

Book:	Ecclesiastes
Series:	Two Ways to Live: Under the Sun or In the Fear of God
Lesson 2:	The Futility of Life, Part 1
Text:	Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 2:1-11
Date:	Sunday, January 20, 2013

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Next Lesson:	Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; 2:12-17

Colonial Hills Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter



TEACHING TIP

Just a follow-up quote by Kidner that reminds us of the overarching theme of this book—two ways to live—as we begin to jump into its details:

G. S. Hendry [writes]... “[The] apparent worldliness [of Ecclesiastes] is dictated by its aim: Qoheleth is addressing the general public whose view is bounded by the horizons of this world; he meets them on their own ground, and proceeds to convict them of its inherent vanity.... His book is in fact a critique of secularism and of secularized religion.”

Looked at in this way, the shafts of light that we have noticed are signals to the reader that the author’s own position and conclusions are very different from those of the secularist, in whose shoes he is standing for the purpose of his thesis. Without these signals and their final confirmation (12:13-14) the book would simply preach despair, or at best a mere whistling in the dark. But with them, it is saying that the abyss of final vanity is the destination of every road but one. Qoheleth can therefore be relentless in facing that final emptiness, first because it is the truth about this passing world, but also because there is a bigger truth to live by.¹

INTRODUCTION

Illustration: Most jewelers display their diamonds against a dark velvet background, so that their brilliance may be more apparent.

In the first several chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher focus on that dark backdrop, and, in the words of Kidner, doesn't "commend the light to us directly," but rather "does [so] by making the darkness intolerable."² His goal is the same as the jewelers: to display, against that darkness, the brilliant hope of his answer more clearly.

And, so, before we can see the light (i.e., before we can enjoy the brilliance of the diamond), we must stumble through the fog and fight our way through the darkness as we begin reading this book. Without any pretenses and with little optimism, Qoheleth immediately tells us his overarching perspective on life in verse 2—"Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

What follows are roughly six chapters of darkness:

*Throughout the book, with the rarest of disclaimers, he shocks us into seeing life and death strictly from ground level, and into reaching the only conclusions from that standpoint that honesty will allow. Yet he is leading rather than driving us. As a real citizen of this tantalizing world, he feels acutely the futility that he describes. He burns at the injustices and disappointments of life, and mourns the passing of youth and the universality of death.*³

Solomon's vocabulary is poignant as he describes the darkness—"vanity" (38x), life "under the sun" (28x) and "under heaven" (3x), "vexation of spirit" (KJV) or "striving after wind" (NASB) (9x), and no "profit" (5x). That term "vanity," in particular, is a favorite of Solomon. He employs the term 38 times with at least three different (and yet common) senses: "1) 'fleeting,' which has in view the vapor-like (cf. James 4:14) or transitory nature of life; 2) 'futile' or 'meaningless,' which focuses on the cursed condition of the universe and the debilitating effects it has on man's earthly experience; or 3) 'incomprehensible' or 'enigmatic,' which gives consideration to life's unanswerable questions."⁴

Life merely lived "under the sun" is futile—pointless, useless, meaningless, empty, transient, unfortunate, confusing, frustrating, etc. This is the gloomy reality that we must take our first several weeks to explore. As we do so, we will experience the futility of life in:

- the ceaseless cycle of existence (1:1-11)
- the emptiness of pleasure (2:1-11)
- the limitations of wisdom (1:12-18; 2:12-17)
- the frustrations of labor (2:18-23)
- the elusiveness of life (3:1-9)
- the bitterness of misfortune (3:16-4:16)
- the disappointment of wealth (5:10-17; 6:1-9)
- the finiteness of humanity (6:10-12)

Today, we're just going to consider the first two of these points.

THE CEASELESS CYCLE OF EXISTENCE ILLUSTRATES THE FUTILITY OF LIFE "UNDER THE SUN" (1:1-11). • NO SIGNIFICANCE

In these first eleven verses, the Preacher views life as a giant treadmill—ever turning, ever repeating, never starting something new. So it is, he observes, with life. It is cyclical to the point of weariness and pointlessness—it seemingly leads nowhere. Solomon is going to show the clarity of this point in nature to parallel its truth even in human history and experience. And he does so as a true literary artist, for throughout this section, "The literary monotony in 1:4-11 mirrors the actual monotony of human action that repeats itself with no real change."⁵

1. *The cycle of people (vv. 3-4)*

Illustration: A quick Google search suggests that the world population is currently 6,973,738,433, which is more than double what it was just fifty years ago.⁶ Statisticians also tell us that roughly 132 million people are born every year, while 56 million people die every year.⁷ Those who have tried to determine how many people have ever lived

(admittedly from the standpoint of our earth being billions of years old) propose that roughly 108 billion people have existed since 8,000 B.C.⁸

These numbers are staggering, and are far greater than when Solomon wrote here in verse 4, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.” Each individual human exerts so much energy and “labor” (lit., “toil with which he toils”) during his life “under the sun” (v. 3); yet, what does that “profit” him? He is born, lives, and dies, and the earth just keeps on spinning (v. 4).

