

ECCLESIASTES 2: 1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure"; and behold, this also was vanity.

The vanity of human courses in the works of pleasure, planting, building, equipage, amassing wealth, etc., Ecc 2:1-11. Wisdom preferable to folly, Ecc 2:12-14; yet little difference between the wise and the foolish in the events of life, Ecc 2:15-17. The vanity of amassing wealth for heirs, when whether they will be foolish or wise cannot be ascertained, Ecc 2:18-21. There is much sorrow in the labor of man, Ecc 2:22, Ecc 2:23. We should enjoy what the providence of God gives, Ecc 2:25, Ecc 2:26.

Verse 1

I will prove thee with mirth - This is well expressed by the author so often referred to. Having tried speculative knowledge in vain, passion and appetite whisper: - "From the rugged thorny road

Of wisdom, which so ill repays thy toil,

Turn back, and enter pleasure's flowery paths.

Go, take thy fill of joy, to passion give

The reins; nor let one serious thought restrain

What youth and affluence prompt."

ECCLESIASTES 2: 2 I said of laughter, "It is foolishness"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

Verse 2

I said of laughter, It is mad - Literally "To laughter I said, O mad one! and to mirth, What is this one doing?"

Solomon does not speak here of a sober enjoyment of the things of this world, but of intemperate pleasure, whose two attendants, laughter and mirth are introduced by a beautiful prosopopoeia as two persons; and the contemptuous manner wherewith he treats them has something remarkably striking. He tells the former to her face that she is mad; but as to the latter, he thinks her so much beneath his notice, that he only points at her, and instantly turns his back.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 3 I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold of folly, until I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their lives.

Verse 3

To give myself unto wine, (yet acquainting [נהג noheg, "guiding"] mine heart with wisdom) - I did not run into extremes, as when I gave up myself to mirth and pleasure. There, I threw off all restraint; here, I took the middle course, to see whether a moderate enjoyment of the things of the world might not produce that happiness which I supposed man was created to enjoy here below.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 4 I made myself great works. I built myself houses. I planted myself vineyards.

Verse 4

I builded me houses - Palace after palace; the house of the forest of Lebanon, 1Kgs 7:1, etc.; a house for the queen; the temple, etc., 2Chr 8:1, etc.; 1Kgs 9:10, etc., besides many other buildings of various kinds.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit.

Verse 5

I made one gardens and orchards - פַּרְדֵּסִים pardenim, "paradises." I doubt much whether this be an original Hebrew word. ferdoos, is found in the Persian and Arabic; and signifies a pleasant garden, a vineyard. Hence our word paradise, a place full of delights. How well Solomon was qualified to form gardens, orchards, vineyards, conservatories, etc., may be at once conceived when we recollect his knowledge of natural history; and that he wrote treatises on vegetables and their properties, from the cedar to the hyssop.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 6 I made myself pools of water, to water from it the forest where trees were reared.

Verse 6

Pools of waters - Tanks and reservoirs.

To water therewith the wood - Aqueducts to lead the water from the tanks to different parts.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 7 I bought male servants and female servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who were before me in Jerusalem;

Verse 7

Servants and maidens - For my works, fields, folds, and various domestic labors.

Servants born in any house - Besides those hired from without, he had married couples in the precincts of his grounds, palaces, etc., who, when their children grew up, got them employment with themselves.

Great and small cattle - Oxen, neat, horses, asses, mules, camels, and such like; with sheep and goats. And multitudes of most of these he needed, when we are told that his household consumed daily ten stall-fed oxen, with twenty from the pasture, with a hundred sheep; besides harts, roebucks, fallow deer, fatted fowls, and other kinds of provision, Probably, such another court for splendor and expense was not in the universe.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 8 I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men—musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

Verse 8

The peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces -

1. The tares levied off his subjects.
2. The tribute given by the neighboring potentates. Both these make the "peculiar treasure of kings;" taxes and tribute.

Men singers and women singers - This includes all instrumental and vocal performers. These may be called the delights of the sons of men.

