

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

"Pleasure and Possessions: Bubbles"

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Introduction

1. This book was written by Solomon, King of Israel, and a man endowed with wisdom from God (1 Kings 3:5-15). He wrote this book under the Spirit's guidance (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) to demonstrate the utter futility of life without God and His will.

2. Using illustrations from nature, Solomon has shown that man is transient and his whole history is empty (1:4-11). If man turns to intellectual pursuits, this will not satisfy the craving of the heart (1:12-18). Indeed, information breeds much trouble (1:18).

3. Being capable with his vast resources (2:12), Solomon turns to the arenas of pleasure and the world of materialism to find them also empty and vain. How he shows this is given in forthright argument here. Read it:

1. EXPERIMENTATION vv. 1-3.

a. His plan vv. 1, 3.

The emphatic personal pronoun "I" is used here. There is a direct address to Solomon's own heart (cf. 1:16, 17). In effect, he says that he will try the heart with mirth and see if this will satisfy. "Mirth" is the word for festivities, pleasure, and gladness. It is a common Hebrew word even in modern times. The word "pleasure" is the word for "good." Whatever, items which seem to offer the summum bonum of cheer are found to be vain.

b. His enjoyment vv. 1-3.

Four items are specifically mentioned: mirth (joy), pleasure (good), laughter, and wine. The verb "sought" (v. 3) is the same as used earlier (1:13). It connotes a tremendous research and investigation. The list is not long, but it in effect represents the gamut of what is in this world to satisfy. Amazingly, he notes that he maintained his wisdom approach to the experiment (v. 3). He did not lose himself nor forget the skill he possessed based upon thorough knowledge (1:16).

c. His expectation v. 3.

Solomon really had a goal. It related to what a man could do in order that he might be satisfied with the "things" which are under the heavens. It had to be lasting for it related to "all the days" of one's life.

2. EXPRESSION vv. 4-8.

a. Area of architecture and landscaping vv. 4-6.

The verb "make great" is Hifil. It actually contains the adjective of the KJV. The object is "works." He strove after splendor and dignity. He could do this for his reign was one of peace and rest (1 Chron. 22:9). What he was after was buildings which could offer pleasure (1 Kings 9:19). He added to these a refined landscape. This included vineyards (1 Chron. 27:27), gardens, orchards (Song of Sol. 6:11), and pools which provided water for the forests which in turn produced sprouting trees or increased forest areas. The list of projects, therefore, included: buildings, gardens, pools, forests, and new trees. It was a fantastic effort at seeking to provide satisfaction.

b. Area of household and employees v. 7.

A difference is made between servants who were purchased ("got") and those who were actually born within his house. He had both sorts. The Hebrew makes it clear that he increased possessions unto himself. Added to the people population of his ownership was also the huge number of farm animals which were his. He had so many that he was the largest cattleman in the area around Jerusalem than prior to that time. He acquired all of this with the hope it would satisfy.

c. Area of income and expenditure v. 8.

An additional list of items is given here. It includes: gold and silver. This mean cash. "Peculiar treasure" signifies what properly belonged to kings only. It represents special objects relating to kings and the country in which he lived (e.g. items which royalty alone would have from its own country). The "men and women" singers may well speak of the festivities of the court. "Sons of men" may suggest sexual love involvements. The musical instruments added indicate that whatever sound was

required to enhance his court "parties" was available. There was splendor of all sorts at his disposal. His resources were unlimited, so his pleasurable items were of the same quality. He was looking for satisfaction with what money could buy: things, festivities, sex, and splendor.

3. CONSIDERATION vv. 9-11.

a. Greatness v. 9.

Solomon enjoyed huge success. He was the greatest above all before and at the time. While going through the greatness, he did not lose his sanity and skill. He had whatever was available and to the fullest. But this entire show did not remove his own skill.

b. Gladness v. 10.

In substance, the author withheld nothing from his enjoyment. He indulged in everything available. But one thing surfaced: the pleasure lasted only so long as the event. His indulgence gave him a fleeting pleasure!

c. Gainless v. 11.

The emphatic "I" is again used (cf. v. 1). The same phrase used earlier is found here (1:14). The exclamatory "behold" is the summa summarum. Of all the engagements attempted, nothing remained but the feeling of emptiness. It was all like wind. It was all a momentary delusion. "No profit" shows there was no real lasting happiness from what he experienced under the sun.

Conclusion While throughout the text there is evidence of total futility, a couple of phrases help this view tremendously. Laughter is "mad" (cf. 1:17). The form of the verb suggests raging mad. Solomon finds pleasure to be self-destructive! As for joy, it too must be interrogated with the phrase: "what then?" or "what is this in all the world?" The obvious reply is: all pleasure and possessions do not provide the end aimed at, namely, heart satisfaction. Ah, dear friend, there is but one answer. It is all in Him (Psa. 16:11).