received through the senses. He wants his answers to come to him within the framework of the demonstrable. He is interested in seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting, and hearing. He declares that he did not withhold any pleasure from his heart.

Although Solomon does not mention it in the text, it is a matter of record that his resources to carry out such an experiment were unlimited. It was written that ". . . silver and gold were as stones in Jerusalem" (I Kings 10:27). He had successfully

increased his kingdom ten times beyond what he had inherited from his father. By his own declaration he proclaimed that he had increased in wealth more than all who had preceded him in Jerusalem.

*vs. 1* The "Come now" of this verse indicates a new direction. We have explained it as the exploration of sensuous pleasure. As in the other experiment, he states his conclusion at the beginning. Futility marks his pursuit. He should not have been surprised, for from his own pen had previously come the words, "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief" (Proverbs 14:13). He declares the reality of this.

That which is being tested is the question concerning what is good for man in the few years he has on this earth. This appears to be the key question in the book. It was asked in 1:3 and also in 1:13. The question is clearly stated here in 2:3. Although he does not arrive at the answer in this section, he does state conclusively that he had discovered what is good for the sons of men to do during their lives as they live them under heaven. Note his conclusions:

- (1) "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God" (2:24).
- (2) "I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime, moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God" (3:12-13).
- (3) "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this

is the gift of God" (5:18-19).

- (4) "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun" (6:12)?
- (5) "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun" (8:15).
- (6) "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7).
- (7) "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (9:9).

As important as the theme is, it is to be understood as a minor chord which he sounds, a half step less than the major theme. The theme is recurring, appearing no less than seven times as noted above, yet it only leads man to the logical conclusion as he views life under the sun. It is in this light alone he turns to examine the evidence of his quest. The major theme speaks to the emptiness of what is thought of as a full and fruitful and enjoyable life when it is lived without the redeeming nature of grace and apart from the direction of God's revelation. We have purposely jumped ahead of Solomon. We have read the conclusions, which at this time in his experience, he is eager to discover himself. It is important, therefore, that we realize that at this point in his experiment, he is steeped in the details of one of his most elaborate undertakings.

v. 2 Laughter is associated with pleasure. He has learned

to laugh much because he has had great pleasure; but once again he admits to the superficial nature of this unrewarding experience. He labels his laughter as "madness," and asks of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" Laughter, madness, and pleasure should be thought of as harmless delights in this context. Neither does madness convey the idea of mental insanity, but rather boasting and foolishness. His conclusion is that there isn't any true, lasting value in the exercising of sensuous pleasure. Note this additional commentary on this subject in 7:3, 6 and 10:19. In like manner, Jesus taught that the presence of laughter is not necessarily a sign of genuine joy (Luke 6:25).

vs. 3-8 In this section, Solomon turns to three additional categories of pleasure which he pursues. The first involves him with food and folly; secondly, he is engaged in aesthetic improvements; and finally he seeks cultural improvements and the pleasures of possessions. One is reminded of the admonition of John, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (food and folly) and the lust of the eyes (aesthetic improvements) and the boastful pride of life (cultural improvements and pleasures), is not from the Father, but is from the world" (I John 2:15, 16). Solomon does each of us a favor in that he comes to the same conclusion (v. 11), and thus saves us the necessity of learning this lesson the difficult way.

(1) Section one: food and folly. (v. 3)

"Wine" could represent all the pleasures of the table as well as just the enjoyment of wine. It would be understood as the part used for the whole. So elaborate were King Solomon's tables that the Queen of Sheba was totally exhausted in her praise (I Kings 10:5). One should not understand his statement as an abandonment to strong drink. He assures us that his mind continued to guide him wisely.

"Folly" implies the harmless nonsense that so often accompanies the pleasure of dining with friends. We should understand this to be the lowest level of his pleasurable pursuits.

The following descriptions represent those experiments which he carried out on the middle level. Solomon identifies them as the enlargements of his works.

(2) Section two: aesthetic improvements. (vs. 4-6)

Although the Temple was the most important and most elaborate of Solomon's contributions, no mention is made of it in this section. The reason is obvious. Solomon is discussing only those items which he planned and designed for personal satisfaction, the Temple belonged in a special way to the people as well as to the king. In reality it was God's Temple and thus it would be out of place to mention it along with those things programmed for sensuous delights.