We discover this monotonous human cycle regularly. We purchase a house, live in it for so many years, and then sell it to another human family to live in. We occupy a job, train our replacement, and then hand it over to him; and he does the same. We purchase a car, drive it into the ground, and then sell it to another person who drives it even further into the ground. And each day, the earth just keeps spinning, seemingly in cruel partnership with this boring monotony.

Together, these two verses depict a human landscape filled with much activity, but so little advantage; so many individuals, but so little impact.

2. *The cycle of the planet (vv. 5-7)*

Now, with creative literacy, Solomon begins to illustrate the futility of life “under the sun,” by simply surveying our context—planet Earth. Throughout these verses, Solomon employs several participles that communicate continual, durative, uninterrupted action—the ceaseless cycle of existence.

First, the sun depicts the unstoping monotony of life (v. 5). It rises and sets each day and then “hastens” to do the same thing all over again tomorrow. That word “hasten” literally

refers to someone or something panting with fatigue (cf. Jeremiah 14:6; Isaiah 42:14). Like man, the sun is personified as wearing itself out just to repeat everything the next day.

Second, the wind illustrates this incessant round (v. 6). Invisibly, it “goes” and “turns” and “whirls continually” and “returns again according to its circuits.” The Hebrew repeats the word for “circle around” four times to express this perpetual pattern. And when it is done, it simply “returns,” only to go out again to do the same—no new pattern or purpose is discovered here. And while we feel its seeming wildness on the surface of our planet, you can quickly find on the internet multiple pictures of its well-mapped courses (i.e., wind currents).

Third, the rivers and stream follow a constant cycle (v. 7). “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full”; and so the rivers are ever flowing, and the sea is always being filled. The phrase “not full” is used of people in verse 8 (i.e., with the idea of being content), further demonstrating that Qoheleth’s greatest frustration is not that our planet is so predictable, but that our existence is so trivial.

Illustration: If you are 40 years old, you’ve witnessed all four seasons 40 consecutive times with no exceptions—and none of them were perfect. Some winters were too harsh; others were too mild. Some summers were too hot; others were too wet. You’ve also experienced almost 15,000 rotations of the earth, and never once were the stars out of line or the sun missing. You’ve seen the same constellations and watched the same sun glide across your sky for 40 years. And when you pass away, people after you will experience the same natural laws. This is Solomon’s point—he’s using the predictability of our planet to mirror the dull routine of our existence.

3. *The cycle of performance (vv. 8-11)*

Solomon states as much with cutting clarity in verses 8-11. The word “labor” in verse 8 is better translated “tiresome” or “wearisome” (cf. Deuteronomy 25:18; 2 Samuel 17:2), which is the result of the ongoing “labor” of the natural order (vv. 4-7). Solomon is bemoaning the weary monotony of “all things” detailed in verses 4-7. Well, as best as he can anyways, for “man cannot utter it”; that is, man is not able to express or describe the multiplied examples of this ceaseless cycle. The secularist (i.e., the one who lives merely “under the sun”) sees and sees and sees this, and hears and hears and hears it. But, like the ever-absorbing-yet-never-filled-ocean, he neither exhausts its examples, nor triumphs over its futility—he remains at a loss for significance “under the sun,” for the cycle leads nowhere.

