

# The Vain Search for Meaning by HVP Wisdom

📖 Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

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Last time we studied the Prologue of Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. In 1:1 we find the author. These are the words of *qohelot*, the teacher of the assembly, who was son of David, and king in Jerusalem. There's only one son of David who fits the bill and that is Solomon. In 1:2 we find Solomon's theme. "Vanity of vanities," which is a Hebrew superlative meaning the greatest of vanities. All is vanity says *qohelot*. In 1:3-11 Solomon seeks to prove his theme by demonstrating from mankind's labor that all is vanity. In view here is the whole of mankind's production as it is viewed from generation to generation. So in 1:3-4 his question is not, what good is labor, because everyone knows that at least you can get a paycheck to provide food and shelter and clothing. But Solomon's question is, "What net gain does mankind have in all his labor, Which he does from an earthly perspective? A generation of mankind goes and a generation of mankind comes, but the earth remains forever." In other words, each generation does their labor, but, in the end whatever they pass on to the next generation is not substantial in the sense that that generation doesn't also have to labor. So then there is really no net gain to man's labor, nothing lasts, but what does last is the earth. The earth is still there. In 1:5-7 Solomon adds observations from nature that parallel truths in the area of mankind's labor. For example, in 1:5 he observed that the sun rises and the sun sets; And it pants to its place and rises there again. And running parallel to that is man's labor. We work and work and work and guess what, there's still more work to do and so you have to hasten to get up and get going the next morning so you can do more work. In 1:6 we find another example. Solomon observed that the wind is blowing this way and that way and in all different directions and then it returns to where it began. Running parallel to that is mankind's labor. We go to work with a plan and before we know it unpredictable things blow it all to pieces and we can't tell what is happening and then we just do it all again. And a third example, in 1:7, Solomon observed that all the rivers flow into the sea but the sea never fills up and then the water returns to the river where it flows into the same sea again. And running parallel to that is mankind's labor. We go to work over and over and over and in the end we don't accomplish much, in fact, we often end up in the same place we began doing the same thing. So all this shows futility. And so in verse 8 he draws some conclusions from these futilities. All things are wearisome, they're just exhausting. And further, man is not even able to talk about the lack of human progress because it's depressing to realize that the human race hasn't really made any progress. And yet they talk about progress, but if they really think about it there hasn't

been any progress. Each generation is doing the same things. Oh yes, there's advances in the things that are done, a manipulation here, a nuance there, but it's still just doing the same things. People moved dirt thousands of years ago and people move dirt today. The equipment's different, but people are still moving dirt. Then in v 8 he says that the eye is never satisfied with what it sees and the ear is never filled with what it hears. What he's saying is that mankind always wants to see something new or hear something new, and so we are constantly trying to watch TV or get new experiences and yet it's all just the same thing over and over and over. There really is nothing new under the sun. In 1:9, that which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages which were before us. There really is nothing our generation has seen that previous generations have not seen. To think that is naïve. You don't know what you're talking about. Every generation has seen the same old things. No generation really saw anything new in the true sense of originality. They might have seen some novel thing, but nothing original. In 1:11 he says the only reason a generation thinks they have seen something new is because "There is no remembrance of earlier things." They don't know their history. And in that sense mankind has a collective amnesia. And then he goes so far as to say that future generations are going to have the same collective amnesia. All is vanity. That's his proof that all is vanity. Mankind's labor doesn't bring any long term advantage or net gain to the following generations.

Then we challenged Solomon's analysis based on the fact that his observations are all from under the sun, which simply means from a mere human point of view. And this means that they are coming out of Solomon's flesh. Solomon wrote this after he had repented, but he wrote it about the time when he was out of it and living in the energy of the flesh. So his proofs are based on a vantage point which is carnal, not spiritual. But when evaluated from a spiritual point of view you don't come away with the same conclusions. Solomon concluded that there is no net gain as you move from one generation to another and from the carnal point of view he was right, there is nothing that is produced by carnality that lasts. But from the spiritual point of view that is not true, there is the doctrine of eternal rewards and anything that is produced by true spirituality does last, it's eternal. And we also said that Solomon concluded that there is nothing new, nothing new that ever comes into existence, and that is also correct from the carnal point of view. But from the spiritual point of view that is not correct because there is the doctrine of regeneration, and anyone who believes in Christ is regenerated, he is a new creation. And therefore there are new things popping into existence all the time, every time someone believes in Jesus Christ they are a new creation. So Solomon's view point was marred by his carnality, and he's teaching us that if you do this Christian, if you decide to walk off in the tuesday's somewhere, you are going to lose all your significance in life, it's going to be meaningless and a vanity. So learn from my mistake, Solomon says, I tried it. That's his lesson.