(a) *Houses*. For a detailed explanation of Solomon's houses, read I Kings 7:1-12 and 9:19. His endeavors were almost unbelievable in scope. He built numerous buildings and public works in Jerusalem. He spent thirteen years building his own palace. It included the armory and the Hall of Judgment. He built a "house of Pharaoh's daughter" (I Kings 7:2-8). He built a citadel (I Kings 9:24; 11:27) or huge fortress to protect the temple. He founded cities in distant lands (I Kings 9:18), built store-cities and chariot towns, national works of great importance, and rebuilt and fortified cities throughout his kingdom.

(b) *Vineyards*. David possessed vineyards that Solomon undoubtedly inherited (I Chronicles 27:27, 28). It is also recorded in Song of Solomon 8:10, 11 that he possessed his own vineyard.

(c) *Gardens*. The term is synonymous with the Greek term for paradise and suggests pleasantries and beauty. There is a reference to "a king's garden" in II Kings 25:4. Note also Song of Solomon 4:16. A detailed description of gardens in Palestine cannot be found in the Bible although they are often mentioned. They were generally believed to be walled inclosures with winding paths and canals of running water to provide for the many shade and fruit trees. This is in harmony with the information in this section. One can almost see the

sweet-smelling, aromatic blossoms inviting travelers to the cooling arbors and refreshing streams.

(d) *Parks*. The terms "parks," "gardens," and "forests" are used interchangeably. From the context in Nehemiah 2:8 and corresponding references, the emphasis is on trees and forestry. Such parks also contained fruit trees and herds of animals.

(e) *Ponds*. Besides the aesthetic value of pools or reservoirs, they served a practical purpose. Pools supplied the water for the irrigation of the growing trees. Because of the long extended periods without rain, sometimes lasting three to four months, the ponds provided an essential and vital supply of water. Evidence of the water supply at Etham is the most celebrated of the pools ascribed to Solomon. There were three large pools ranging in length from 380 feet to 582 feet and in width from 207 feet to 250 feet. They varied in depth from 25 to 50 feet. The pools were located a distance of ten miles from Jerusalem but because of the natural contour of the Judaeian hills, the water traveled nearly 15 miles to the enormous reservoir beneath the city. The origin of the aqueduct is uncertain. The history of Jerusalem has always included a struggle on the part of the people to discover and supply water for their needs. However, in Solomon's description, no mention is made of the utilitarian purposes of the pools, either for Temple needs or the needs of the people. He is searching for the answer to the question: Is there any good in the beautiful?

(3) Section three: cultural improvements and pleasures of possessions. (vs. 7, 8)

This third and highest level upon which he experiments involves the pleasures derived from developing cultural projects and accumulating earthly wealth.

(a) *Slaves*. Solomon purchased some slaves, captured others and had some born in his own house" (I Kings 9:20-22; 10:4-8). Those who were born in his house were called "sons of the house (Genesis 15:3)" and were often more desired than other slaves. Solomon's interest in horses alone required literally

thousands of slaves to care for his extensive holdings. It was stated that he had 40,000 stalls of horses, a similar number of chariots and 12,000 horsemen (I Kings 4:26). It was said of the Queen of Sheba, as she observed the elaborate attention given to the king by his servants, that "there was no more spirit in her" (I Kings 10:5). She had not believed the colorful reports; however, upon personal observation she confessed that she had not been told half of what was true!

(b) *Flocks and herds.* Solomon's provision for one day included, among other things, ". . . ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed oxen, a hundred sheep besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl." Read I Kings 4:22, 23 and 8:62, 63. The large number of dedicatory sacrifices offered to God at the consecration of the Temple, suggests the magnitude of his flocks and herds. He offered the Lord 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep on that one occasion. Cf. I Chronicles 27:29-31.

(c) *Silver and gold.* The statement, "I collected for myself silver and gold" is more flagrant than it appears on the surface. God specifically commanded the king not to multiply gold for "himself." The detailed accounts found in the Bible depicting Solomon's inordinate desire for gold and silver supports his contention. In the face of the prohibition (Deuteronomy 17:17), Solomon made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones (II Chronicles 1:15). The following record of Solomon's extensive use of gold is included here to impress the reader with the magnitude of his personal quest. It is found in II Chronicles 9:13-21 and is followed immediately with the declaration, "So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom." It reads:

"Now the weight of *gold* which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of *gold*, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought *gold* and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten *gold*, using 600 shekels of beaten *gold* on each large shield. And he made 300 shields of beaten *gold*, using



three hundred shekels of *gold* on each shield, and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure *gold*. And there were six steps to the throne and a footstool in *gold* attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. And twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom. And all King Solomon's drinking vessels were of *gold*, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure *gold*; silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon. For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hurum; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing *gold* and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks."