In verses 9-11, Solomon considers the concepts of novelty and memory, and likewise demonstrates their failure to break this ceaseless and insignificant rotation. He defies all sense of novelty, uttering the classic maxim, “There is no new thing under the sun” (v. 9). He muses that what we see today is what will be tomorrow, and what happened in the past will continue to happen in the future (v. 9). And, even when someone suggests, “See, this is new!”⁹ (vv. 10a), it simply betrays insufficient memory and experience, for “it hath been already of old time, which was before us” (vv. 10b-11a).¹⁰

And lest we think that our innovations and our generation will defy the norm, Solomon deflates our naïve pride in verse 11, reminding us that, as we don’t remember today what people had considered “monumental” events in the past, so future “great moments in time” will also be forgotten. Media and technology may better record and preserve the data, but history invalidates its originality, and time erases its memory. One commentator writes,

*Every generation looks for some satisfying novelty, but each novelty can be analyzed as only a variant on the past (v. 9). Obviously, there have been many inventions; but in the context the Teacher probably has in mind any invention that enables man to break out of nature and the succession of history into meaning which transcends the sense of futility. Man has not found it; and each generation, regarding itself as the greatest, still reaches no conclusion.*¹¹

Application: As we consider this first sobering reality—that the ceaseless cycle of existence illustrates the futility of life “under the sun”—we can start making application to specific facets of life. As you consider your own life and seek some level of significance and contentment, do you see its ceaseless cycle driving you to the following poor solutions?

(1) *Relationships*—This ceaseless cycle cries warning to those who try to find fulfillment “under the sun” in relationships. “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh,” and those we most love and depend on will pass away, too.

(2) *Culture*—This perpetual pattern of history also helps to explain our culture’s fascination and infatuation with fads, and the rebirth of them. We’re always looking for something new and fresh—art, clothing, hobbies, social networks, toys, music, etc.—but it’s often just the old repackaged, and the novelty of today’s item is tainted by the quick “passing away” of yesterday’s (cf. 1 John 2:15a, 17).



Can you think of examples—fads that were promoted for their seeming novelty, but that were actually repackaged from the past? *open discussion*

(3) *Accomplishments*—Furthermore, this honest evaluation of life forces us to consider how we view accomplishments. In a “one-upmanship” culture, we can easily find ourselves living for performance and accomplishment, only to arrive there and find it devoid of fulfillment. So, like the secularist who ignorantly pursues the “rat race” “under the sun,” we move on to the next

performance, to the next accomplishment, and then the next one, and the next. And along the way, we learn that we're really accomplishing nothing that the guy before us didn't do, nor are we really contributing very much to the grand scheme of things.



What were some accomplishments that you took pride in that seemed more short-lived than you expected? *open discussion*

Realization: While there is nothing new “under the sun,” the New Testament reveals that all things are new “in the Son.” 2 Corinthians 5 tells us that when a person is living in the “fear of God” through a relationship with Jesus (vv. 16-17a), “he is a new creature—old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (v. 17). That is because there is no One like Jesus and nothing like what He did. He is the “eternal novelty,” the “great cycle-breaker”—and in Him contentment never fades away. Two thousand years ago, He entered and endured the ceaseless cycle of time and space to remind us that the significance of life is found in eternity. He offered an eternal relationship with God through Him (John 1:12-13), eternal citizenship in the culture of heaven (John 14:1-3), and the eternally-effective accomplishment of Calvary to guarantee it all (John 19:30). While we are always looking for a break in the cycle, for something new and fresh, Scripture tells us that we need look no further than Jesus, who is recreating us as His workmanship to display His glorious grace throughout eternity (Ephesians 2:4-10). What significance, indeed!



What are some of the details of this significance of being “in Christ” on planet Earth? *open discussion (cf. Ephesians 2:4-10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)*

Transition: Life merely lived “under the sun” is futile. We've first seen that its ceaseless cycle undermines its significance; next, we'll learn that the emptiness of its pleasure denies its fulfillment.

THE EMPTINESS OF PLEASURE ILLUSTRATES THE FUTILITY OF LIFE “UNDER THE SUN” (2:1-11). • NO FULFILLMENT

“If we don't know why we're here,” we seem to reason, “Let's at least make the most of it.” And so, when the secularist's quest for significance ends in failure, he pursues fulfillment through whatever means of pleasure is available.

Solomon, here typifying such a secularist who merely lives “under the sun,” talks to himself in 2:1 and says (in the vernacular), “Self, I'm going to conduct an experiment¹² with self-indulgent pleasure¹³ to see if it is worthwhile¹⁴.” The following verses detail his quest to discover¹⁵ whether or not various forms of self-indulgent pleasure can satisfy.¹⁶

And, like our illustration from our final 2 Peter lesson, this experiment only ever works “in the basement.” When taken out of the lab into one's life, the test produces little fulfillment, for in the words of Qoheleth, “Behold, this also is vanity” (v. 1).

1. *Partying (v. 2)*

Both “laughter” and “mirth” in verse 2 refer to “frivolous merrymaking.”¹⁷ Again, the Preacher is blunt as to what he discovered—of the one, he said, “It is mad [or folly, senseless]”; of the other, he said, “What doeth it?” or “What does it accomplish?” This is the same folly spoken of in Proverbs 23:29-35.