Tonight we come to the second section of Ecclesiastes; the first section was the Prologue, 1:1-11, the second section is the Procedure, 1:12-18, and we'll be doing this by outline format so we have some structure to Solomon's argument. However, the purpose of these verses differs from commentator to commentator and so we have to choose a path to follow. The first approach is the most common approach, which is to say that these

verses describe Solomon's attempt to find meaning and significance by philosophy, so that what is here explained is Solomon's mental activity. He's not actually doing any activity outside his brain, he's just thinking about life's problems and trying to solve them in his head. The second approach is that these verses describe Solomon's method or means of finding meaning and significance. He's telling us what his procedures were and they are a lead in to 2:1 where he actually begins his experiments. I think the second approach makes more sense because later in 2:12-17 he's going to deal with wisdom and follow. So it's better to view this as Solomon explaining to us what his procedure was, or, you might say, his mode of research, how he decided to gather his information and give us the report card that all is vanity.

In 1:12 Solomon says, **I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.** Note the switch from 3rd person in verse 1 where we read, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David..."<sup>1</sup> to the 1st person in verse 12, **I, the Teacher.** So he's resuming verse 1 but he's doing so now in a much more personal way. And once again he refers to himself as **the Preacher**, which is *qohelet* and better rendered "the Teacher." **Preacher** may sound respectful to the uninformed, but I hope you don't refer to me that way. It has too many goofball connotations. The word is fine but I'm no preacher in the sense most people think. I'm a teacher and Solomon is a Teacher. The word means one who convenes an assembly for instruction. And that's what I do, instruct. And what Solomon is doing is instructing them in his experiences as a carnal believer, and how they turned up empty, so he's a negative example, he's saying this is how not to do it.

And then we have a little part in verse 12 that is used by every liberal scholar to argue against Solomonic authorship. They read this phrase, **I...have been king over Israel in Jerusalem** and they argue that Solomon couldn't have said that because Solomon was the **king over Israel** all the way until his death. So there was no time before Solomon's death when he could say **I have been king over Israel**, as if he was no longer. He could only say **I am king over Israel**. And therefore they argue that this was either a slip by the author or an intentional wording to tip us off that this is not Solomon but someone in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century writing as if they are Solomon. But this is a weak argument because the verb tense **have been** can be translated one of two ways, Wright says, "The perfect tense **הָיִיתִי** (*hāyītī*) can be translated either as "I was [and am no longer]" or "I have been [and still am]." The second meaning would be applicable at the end of Solomon's life when he cited the fruit of his experiences."<sup>2</sup> So the fact that the translation says **I...have been king** does not mean that Solomon no longer was **king**, and therefore does not negate Solomonic authorship. Unger said, "Koheleth was *still* king and was about to describe the results of his *past* experiences during his long reign."<sup>3</sup>

A further point is made in verse 12 that he was **king over Israel in Jerusalem**. This would indicate that he was **king over** all twelve tribes, and this means it has to have been prior to the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, because when Rehoboam came to be **the king over Israel** the kingdom was divided and from that point forward the northern kingdom was known as Israel and the capital city was Samaria, not **Jerusalem**. So again we have it confirmed that Solomon was the **king over Israel in Jerusalem**.

But why was verse 12 included? Certainly not to simply confirm for us that Solomon was the king. No. The main point of why verse 12 was included is to inform us of the privileged station in life that Solomon had, so we know that this man had at his fingertips every possible means to conduct his research. Remember, Solomon was a very wealthy man. He had his own personal allowance of more than 50 million dollars a year. So, Solomon could have endless resources to carry out his research. And this means that the research that this man is going to show us is not piddly research. It's not little five and dime games. But he's going to investigate with the best that money can buy.