(d) *The treasure of kings and provinces.* If the treasure is that of great wealth, Solomon qualified (I Kings 4:21, 24; 10:14, 15). If it means he possessed such treasure unique to kings and not the common man, he also qualified. He controlled provinces and exacted tribute from them; these provinces boarded or neighbored his own country of Palestine and were in addition to the districts of his own country. There were twelve districts in Israel and each district provided Solomon's needs for one month of the year (I Kings 4:7). Solomon reigned over all the tribes and nations between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates. The promise God gave in Genesis 15:18 was thus fulfilled. Solomon was a dictator. Everything depended upon his will. Although he was not a man of war as his father David had been known, he still subjected the people of his land to his every desire. In addition to Israel, he ruled the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Amonites, the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Syrians. So vast was his wealth that he was greater than all other kings of earth. It was estimated that he provided for 10,000 people in his service.

(e) *Male and female singers.* From the reference out of David's life (II Samuel 19:35), singers were employed to entertain

and lighten the spirit. These singers were for Solomon's personal enjoyment and should not be confused with the male singers of the choir within the Temple. They were chosen solely because of the satisfaction they brought to the king.

(f) *The pleasures of men.* This euphemistic phrase suggests the sexual enjoyment of men. The translators of the New American Standard Version suggest that "concubines" represent what is meant by the pleasures of men. This is in harmony with Solomon's experience as he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).

This text, however, has been widely disputed. The Septuagint translates it "a male cupbearer and a female cupbearer." Both the Syriac and Vulgate agree with this. The King James Translation renders it "Musical instruments, and that of all sorts." Other translations supply a variation of ideas. Some of these are: "plenty of all sorts," "combination of tones," "captives," "litters," "coaches," "baths," "treasures," "chests," and even "demons." The original Hebrew expression appears but this one time in the whole of the Bible, and thus the difficulty of determining the proper translation.

v. 9 In this verse he sets forth two ideas which qualify his experiment. The first suggests the extensive nature of his experience. He said that he excelled all who preceded him in Jerusalem. This would include David and Saul and very likely implies any of the Jebusite kings of various chieftains who ruled prior to that time. The second suggests that he was always mentally in control of his activities as elaborate as they may have been. He states, "My wisdom also stood by me." He never lost sight of his objective that he stated in verse three. The type of wisdom that remained with him is not to be confused with the "heavenly" wisdom from above. It is the exercising of common sense and earthly propriety . . . it is the wisdom known to those who live "under the sun." The words "stood by me" carry the idea of "served me" and bring into sharper focus the purpose and value of this kind of wisdom. Solomon was committed to every pleasure conceivable to the mind of man. The only criterion was that his pleasurable experience

would not violate his "under the sun" wisdom. As we have noted, this opened the door to endless opportunities for one who had at his command the wealth and resources as the world's richest king.

v. 10 In this verse he speaks of his reward. One would expect glowing and colorful descriptions of an exuberant heart declaring, "I have found it!" A lifetime of searching and millions of dollars expended would surely bring one to the end of the rainbow where the treasure would be discovered and the fortunate man who pursued it could, with the deepest satisfaction, share such fulfillment with his friends. However, no such manifestation of joy is forthcoming. There is a deficiency that manifests itself in his answer. There is a positive note, but it is the rather subdued admission that his reward was simply the fact that he did everything his heart desired. This, however, isn't what he was searching to discover. He wanted to do everything in order to find out what profit there is for the sons of men in all the activities of their days upon the earth. His heart was pleased. In other words, the earthly desires were fulfilled and thus the earthly needs were met. He had at least accomplished this.

v. 11 Solomon is after a profit. He intends to review all his labors, satisfied that he had exhausted every opportunity for some new thrill of experience. One panoramic flashback over his life brought into focus all the fruit of all his labors. He searches in his mind's eye to discover something of lasting value, something that abides. He isn't interested in speaking to the empty feeling within the one who has so indulged himself, but rather to the "profit" that comes to one who has thus so lavishly lived. He doesn't deny the emptiness, such grief, he admits, is very much the fiber of one who lives "under the sun." His conclusion is pointedly harsh: "there was no profit under the sun." Men today should learn this lesson from Solomon. Who can find the time or the resources to run the course as skillfully as Solomon? Even if he does, the signpost at the end of the road points to "no profit." How unlike the Christian who discovers that in Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 3:2).