Musical instruments, and that of all sorts - For these seven words, there are only two in the original, **ושדות ושדה** shiddah veshiddoth. These words are acknowledged on all hands to be utterly unknown, if not utterly inexplicable. Some render them male and female captives; others, cups and flagons; others, cooks and confectioners; others, a species of musical compositions derived from a celebrated Phoenician woman named Sido, to whom Sanchoniatha attributes the invention of music. Others, with more probability, wives and concubines; of the former of whom Solomon had seven hundred, and of the latter, three hundred; and if these be not spoken of here, they are not mentioned at all; whereas music, and every thing connected with that, was referred to before. The author of Choheleth paraphrases thus: - "To complete

This scene of earthly bliss, how large a span
 Of that which most delights the sons of men
 Fell to my portion! What a lovely train
 Of blooming beauties, by connubial ties,
 By purchase, or the gifts of neighboring kings,
 Or spoils of war, made mine."

If, after all this, I may add one conjecture, it shall be this; **שדה** sadeh, in Hebrews is a field, and occurs in various parts of the Bible. **שדות** sadoth is fields, 1Sam 22:7, the points in such a case are of no consideration. May not Solomon be speaking here of farms upon farms, or estates upon estates,

which he had added by purchase to the common regal portion? We know that a king of Israel (Ahab) once desired to have a vineyard (Naboth's) which he could not obtain: now, Solomon having spoken before of gardens, orchards, and vineyards, why may he not here speak of supernumerary estates? Perhaps every man who critically examines the place will be dissatisfied, and have a conjecture of his own.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 9 So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 10 Whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I didn't withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced because of all my labour, and this was my portion from all my labour.

Verse 10

I withheld not my heart from any joy - He had every means of gratification; he could desire nothing that was not within his reach; and whatever he wished, he took care to possess.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 11 Then I looked at all the works that my hands had worked, and at the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

Verse 11

And, behold, all was vanity - Emptiness and insufficiency in itself.

And vexation of spirit - Because it promised the good I wished for, but did not, could not, perform the promise; and left my soul discontented and chagrined.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 12 I turned myself to consider wisdom, madness, and folly: for what can the king's successor do? Just that which has been done long ago.

Verse 12

For what can the man do that cometh after the king? - I have examined every thing proposed by science, by maddening pleasure, and by more refined and regulated mirth. I seized on the whole, and used them to the uttermost; and so far, that none ever shall be able to exceed me; as none can, in the course of things, ever have such power and means of gratification.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness.

Verse 13

Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly - Though in none of these pursuits I found the supreme good, the happiness my soul longed after; yet I could easily perceive that wisdom excelled the others, as far as light excels darkness. And he immediately subjoins the reasons.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness—and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all.

Verse 14

The wise man's eyes, etc. - Well expressed by Choheleth: - "The wise are circumspect, maturely weigh

The consequence of what they undertake,

Good ends propose, and fittest means apply

To accomplish their designs."

But the fool walketh in darkness - "But fools, deprived

Of reason's guidance, or in darkness grope,

Or, unreflecting like a frantic man,

Who on the brink of some steep precipice

Attempts to run a race with heedless steps,

Rush to their own perdition."

One event happeneth to them all - "Though wide the difference, what has human pride

To boast? Even I myself too plainly saw,

That one event to both alike befalls;

To various accidents of life exposed,

Without distinction: nor can wisdom screen

From dangers, disappointments, grief, and pain."

ECCLESIASTES 2: 15 Then I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

Verse 15

As it happeneth to the fool - Literally, "According as the event is to the fool, it happens to me, even me." There is a peculiar beauty and emphasis in the repetition of me. Having pointed out the

advantages that wisdom has over folly, he takes this opportunity of reminding us of the danger of trusting too much to it, by showing that it is equally subject to the common accidents of life; and, therefore, incapable of making us completely happy. Having given his sentiments on this point in general terms, he proceeds to those particular instances wherein human prudence chiefly exerts itself; and shows how egregiously it is mistaken in every one of them - C.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 16 For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no memory for ever, since in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. Indeed, the wise man must die just like the fool!