Now in verse 13 we see his method laid out. **And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven.** Let's look at this method. He says, **I set my mind.** The Hebrew for **mind** is *leb*, which is often translated "heart." The word can mean the actual physical organ we call the heart that pumps blood through the human body. But it's obvious it's not being used that way here. The Hebrew also uses "heart" for the mind, which is why they've translated it "mind." And the reason the Hebrew does that is because they don't have another word for mind or brain. They figured people would be smart enough to know from the context whether heart referred to the physical organ or the mind. But today Christians come along and they say, "Oh, you've got head knowledge, not heart knowledge." Then the next thing they do is quote 1 Cor 8:1, "knowledge puffs up..." by which they mean intellectual knowledge. Now what they have done here is created new definitions of head and heart. They have divided the concepts whereas in the Bible the concepts are never divided. And what they are doing is trying to put you down. They are saying they are so spiritual, they have this deep seated faith and they usually connect this with an emotional experience or piety, and you are not really spiritual because you just have knowledge, you're all intellect and no emotion. But the Bible never makes that distinction. All they are trying to do is feel spiritual and by doing this they are adopting an unbiblical concept of spirituality and emotions. Head knowledge is heart knowledge and it always precedes true spirituality and controls our emotions. So don't listen to these nitwits that have bought into a pagan separation of head and heart knowledge. It's not biblical, it's Kantian neo-orthodox philosophy. So here is Solomon and he says he **made up his heart to seek and explore**, meaning he made up his **mind**. And technically, the Hebrew for **mind** means "the thinking, understanding and deciding center of a man."<sup>4</sup> And Solomon is saying, I thought about what my procedure would be and I decided **to seek and explore by wisdom.**

Now the words **seek and explore** are not the same word, nor are they synonyms. The word **seek** refers to a depth of knowledge. When you are seeking something you look closely, so it's a penetrating look. And Solomon decided he was going to take an in depth look at things. He was not going to take a surface look. He was going to penetrate deeply into various areas of life to see if they bring happiness and significance. The other word is **explore** and this refers to a breadth of knowledge. When you explore something you are moving around a large area, so it's looking at the scope of investigation as being very broad. And, of course, we'll find that he investigated every possible area of life. So what Solomon is saying is that he made up his mind that his procedure would be in depth in terms of penetration and broad in terms of scope.

Then he tells us his procedure would follow a certain method. He says, **by wisdom**. This is the instrumental case, by way of, so his method will be "by way of wisdom." And it's this word that we have to spend some time on so that we don't get the wrong idea of **wisdom**, because most people when they come to this word think of a philosopher or a sage, one who sits around and thinks all these ideas in his head. But that's not the idea here. This Hebrew word is *chokmah*. And depending on the context it has a variety of meanings, but at the root of this word is the concept of "skill." We think of professions where skill is required to accomplish a task. The Bible uses "wisdom" this way when it refers to it in Exod 28:3, "You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom. That they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me." The expression "skillful persons" is "wise of heart," which again refers to understanding. And God had endowed them with "the spirit of wisdom" to be able to make these garments. And the clear concept is "skill." They had skill as seamstresses and therefore were considered wise. It can also refer to divine view point wisdom and Solomon certainly had that in his earlier years, and particularly in the area of politics. It meant he had godly skill in leading the nation Israel and deciding issues of justice. But that's clearly not the intended use in this context since Solomon is going to do these experiments from the flesh. So it must relate to a third concept of wisdom and that is human view point wisdom. And this is the usage in 1 Kgs 5:10 where we read that "Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt." Actually you see both the concept of divine view point wisdom where it applies to Solomon and the concept of human view point wisdom where it applies to all the sons of the east and Egypt. And there really is no comparison of the two. And the reason is because the source of divine view point wisdom and human view point wisdom differ. They don't come from the same place. They don't start in the same place. Divine view point wisdom starts with revelation. Revelation is the doctrine that God has revealed Himself in human language and that through study of that revelation we can gain skill in living. So the source of divine view point wisdom, or skill, is revelation in the Scriptures. But human view point wisdom does not start with revelation, but experience. Experience this and experience that and through that acquire knowledge. And that is a meaning in the Hebrew lexicon and that is the meaning here. What Solomon decided to do as far as his procedure was concerned, was to experience everything he could, as in depth as he could, and that is what he means in verse 13 where he says that his procedure will be by **wisdom**, he means by experience, which is the starting point of acquiring human view point wisdom. So the conclusions he draws are not going to be based on the experiences of others, but his own personal experiences, he's going to do his own experiments.