## FACT QUESTIONS 2:1-11

53. What is the question Solomon now seeks to answer?
54. Explain why Solomon's first experiment (1:13-18) did not bring satisfaction.
55. What general area now intrigues him in this second experiment?
56. What motivation is behind his activity?
57. How often does he refer to himself in these eleven verses?
58. What is the kind of pleasure that he seeks?
59. How common were silver and gold in Jerusalem?
60. Solomon asks, "What is good for man?" Find the verse in chapter two where he states this question.
61. What two verses in chapter one alluded to this same question?
62. From your study of the list of answers to this question, give five things Solomon indicates as good for man to do.
63. Name the three categories of pleasure to be pursued by Solomon.
64. Explain how they correspond to a degree with the teaching in I John 2:15, 16.
65. In what two ways could the term "wine" be understood?
66. Why isn't the Temple mentioned in Solomon's list of great works?
67. How many years did it take for Solomon to build his own house?
68. The term "garden" corresponds with what other English term that comes to us from the Greek?
69. What two purposes did the ponds serve?
70. What is the difference between slaves and home-born slaves?
71. What was the total number of oxen and sheep sacrificed at the dedication of the Temple?
72. Why is Solomon's statement that he collected silver and gold for himself more flagrant than it appears?
73. From the description found in II Chronicles 9:13-21, list the various items which were covered with gold.

74. What is the distinction between "districts" and "provinces?"
75. How were Solomon's needs met each month?
76. Solomon fed from his table approximately how many people?
77. What purpose did the male and female singers serve?
78. What is meant by the term "euphemistic?"
79. Why is there such difficulty in translating the latter part of verse eight?
80. What translation seems the most appropriate from the context?
81. In what ways does he qualify his experiment? (Cf. v. 9)
82. Define the kind of wisdom Solomon used.
83. What satisfaction came from his experiment? (Cf. v. 10)
84. What "profit" did he discover?
85. What was his final conclusion? (Cf. v. 11)

## 2. Conclusions 2:12-26

- a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave. 2:12-17

### TEXT 2:12-17

- 12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?
- 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.
- 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."
- 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!
- 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after the wind.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

46. List the six reasons stated in this passage (vs. 12-26) that led to the conclusion that all is vanity and futility.
47. What could be expected of the man who succeeds the king? v. 12
48. Although wisdom excels folly, and it is better to be wise, what fate comes to both the wise and the foolish?
49. Give proof that Solomon numbered himself among the wise. v. 15
50. What will happen to the memory of both wise men and fools?
51. Why did Solomon hate life and consider his work grievous?

## PARAPHRASE 2:12-17

I turned my attention to another matter. I was interested in making a comparison of wisdom with foolishness and stupidity to determine the value of wisdom. My intention as king was to thoroughly examine this proposal. I did examine it with greater detail than any man who preceded me or any man who would follow me. I reached the conclusion that wisdom is an advantage over folly just as light is an advantage over darkness. The wise man walks in the light as he is guided by the eyes in his head. The fool, the one who practices folly, goes forward blindly, stumbling along the path. Yet they are both influenced by chance and fate. Then I said to myself, "I am a wise man, but one day I shall lie in the grave along side the fool. What advantage has my wisdom been to me?" Looking at it from that angle, I concluded that this too was futility. Death brings both the wise man and the foolish man to common ground. Not only do both die, but before many days pass, the memories of both have been forgotten. There is no lasting memory of either the wise man or the fool! All of my labor under the sun has thus been interpreted as clutching for wind, unrewarding, and only a vapor. I concluded that since this is true, I hated life.