Verse 16

There is no remembrance - The wise and the fool are equally subject to death; and, in most instances, they are equally forgotten. Time sweeps away all remembrances, except the very few out of millions which are preserved for a while in the page of history.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 17 So I hated life, because the work that is worked under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Verse 17

Therefore I hated life - את החיים et hachaiyim, the lives, both of the wise, the mad man, and the fool. Also all the stages of life, the child, the man, and the sage. There was nothing in it worth pursuing, no period worth re-living and no hope that if this were possible I could again be more successful.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 18 I hated all my labour in which I laboured under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me.

Verse 18

I hated all my labor - Because,

1. It has not answered the end for which it was instituted.
 2. I can enjoy the fruits of it but a short time.
 3. I must leave it to others, and know not whether a wise man, a knave, or a fool will possess it.
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ECCLESIASTES 2: 19 Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have rule over all of my labour in which I have laboured, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

Verse 19

A wise man or a fool? - Alas! Solomon, the wisest of all men, made the worst use of his wisdom, had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, and yet left but one son behind him, to possess his estates and his throne, and that one was the silliest of fools!

ECCLESIASTES 2: 20 Therefore I began to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labour in which I had laboured under the sun.

Verse 20

I went about to cause my heart to despair - What makes all worse, there is no remedy. It is impossible in the present state of things to prevent these evils.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 21 For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom, with knowledge, and with skilfulness; yet he shall leave it for his portion to a man who has not laboured for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

Verse 21

For there is a man - Does he not allude to himself? As if he had said, "I have labored to cultivate my mind in wisdom and in science, in knowledge of men and things, and have endeavored to establish equity and dispense justice. And now I find I shall leave all the fruits of my labor to a man that hath not labored therein, and consequently cannot prize what I have wrought." Does he not refer to his son Rehoboam?

ECCLESIASTES 2: 22 For what has a man of all his labour, and of the striving of his heart, in which he labours under the sun?

Verse 22

For what hath man of all his laborer - Labour of body, disappointment of hope, and vexation of heart, have been all my portion.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief; yes, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

Verse 23

His days are sorrows - What a picture of human life where the heart is not filled with the peace and love of God! All his days are sorrows; all his labors griefs; all his nights restless; for he has no portion

but merely what earth can give; and that is embittered by the labor of acquisition, and the disappointment in the using.

This is also vanity - Emptiness of good and substantial misery.

ECCLESIASTES 2: 24 There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.

Verse 24

There is nothing better for a man - The sense of this passage is well expressed in the following lines:

- "For these disorders wouldst thou find a cure,

Such cure as human frailty would admit?

Drive from thee anxious cares; let reason curb

Thy passions; and with cheerful heart enjoy

That little which the world affords; for here,

Though vain the hopes of perfect happiness,

Yet still the road of life, rugged at best,

Is not without its comforts -

Wouldst thou their sweetness taste, look up to heaven,

And praise the all-bounteous Donor, who bestows

The power to use aright."

ECCLESIASTES 2: 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

ECCLESIASTES 2: 26 For to the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Verse 26

For who can eat - more than I? - But instead of *חַוֵּץ מִמֶּנִּי* chuts mimmenni, more than I; *חַוֵּץ מִמֶּנּוּ* chuts mimmennu, without Him, is the reading of eight of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., as also of the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic. "For who maye eat, drynke, or bring enythinge to pass without him?" - Coverdale.

I believe this to be the true reading. No one can have a true relish of the comforts of life without the Divine blessing. This reading connects all the sentences: "This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God; - for who can eat, and who can relish without Him? For God giveth to man that is good." It is

through his liberality that we have any thing to eat or drink; and it is only through his blessing that we can derive good from the use of what we possess.

Giveth - wisdom, and knowledge, and joy -

1. God gives wisdom - the knowledge of himself, light to direct in the way of salvation.
2. Knowledge - understanding to discern the operation of his hand; experimental acquaintance with himself, in the dispensing of his grace and the gifts of his Spirit.
3. Joy; a hundred days of ease for one day of pain; one thousand enjoyments for one privation; and to them that believe, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But to the sinner he giveth travail - He has a life of labor, disappointment, and distress; for because he is an enemy to God, he travails in pain all his days; and, as the wise man says elsewhere, the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just. So he loseth earthly good, because he would not take a heavenly portion with it.