Now as far as the expanse of what he is going to investigate by experience, he states clearly in verse 13, **concerning all that has been done under heaven**. So this is going to be an all-encompassing investigation. Every area of life is going to be personally investigated by Solomon. But note that the phrase **under heaven** modifies all these areas. And what he's saying is not something silly, like, stuff on earth. Of course it's going to be stuff on earth he experiences. That's not the meaning. The phrase **under heaven** is a synonym for verse 3, "under the sun."<sup>5</sup> And that's the expression that means looked upon from a mere earthly perspective, that is,

from the flesh. I'm going to look at every area of life without respect to anything beyond the sun, without respect to God, just on their own terms and I'm going to personally experience them and act as if I am in my own little play pen and find out if there's anything there of real substance.

Now in verse 13 he gives his preliminary analysis of this procedure. **It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.** The words **grievous task** mean in the Hebrew, "an evil task." And what Solomon is saying is that **God has given** us this evil task. He's blaming God. It's God's fault. And this is what all Christians do who are out of it, living in the flesh, living out of fellowship with God. Something bad happens and they blame God, something good happens and they congratulate themselves. It's always the flesh when you see people pinning evil things in their life on God. "Oh God, why have you done this to me." If God were to answer He'd say, "Hey, don't blame Me, when the universe left my fingertips it was perfectly good. It's not My fault there's evil in it. It's your fault. You are the guys that sinned in Adam. So don't come to me with, 'Why God? Why have you allowed this to happen to me?'" And that is what Solomon is saying. "Oh God, why did you give the **sons of Adam** this evil task, which is the way it should be translated. Why did you give **the sons of Adam** such a evil task? It's your fault. And it just **afflicts** us. And his point there with that Hebrew word **afflict** is that if you go down this path of personal experience, and you decide you are going to investigate every area of life; you're going to try to find happiness in money, you're going to try to find happiness in drugs, you're going to try to find happiness in success, you're going to try to find happiness in popularity and all the rest of it, when you come to the end of the line you're going to give up, but even though you give up, you're still going to be pricked to try to find happiness. You just cannot forget about it. You're not an animal. An animal could care less, he just eats the next blade of grass and keeps chomping. He never thinks about the meaning of life. It doesn't matter to him because he's not a son of Adam. But you are, and therefore, even if you say to yourself, alright I give up the quest, you can't. It just keeps bothering you and you find yourself occupied with trying to stop thinking about it. And that my friend is why the suicide rate is skyrocketing. People are saying there's just no meaning, but that's not all they're saying, because if that were all they were saying then that would be the end of it. But that's not the end of it. They can't stop being bothered by the fact there's no meaning. And the only way they can stop being bothered is just to eliminate themselves. And that is why as Western Civilization has moved farther and farther away from biblical Christianity the suicide rate has gone up and up and up. People want answers and they're not down here under the sun. They only come from beyond the sun. But people don't want to look there so they get afflicted trying to find it down here to the point they say, "I'm done. I'm checking out." And that is Solomon's analysis of his research project.

Now in verse 14 and 15 he gives the results of his research. **I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after the wind.** It's real simple, I have seen firsthand everything that has been attempted to find meaning in life down here **under the sun**, apart from God, and conclusion, **all is vanity and striving after the wind.** I don't know if you've ever chased the wind before, but

you can never catch it, and that's what this is saying, you can't find meaning. You can try anything and everything and you'll never figure it out. It's just **vanity, chasing wind** around.