## COMMENT 2:12-17

"I turned" does not indicate a new experiment, but additional conclusions to be drawn from testing the meaning of life with pleasure. He has already indicated that he is aware that history repeats itself. He stated that God seeks what has passed by (3:15); that what happens in the future has already happened in the past (1:9). He is manifesting this same truth when he draws our attention to the question, "What will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?" In this question, Solomon indicates that one will come after the king. Is Solomon speaking only of one who might experiment in the same manner, if such were possible, or is he speaking historically of one who is already standing in the wings waiting his turn to rule over the kingdom? It is difficult to determine. However, the import of his question appears to be that whoever follows, whether in his authority or by his example, will certainly reach similar conclusions. Human nature is the same generation after generation.

One should not conclude that Solomon's experiment was a failure. He did what he proposed to do as stated in verse twelve. He said that "his heart was pleased because of all his labor" (v. 10). The experiment, however, did not yield the satisfaction that he sought. His dilemma is found in the fact that he did not discover "what good there is for the sons of men," and he now admits that the one who follows him will not discover the answer either!

"I set my mind" (1:17), and "I turned to consider" (2:12), should be understood as similar statements. In each instance, the objective is to know wisdom, madness and folly (cf. 7:25). Wisdom here is the "earthly" wisdom previously discussed. Although it is not of the high level where "wisdom from above" is discovered, it still excels madness and folly as light excels darkness. Madness and folly have been identified as foolishness and silliness which is so often associated with those who are caught up in the sheer enjoyment of earthly things.

The metaphor is wisely chosen in verse thirteen. Wisdom

is likened to light while folly is likened to darkness. The contrast is sharpened in Ephesians 5:8 and I Thessalonians 5:5, because light is the symbol of truth from God, and darkness is the symbol of sin. It should be noted that Solomon makes a similar distinction in 2:26 when he identifies the wise man as the "good" man, and the foolish man as the "sinner." Solomon admits to the availability of a particular earthly wisdom that gives an advantage to men. In 7:11, 12 and 19, he states that wisdom is (1) good and an advantage to men on this earth, (2) a protector to those who possess it, and (3) gives strength to a wise man. In 9:18, he writes that (4) wisdom is better than weapons of war, and in 10:10, he speaks of wisdom (5) as bringing success. It is this kind of wisdom that excels foolishness as light excels darkness. Note the following comparisons and conclusions made in the remaining section of chapter two.

## THE WISE MAN

## THE FOOLISH MAN

## COMPARISONS

Light	Darkness
Eyes are in his head	Walks in darkness
Same fate (death)	Same fate (death)
No lasting remembrance	No lasting remembrance
Will be forgotten	Will be forgotten
In the coming days he will die	In the coming days he will die

## CONCLUSIONS

1. If one labors with wisdom, knowledge and skill only to accumulate a great legacy, he will discover this is futile and striving for the wind (vs. 19-21).
2. If collecting and gathering a great fortune is your primary goal in life, your days will be filled with pain and grief and your nights will be restless (vs. 22, 23).
3. One should resolve to eat, drink and enjoy labor one day at a time as this is the gift of God (v. 24).
4. There is joy that comes to the good man who understands



that he should enjoy life day by day. However, to the sinner who collects and gathers for his own satisfaction, there will be no joy but a realization that all that he has gathered will be given to the good man (v. 26).

There is a difference that is discernable between one who practices common sense and keeps his eyes within his head, and one who seeks folly and thus walks in darkness. Solomon had written, "Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth" (Proverbs 17:24). However, there is the recognition that even to the wise man death is an inevitable companion who never discerns between the wise man or the fool. It is in the light of this conclusion that Solomon states that he hates life. In addition he confesses that his work, even the fruit of his labor, is grievous, futile, and striving after wind. Vanity has once again robbed even the wise man of any possible profit of his labor under the sun.

The fact that both the wise man and the fool share equally in many ways is a recurring theme throughout the book. It is discussed in 6:6, 7:2 and 9:2, 3. One of the real tragedies of living is the fact that one must die. The tragedy is compounded because through man's natural eye, he cannot see beyond the grave. If indeed the premise is correct, that is that all activities qualified by the phrase "under the sun" do not have the redemptive nature of the higher values, then it is possible to interpret Solomon's despair. David wrote of this when he said, "even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish, and leave their wealth to others" (Psalms 49:10).