In what ways does partying often end up ringing hollow? *open discussion*

2. *Narcotics (v. 3a)*


Verse 3 depicts a Solomon who is exploring the physically-cheering effects of wine. Literally rendered, the first phrase in the verse reads, “In my heart, I sought to cheer my flesh with wine.” The word “sought” is the same word used of the twelve Israelites who “spied” out the Promised Land before they entered it (Numbers 13:2). Its as if


Solomon is doing reconnaissance in his mind to determine whether or not any pleasure might be found there as a result of drinking. And, knowing the possibility of inebriating himself beyond cognition, Solomon kept careful control over his mental faculties (i.e., “yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom”) so that he could conduct his experiment without hindrance.¹⁸ In essence, he’s evaluating, not drunkenness, but the pleasurable use of narcotics to kill pain, reduce stress, alleviate frustration, and provide pleasure.

 How have the promises of narcotics proved to be deceptive and hiding a “catch”? *open discussion*

3. *Immaturity (v. 3b)*

Solomon even suggests in verse 3 that he experimented with immaturity (i.e., “to lay hold on folly”). This term for “folly” is used only throughout Ecclesiastes (1:17; 2:3, 12f; 7:25; 10:1, 13) and refers to behaviors and ideas that lack insight, prudence, and understanding.¹⁹ In other words, before modern society extended the age of adolescence, Solomon tested lifestyle-immaturity to see if it could be a source of pleasure. He lived as a perpetual junior high.

 In what ways do people today behave and think immaturely when they should be practicing prudence and understanding? *time usage, responsibility, initiative, living situation, entertainment-saturation, no budget, etc.*


 What do 1 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:11-17; Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1-2; and James 1:2-4 contribute to the idea of maturity within believers? *open discussion*

Beginning in verse 4, Solomon begins to describe all the possessions (“great works” KJV) he heaped to himself in his quest for fulfillment. Regarding these pleasures, two themes should be noted throughout. First, the repetition of the term “me” (KJV) or

“for myself” (modern translations) evidences that he didn’t share any of these possessions. Therefore, he couldn’t blame any dissatisfaction on having had to give some stuff away.

Second, the statements in verses 7, 9-10 of having “more than” anyone else and “whatsoever” he wanted tells us that he didn’t stop accumulating possessions—he didn’t just own a house, he owned estates (v. 4); he didn’t just keep a garden, he designed landscapes (v. 5); he didn’t just have a lot of money, he had precious treasures (v. 8a); etc. Therefore, he couldn’t argue that fulfillment eluded him because he didn’t have as much as someone else.

So this is a guy who gathered possessions to an unmatched degree completely for himself—and he did so thoughtfully, honestly testing their value to satisfy (i.e., “my wisdom remained with me”—v. 9). If they didn’t fulfill him, they won’t fulfill anyone.

 As you consider each of the following categories of pleasures, discuss how our society promotes each as true source of fulfillment in life. Consider inserting some illustrations from the 21st century that parallel Solomon’s testimony regarding each category.

4. *Houses (v. 4)*

He built his own houses (plural), and planted his own vineyards (plural). Apparently, he had several estates.

5. *Gardens (vv. 5-6)*

The gardens and orchards described in these verses sound large, colorful, diverse, and well cared-for.

6. *Servants (v. 7a)*

Not only did Solomon purchase slaves over whom he had totalitarian authority, but he also had children born to those slaves within his own home (which children were also his property).

7. *Assets (v. 7b)*

Solomon owned more livestock—both herds and flocks (“great and small cattle” KJV)—than anyone else ever had in Jerusalem.

8. *Money (v. 8a)*

He didn’t just earn money, he “gathered” gold and silver and valuable treasures from other countries and kingdoms.

9. *Music (v. 8b)*

Again, he didn’t just enjoy music, he owned his own musicians!

10. *Sex (v. 8c)*

While the KJV translates the second half of verse 8 as a continuation of the first half, there is no Hebrew justification for doing that. There is very strong, well-documented reasons for adopting the more modern rendering, “I gathered for myself...the pleasures of men—many concubines.”²⁰ And again, we notice the extravagance of Solomon’s lifestyle. He didn’t just pursue illicit sex; he collected a large harem of women to enjoy.