In verse 15 he continues and expands on the meaning of **vanity. What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.** What he's saying here about **crooked** is that the world is fallen. The world is a messed up place and try as you may to fix it, you can't fix it. Later in 7:13 he's going to say "What God has bent who can straighten?" And he's blaming God again for messing the whole world up. And it's true that God did curse the world, but the reason He cursed it is because we rebelled against Him and so He cursed the world so that it would rebel against us and we would learn the lesson that we are rebels. So, of course we can't fix the fallen world. Oh, you can make this little detail of life better, and that little negative you might be able to be relieve, but there's always another nuisance you need to fix. We simply cannot straighten out this crooked, messed up world. Then what he says about what is **lacking cannot be counted** is simply that how many things need fixing before they are all fixed can't be known. There are too many things in this world that are messed up. You just go on forever trying to fix them but there's always another one. And his point is its just vanity and that is Solomon's initial results of his research. I set out by personal experience to find meaning in life through all these avenues, I came to the conclusion that all I'm doing here is chasing the wind here and I'm never going to find meaning because the world is all messed up and there's no end to the needs to fix it.

Now in 1:16 Solomon restates his initial situation but in more detail. You'll see him do this from time to time. He'll give you the big picture and then he'll go back and give you some of the details that led to the conclusion. The big picture is vv 12-15, the details are vv 16-18. So verse 16 is parallel in thought to verse 12. Verse 12 was his station in life that gave him such an advantage. That's where he said, **I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.** Verse 16 is parallel to that, but it explains how this position gave him an advantage. **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."** This is something Solomon was saying in his own soul. We call this soliloquy, and it means you're talking to yourself. And it's quite obvious that he was saying this in arrogance because notice who he attributes his wisdom too. To himself. **I have magnified and increased wisdom.** Well, it wasn't you who did it Solomon. It was God. God gave you the wisdom. But he doesn't give credit to God; he gives credit to Solomon. Oh, I'm so great! So he went into human view point wisdom.

And look who he compares himself to, **all who were over Jerusalem before me.** And this is where the liberals seize the opportunity to try to discredit Solomon as the author again. They say that if this was Solomon then he forgot that there was only one king in Jerusalem before him, David. And that betrays that whoever did write this wrote it centuries later and under the guise that they were Solomon. But the problem with this argument is that Solomon did not compare his wisdom to only kings *over Israel* in Jerusalem, but to all kings in Jerusalem. And when that is observed we see that Solomon is comparing himself to every king in Jerusalem, no matter what

people he ruled, which would include Melchizedek in Gen 14:18, Adoni-Zedek in Josh 10:3 and Abdu Heba in the Amarna Letter, among others.

And at the end of verse 16 he now comments on his **mind** or heart. **And my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.** By which he means that as king he had access to all the abundance **of wisdom and knowledge** that men had acquired. He had these visitors come into his court. And so not only on the basis of his own personal experience of these things, but on the experience of others who had great personal assets, he made these observations. And so we are to know that Solomon was in an advantageous position. If anyone was going to discover meaning down here under the sun, starting autonomously, with the self and one's own personal experience, it was going to be this man.

In verse 17 he gives you a parallel to verses 13-14, which are his initial conclusions. There he said in v 13, **I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom** and his initial conclusion at the end of verse 14 is **all is vanity and striving after the wind.** And here in v 17 he says, **And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after the wind.** Now I'm going to have to re-translate this because the translators got it wrong here. In verse 17 the Hebrew verb **to know** has two objects, **wisdom and knowledge.** The NET Bible translators saw this and you'll see both **wisdom and knowledge** in that translation, whereas it's absent in yours. But it's there in the original. So what he made up his mind to do is to know wisdom and knowledge; but his conclusion was that it's **madness and folly.** So we'd translate "I set my mind to know wisdom and knowledge; that it is madness and folly." And what does he mean by its **madness and folly.** He means it's vanity. It's just another description of vanity. The word **madness** means "foolishness." And it's just foolish he says, to try to find meaning by all this experimentation that I'm going to share with you. Now the other word is **folly** and it's something of a synonym. The word means rash behavior, as someone who is just doing stupid things. And the reason Solomon said what he was doing was stupid was because it was stupid what he was doing. He was trying to find meaning apart from God and that can't be done. But he had to go through all this to get to that conclusion. Which he states clearly at the end of verse 17 **I realized that this also is striving after the wind.** It's just vanity. You can chase wind all day long and all night long and you'll never catch it. That's what it's like trying to find meaning down here by experimenting with this and that. You're just chasing your tail.