It is in view of the fact that both the wise man and the fool die and go to the grave that Solomon despairs of being "extremely" wise. His extreme wisdom is the fruit of his life-long labor, and yet what does it profit him? He is certain that the wise man has no advantage over the fool in this respect (6:8, 11). Of course one dare not assume these conclusions in the light of Christian hope. However, to the man who is restricted to only that which can be interpreted "under the sun," death

terminates everything! This is why Solomon amplifies this conclusion with the observation in 9:3, 4: "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men . . . they go to the dead. For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion."

The concept of "the coming days" is also important to the Preacher (v. 16). In the days to come, *how* will a man be remembered? More to the point, however, is the question of *will* he be remembered? There is surely some profit in the awareness that one's reputation continues on in the minds of one's countrymen. Especially would this be true if one were a wise man. However, this is not to be under the sun! His original premise in 1:11 underscored how quickly things are to be forgotten. Later in his book he offers two illustrations of this same tragic truth. He speaks of a young man who rises from adverse circumstances to become king. The multitudes, tired of the former king, throng to his side and offer their allegiance. However, he declares that in time even the new king will not be remembered (4:13-16). He speaks further of the dead who no longer have a reward. Their reward would have been for them to have been remembered. However, they no longer have a share in all that is done "under the sun." No one remembers them.

There is a relentless correlation between the results of participating in fleeting things and the nature of the things themselves. His conclusions are consistent with the means employed in reaching them. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him say that he "hated life," that he questioned his endless endeavors to become wise, that he looked upon all his work as a grievous, empty, futile task. His thoughts were simply corresponding with the kind of wisdom, madness and folly which he sought. There is a sense in which the very wisdom which he found became the greatest kind of folly.

## FACT QUESTIONS 2:12-17

86. Give three references from Ecclesiastes that Solomon understood that history repeats itself.
  87. What is meant by "the man who will come after the king?" Give two possible interpretations.
  88. Who ever follows the king will reach what conclusion concerning Solomon's primary question concerning profit?
  89. In what sense was Solomon's experiment found in the first eleven verses unsatisfactory? In what sense was it successful?
  90. Identify and define the three objectives which Solomon "turned to consider."
  91. List the five good qualities that "earthly" wisdom affords.
  92. Who is the one who walks in darkness?
  93. "The wise man's eyes are in his head" means that he has what? (Cf. Proverbs 17:24)
  94. Why does Solomon say he hates life?
  95. Why did he despair of being extremely wise?
  96. Will either the wise man or the fool be remembered after they die?
  97. Give an illustration found in Ecclesiastes chapter four that confirms your answer.
- b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies.  
2:18-23

## TEXT 2:18-23

- 18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.
- 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.
- 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my

labor for which I had labored under the sun.

- 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.
- 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?
- 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:18-23

52. Why did Solomon hate the fruit of his labor (vs. 18-20)?
53. What three tools did Solomon use to accumulate his legacy?
54. State the qualifying phrase found in verse twenty and twenty-two that proves Solomon's labor had no eternal value.
55. Find the verse in this passage that corresponds with the basic question asked in 1:3.
56. What keeps men from restful sleep (v. 23)?

### PARAPHRASE 2:18-23

I labored and achieved more than any man who had been before me. Yet, I hated my achievements because now I must leave them to some man who will follow me. The basic tragedy is that I have no knowledge of the one who shall follow me. He could be a wise man, or he could be a fool. I have collected everything through wisdom, and now who ever follows me will have complete control over my fortune. What fleeting satisfaction! What vanity! Therefore, I turned my heart aside to despair as I thought of all the works I had accomplished, and the great fortune I had accumulated upon the earth. Why do I despair? I labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and now I must give this legacy to one who had not labored in this manner. This is not only futility, it is a great evil. I ask

again, "What profit does man have in all his toil and stress as he struggles upon the earth in the few days of his short life?" For all his days he labors at his task accompanied by pain and grief. Even at night he remembers the vexation of his work and his mind has no rest. This too is vanity.