You may want to take some time here to discuss (1) how our society markets the idol of sex today so that we are not ignorant of its deception, and (2) how even believers are tempted to elevate sex to an unbiblical and unrealistic source of fulfillment.


Illustration: After a difficult childhood and adolescence (filled with divorced parents, drug addiction, etc.), Kurt Cobain finally had a breakthrough in 1991 when he started the rock band, Nirvana. But just three years later, during the height of his career when he had everything he had ever dreamed, an electrician found him dead in his home with a gun in his hand and a suicide note in the house. This is what he said:

When we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins, it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy. The fact is, I can't fool you....The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it and pretending as if I'm having 100% fun....I've tried everything within my power to appreciate it (and I do...believe me I do, but it's not enough). I appreciate the fact that I...have affected and entertained a lot of people....I have a goddess of a wife who sweats ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what I used to be, full of love and joy, kissing every person she meets...And that terrifies me to the point to where I can barely function. I can't stand the thought of [my daughter] becoming the miserable, self-destructive, death rocker that I've become.

Application: Reality hasn’t changed. Three thousand years later, humanity still wrestles with Solomon’s discovery—i.e., the emptiness of pleasure illustrates the futility of life “under the sun.” And sometimes, an early death seems preferable to empty pleasure and a futile life.

Solomon offers his perspective in verses 10-11. He says, on the one hand, that his experiment made him happy, for he “rejoiced in all his labor” (v. 10b). But even in that phrase, we see the elusiveness of true fulfillment. First, the word for “rejoice” is none other than the “self-indulgent pleasures” of verses 1, 2, and 10a. So, he got exactly what he knew he would get—some level of physical enjoyment. No one is denying that. This, however, is certainly not the deep-seated fulfillment that he was searching for. Second, the word “labor” is the same as in 1:3 referring to “toil” and “trouble”—this is the term he uses to describe his experiment. Indeed, Solomon has learned that while happiness may have been gleaned, such happiness is fleeting, even as it is tied to the moment (cf. Hebrews 11:25).

So while, on the one hand, the pursuit of pleasure had to a small degree made him happy, on the other hand, it had left him empty. He wants all his readers to read his test results, which he clearly records in verse 11—“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought and on the labour that I had laboured to do [vv. 1-10a], and, behold, all was *vanity* and *vexation of spirit* [lit. “striving after wind”], and there was *no profit* under the sun.” Like an ignorant little child who chases the wind, Solomon had run after fulfillment and returned grasping air.


 Consider the list of pleasures above—which one(s) is your experiment? Are you having any more success than Solomon? open discussion—allow a moment for your students to express openness and transparency here


Realization: The pursuit of pleasure is nothing new, and it wasn’t even invented by our nation’s founders. God has wired into the very fiber of our being a desire to be satisfied and fulfilled (Ecclesiastes 3:11). And He also provided the solution in Himself (cf. Genesis 3:8). Psalm 16:11 promises us, not momentary satisfaction, but eternal fulfillment—“In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” In a relationship with God through Jesus we have divine power, provision, perception, promises, and participation—yes, everything we need for life (2 Peter 1:1-4). This is what Israel, like her king Solomon (and perhaps us), had missed by committing “two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

However, when people returned to the Fountain, God transformed them from life “under the sun” to life “in the fear of God.” Asaph, after mulling over the problem of evil, recognized God’s promise of fulfillment and proclaimed, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever” (Psalm 73:25-26). Jeremiah, who mourned the destruction of Jerusalem, declared, “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope:

... ‘The Lord is my portion,’ saith my soul; ‘Therefore will I hope in Him.’ The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him” (Lamentations 3:21, 24-25).

And today, these three thousand years after Solomon, God offers us the realization of what escaped Solomon for so long—eternal fulfillment in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who came that we “might have life and that [we] might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

 How do we enjoy that fulfillment now, before we see Him face to face? by faith as we pursue the knowledge of Him in His Word—if we add to our faith excellence and then knowledge and character of Jesus, God promises that we will be “neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8)

 What can we be doing practically in order to enjoy fullness in Jesus? praying for it for one another (cf. Ephesians 3:19); communing with Christ in Bible study and prayer—if you are not cultivating a habit of relating to Jesus Christ, you are not experiencing His fullness and fulfillment (cf. Ephesians 5:18; Colossians 3:16)

CONCLUSION

Illustration: Just this past week, former All-Pro defensive end for the Miami Dolphins, Jason Taylor, gave a grisly interview detailing the horrendous situations that some football players go through just to get out on the field each Sunday. His story is particularly disturbing as he describes recovering from being leg-whipped and from a foot condition known as plantar fasciitis. Nevertheless, after all the horror stories, Taylor concludes, “Would I do it all again? I would. If I had to sleep on the steps standing up for 15 years, I would do it.”