Now verse 18 and then we'll evaluate this in light of the NT. **Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in pain.** Now, remember, in verse 17 I added that word **knowledge** to the translation. And here in verse 18 you can see it was there. It's also in verse 16. So here's the reason why it was all vanity. And the reason is because as you get more skill in living by experience you just experience more **grief.** You can't avoid it. Get out there and experience more and guess what you'll see a lot more of. Bad things. And that will cause you grief. You just see more and more problems in the world and it vexes your human spirit. That's what the news will do to you constantly. You have a lot of grief because you're coming into contact with



all kinds of terrible things at a fast rate. And by parallel he also says, **and increasing knowledge results in pain.** I think everybody knows this. The more you learn about the world around you the more information you discover and its painful. Sometimes you want to turn the Television off and just go live in a box, because all that does is give you notice of what's going on in the world and it's painful. That was Solomon's conclusion why all his experimentation that we're going to see was futile. It brought more grief and more pain and so what's the point? There's no solution to all of this anyway. So what Solomon has done is laid out his procedure for gathering data. He's going to personally plunge into this mess. And he's already laid out the initial conclusions or his analysis.

Now we're going to do our own analysis by looking at the same things from beyond the sun. But before we do let's briefly review. In 1:12 Solomon lays out his advantages for making a thorough investigation. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem. In verse 13 he explains that he made up his mind to do an in depth and broad search for meaning by way of experience that gives rise to human view point wisdom. He concluded this was an evil task that God had given to the sons of Adam to be bothered with. In 1:14 the results, after looking at everything from the standpoint of the flesh, he concluded that all is vanity, just chasing wind. In 1:15 man cannot undo the effects of the Fall, every time we fix something we find something else that is broken. In 1:16 he begins to recapitulate vv 12-15. Soliloquizing with his soul Solomon arrogantly expressed his magnified and increased wisdom above any other king in Jerusalem. And his broad experience of observing an abundance of wisdom and knowledge in his court. And yet he concluded that making up his mind to know wisdom and knowledge were nothing but madness and folly, a striving after the wind. In 1:18 he states the reason, because the more human wisdom you have the more grief you encounter, and the more knowledge you have the more pain you realize. That's Solomon's analysis and now we'll give ours.

What we're going to do is give the corrective to Solomon's flawed procedure. First, what's the correct starting point for investigating any topic? Solomon started with experience and through the door of experience he hoped to discover meaning. What's the proper procedure? Turn to Col 2:2-3. Paul is speaking of his struggle on their behalf and he says at the end of verse 2 that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." They are hidden in Him. So Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God, is the starting point for all wisdom and knowledge. Note the word A-L-L and circle them in your Bible. All means ALL. You can't go into any area of life and find any significance apart from starting with Jesus Christ. That means mathematical study. You can't study numbers and how to combine them and find any meaning in that apart from Jesus Christ. Numbers don't even exist without Jesus Christ. You can't study history. History is his story and it's a revelation of Him and if you cut yourself off from that, like Solomon, you're going to have a flawed analysis. The starting point for meaning and significance is looking at the world through divine revelation hidden in Christ. And that means that if you are trying to find meaning by multiplying your experiences and gaining knowledge through them you are on a dead end track. The only way to find meaning is to start with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is God incarnate and if He is not the starting point for investigation, then you can forget ever finding meaning. That's

the first corrective to Solomon's search for meaning. He started in the wrong place; human experience. You start in the right place; divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, and then there is meaning, all is not vanity. Second, is there any answer to this fallen world? Solomon said there is no answer, "What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted." That just means there is no end to problems. But turn to Rev 21:1. This is John in vision. He says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away..." and come down to verse 4, "and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." So all the problems introduced by God because of our rebellion against Him will be taken away. So He will make straight what is crooked. There is an end to all the problems, for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Solomon didn't have this in mind when he was in this phase of his life and so it's a very pessimistic outlook. But the optimism comes from looking at things from beyond the sun, from the divine view point.

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<sup>1</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Ec 1:12.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stafford Wright, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1155.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1076.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ec 1:16.

<sup>5</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Ec 1:13.