### COMMENT 2:18-23

The Preacher turned toward the past and surveyed the fruit of his life-long endeavor. He had amassed a fortune and collected riches beyond his highest expectations. However, as he contemplated the future and the one who would inherit all that he had gathered together, he grew bitter and cynical. He could designate the next king, but the people would not likely listen to the advice of an old and foolish king. He might dream of the kingdom remaining united but in his heart he realized it was but a dream. He would have little control over these matters. What if the one who follows him is a fool? He had acquired the greatness of his kingdom through wisdom, knowledge and skill. He now senses that it could slip into the hands of one who exercises little of these attributes and thus he will inherit wealth and power which he neither deserves nor can properly handle. His conclusion is that he thus "hated life." There are no forthcoming answers which satisfy him. He carries his burden into his bedchamber and is thus robbed of sleep (v. 23).

Did Solomon have cause to worry? One has sufficient evidence to recite the history of Israel following Solomon's death, and he discovers not one but two men who ascended to his throne. The kingdom did divide. In Solomon's closing years, his foreign wives turned away his heart from the Lord (I Kings 11:1-8). The author of Chronicles is silent on his closing years, but in I Kings we read that he loved "many foreign women" (I Kings 11:1). Solomon also had many adversaries. Among them were Hadad the Edomite and Rezon of Damascus (I Kings 11:9-25). However, the most dangerous of his foes had

to be Jeroboam. Jeroboam had been appointed to a prominent position in Solomon's kingdom. In addition to his own personal designs on the throne, he had the encouragement of the prophet Ahijah. The aggression and zeal of Jeroboam were manifested throughout the kingdom, and when Solomon suspected him he fled to Egypt for his life (I Kings 11:26-40). It is thought by some that the "lad" who comes out of prison to take the place of the king (4:14) is a direct reference to Jeroboam. It is true that upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam did return from Egypt to assume the leadership of the ten tribes. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was proclaimed king in Jerusalem.

Perhaps there is a prophetic sense in which the words of Solomon predict the historical situation of his day. However, this interpretation is not vital to understanding the message of the book. One may readily see that Solomon's despair is based on two entirely different premises: (1) he will *not* be remembered for all his great works, and (2) he is uncertain who will inherit his fortune. It could easily be a person who has little regard for wisdom and much regard for silliness and jest.

Either way, Solomon will lose control over all the "fruit" of his labor. This is the inevitable result of laboring "under the sun." How different is the picture for the Christian who one day shall rest from his labor with the sweet peace that his works will follow after him (Revelation 14:13)!

The "legacy" is of major consequences to the one who has acquired it because he applied wisdom, knowledge, and skill in the task of gathering and collecting. The term "skill" may also be translated "efficiency" which suggests hours of toiling and perfecting of trades. He is not like the one who came upon his fortune through happenstance or chance. Solomon has designed and labored toward such an end. He has placed his whole heart in his work. His fortune represents an entire lifetime of tireless effort and toil. Some of the magnitude of his despair is sharpened by his question concerning profit. He asks, "For what does a man get in all his labor and in his

striving with which he labors under the sun" (v. 22)? His answer: He gets nothing! Thus he declares, "I hated all the fruit of my labor." In addition he says, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor." He places a label on the fruit of his labor. It reads: "This too is vanity and a great evil."

- c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God. 2:24-26

#### TEXT 2:24-26

- 24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.
- 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?
- 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that He may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

57. List the three simple things in life that one is instructed to recognize as coming from the hand of God.
58. Who gives man enjoyment?
59. What is the condition that one must meet to receive God's blessings of wisdom, knowledge and joy (v. 26)?
60. What happens to the "sinner's" legacy?

#### PARAPHRASE 2:24-26

Man is not able of himself to find satisfaction in his work or in his pleasure such as eating and drinking. However, if a

man finds a temporary satisfaction in his labor or his pleasure, he must recognize that it is entirely from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can find enjoyment apart from God? Let us consider what happens to the one whom God favors and also to the one who offends God. To the person who is good in God's sight, God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy. To the sinner, however, God gives the vexing task of collecting and heaping up a fortune under the sun. Then the one who offends God must give it to the one who is good in God's sight. My conclusion is that this too is as unfulfilling as feasting on the wind.

#### COMMENT 2:24-26

This is the first time in Solomon's book that he reaches above the "sun" and speaks of God. As previously noted, however, it is not in the sense of a warm, covenant relationship. Rather, he speaks of God as the *Creator* who is in complete control of His universe. God's laws govern our world. There is enjoyment to be found in one's labor, but it is only when God blesses or permits. There are two classes of people who are identified. One is the "good" man who receives approval from God, and thus enjoys his labor. The other is the "sinner" who does not find this approval from God. Perhaps the intention here is to explain that a wise man, in this instance the good man, works in harmony with God's laws as he interprets them through the revelation of God through nature. As a result he pleases God and finds favor. On the other hand, the sinner is literally one who offends God. He sets aside the rules he discovers in this world. As a result he runs contrary to what he knows to be the better way to live. When one does this, he does not discover wisdom, knowledge or joy.