Solomons are alive and well, and still on their quest, in our society today. We can’t help but read 1:3 and 2:11 and hear Jesus’ question ring in our mind—“For what shall it profit a man, if he

shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). There really are only two ways to live—"under the sun" or "in the fear of God." One is described as the way to life, abundant and everlasting; the other is strewn with those who, disheartened by life's cycle and disillusioned by empty pleasure, have been swallowed by the darkness. May we be ambassadors from Solomon and from the Savior with a message of light to pierce their darkness and an offer of hope to erase their futility.

ENDNOTES

¹ Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, & Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 93-94.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴ *The MacArthur Study Bible*, ed. John MacArthur, Jr., electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997). For our purposes throughout this study, we'll use the term "futility" in our outline, since that probably conveys the point better than "vanity" does to the English reader.

⁵ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006).

⁶ <http://bit.ly/V7ohF2>

⁷ <http://1.usa.gov/V38rYg> and <http://bit.ly/V38tPG>

⁸ <http://bit.ly/1o8INpZ>

⁹ The Hebrew grammar in verse 10 allows one to translate it either as (1) "Is there any thing whereof it may be said..."—KJV; or (2) "Even the thing of which we say..."—NAB. See NET Bible.

¹⁰ "This does not deny man's creativity or inventiveness, only the ultimate newness of his accomplishments. For example, there is no essential difference between the first voyage to the moon and the discovery of America (different point of arrival, different vehicles of travel, but the same essential action and results)" (NET Bible).

¹¹ EBC

¹² "Prove" (KJV) = "conduct an experiment or test" (HALOT)

¹³ "Mirth" (KJV) = "The term... *simkhah* ('pleasure[/mirth]') has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) it can refer to the legitimate enjoyment of life that Qoheleth affirms is good (5:17; 8:15; 9:7; 11:8, 9) and that God gives to those who please him (2:26; 5:19); or (2) it can refer to foolish pleasure, self-indulgent, frivolous merrymaking (2:1, 2; 7:4). The parallelism in 2:2 between [*simkhah*]... and... *sékhohq* ('laughter, frivolous merrymaking'), which always appears in the context of banqueting, drinking, and merrymaking, suggests that the pejorative sense is in view in this context" (NET Bible).

¹⁴ "Therefore enjoy pleasure" (KJV) = an unfortunately poor translation; lit. "see what is good" with the Hebrew grammar itself suggesting purpose (i.e., "to see what is good")

¹⁵ The idea of "discovering" is inherent in three different words for seeing used in verse 1 (*ra'ah*—not translated; *hena*—"behold"), verse 3 (*ra'ah*—"see"), and verse 11 (*panah*—"looked"; *hena*—"behold").

¹⁶ In both verse 1 (poorly translated in KJV) and verse 3 ("what was that good"), Solomon clarifies that his goal is to determine what "good" (*tov*) self-indulgent pleasure will provide for people. This term for "good" can refer to that which is "pleasant," "desirable," "usable," or "efficient"; in context, it speaks of being "worthwhile" or "valuable" (NET Bible).

¹⁷ The word for "mirth" was explained in endnote 13. Regarding "laughter": "The term... *sékhohq* ('laughter') has a fourfold range of meanings: (1) 'joyful laughter' (Ps 126:2; Prov 14:13; Job 8:21); (2) 'frivolous laughter, merrymaking' (Eccl 2:2; 7:3, 6); (3) 'pleasure, sport' (Prov 10:23; Eccl 10:19); and (4) 'derision, mockery, laughingstock' (Jer 20:7; 48:26, 27, 39; Job 12:4; Lam 3:14)... In Ecclesiastes, [*sékhohq*] is always used in contexts of self-indulgent banqueting, drinking, frivolous partying and merrymaking (Eccl 2:2; 7:3, 6; 10:19). It is distinct from 'healthy' joy and laughter (Ps 126:2; Job 8:21). The connotation of 'frivolous merrymaking' fits this context best" (NET Bible).

¹⁸ "He emphasizes that he never lost control of his senses in this process. It was a purely mental, cognitive endeavor; he never actually gave himself over to wanton self-indulgence in wine or folly" (NET Bible).

¹⁹ Cf. NET Bible and DBL.

²⁰ Cf. NET Bible.