Solomon employs the term "joy" in much the same way that it is understood today. It carries the idea of cheerfulness and satisfaction with life. It is used three other times in Ecclesiastes and in each case the NASV renders it differently.



They are: "pleasure," (2:10); "joy," (2:26); "gladness," (5:20); "cheerful," (9:7). In each reference it speaks to the excitement of discovery and living life to its fullest each day. This kind of "joy" does not come to the man who is motivated by greed, or gathering wealth and possessions for his own use. The sinner has a grievous task because he gathers and collects with selfish intent. The good man is quite different. His wisdom does not bring grief. His knowledge does not bring sorrow. His joy comes to him because he finds satisfaction in the labor within a single day. This conclusion is clearly stated: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward" (5:18).

The sinner does not enjoy what he has gathered. This has been the basic premise of the book thus far. Not only has Solomon demonstrated this to be true, but what the sinner has gathered and collected for his own use will be inherited by one who is "good" in God's sight. This principle of retribution is taught in Proverbs 28:8 which reads: "He who increases his wealth by interest and usury, gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor." Again he writes: "The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous" (Proverbs 13:22).

The vanity of "striving after wind" of verse twenty-six, does not refer to the activities of the good man. It has reference to the sinner who is collecting and gathering fruit of his labor, but will not enjoy it because it will soon belong to another. (Read carefully 2:11, 17, 18.)

The fact that the good man recognizes that his enjoyment is from "the hand of God," should not be interpreted in the context that God has given him a detailed rule book by which he works and lives to increase his joy. Rather, it is simply that the good man realizes that food and drink are gifts, which he acknowledges to be from God, and he finds genuine joy in the use of them. There is a definite moral involved. If avarice is the foe which keeps one from enjoying life, then setting oneself free from such a vain sin would result in the daily

satisfaction with life that Solomon is discussing.

To try and discover happiness where God has not ordained that happiness can be found, has always been man's failing. Jesus redirects men's minds to those higher and nobler efforts which result in genuine happiness. Never has it been that joy results from the pursuit of joy. Our Lord's beatitudes underscore the truth that when one seeks higher values such as purity, peace, and righteousness, that "blessedness," in this case "joy," overtakes him, and he discovers that he is experiencing real joy where God has ordained that it is to be found.

The division of chapter three at this particular verse is unfortunate. The same theme is under consideration in all twenty-two verses. In 3:9 the basic question is asked once again: "What *profit* is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" The entire chapter is an amplification of chapter two. How can man discover a profit from his labor? First, by submitting to the fact that God does things appropriately in His own time. Second, eat, drink, work, and do good in one's lifetime. Third, do not be discouraged by the similar fate (death) of both man and beast as man does not have the knowledge to see his future, and thus he should be happy in his activities day-by-day. The profit is limited but it is there. Joy is his reward. Solomon states it clearly: "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; *for this is his reward*" (5:18).

#### FACT QUESTIONS 2:24-26

108. What attitude does the "good man" have toward God's control of the world?
109. What attitude does the "sinner" have?
110. Give the three synonyms used for "joy" in Ecclesiastes.
111. Who cannot experience this joy?

112. There is a limited profit (reward) that is available to one who labors under the sun. What is it? Cf. 5:18
113. What will happen to that which the sinner collects and gathers?
114. Does joy result from pursuing joy?
115. Jesus taught us that we will find joy if we pursue what?
116. What subject comes under discussion in chapter three?
117. What basic question is once again raised?
118. Give three ways one can find a share of profit even under the sun.

## B. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS THAT WE WORK UNDER THE RULE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE 3:1-22

1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence. 3:1-8

### TEXT 3:1-8

- 1 There is an appointed time for everything, And there is a time for every event under heaven—
- 2 A time to give birth, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.
- 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to tear down, and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.
- 6 A time to search, and a time to give up as lost;  
A time to keep, and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together;  
A time to be silent, and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time for war and a time for peace.