

## Dr. Al Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 8

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In the previous lectures, we've spent time looking at the prominent motifs of the book of Ecclesiastes.

And I do believe that this kind of approach is an appropriate approach for the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is very cyclical in the sense that you find repeated motifs that come up again and again and again throughout the book. Along with stock words and phrases that we must understand to be able to accurately understand the meaning of the book as a whole.

Its message is dependent upon an accurate understanding of these phrases and these themes. And so, a thematic approach is appropriate, but I think it would be perhaps lacking if we weren't to spend some time directly dealing with the text itself in a linear fashion. Going from chapter one all the way through chapter twelve of the book of Ecclesiastes.

So, in this lecture, I'd like to spend time in a running exposition of chapters one through six. And then in the next lecture, in our final lecture, we'll spend time doing a running exposition of chapters seven through twelve of the book of Ecclesiastes or Kohelet. You'll hear me in doing this running exposition frequently using terms that I've exposed you to in the prior lectures.

And so Hebrew words, those stock words that are so unique to Kohelet, that are so important in the theology and the message of Kohelet, we're going to use. I'm going to be reading out of the NIV translation, but again, I'll interject some of these keywords and do a little bit of running commentary as I move forward in this running exposition. So, Ecclesiastes chapter one and verse one.

The words of the teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem. And again, the teacher is our Kohelet figure. By the way, this is something that I don't think I've dealt with in a prior lecture, but the Hebrew title for this book is Kohelet.

So, the book's title is named after this key figure, Kohelet. Ecclesiastes actually comes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Kohelet. And you can kind of get that sense of ecclesiastical or ecclesia, an assembly, a gathering that some might be familiar with from their studies of New Testament theology, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church.

And so, you get this sense of an assembly or a gathering. Remember, the term Kohelet that is translated by the NIV teacher or by the King James Version as Preacher, that term is a participial form of a Hebrew verb, kahal, which means to

gather or assemble. And as I've noted before, the question becomes, is the Kohelet the one who gathers people or assembles people to teach them? That's implied by the epilogue in chapter 12, but also, we find that the teacher is one who gathered and amassed wisdom.

And so, in some sense, he's both. He's a gatherer of wisdom and then he's a dispenser of wisdom to the people, the Kohelet. We find the Kohelet referenced in first person as well as in third person throughout the book, and so that adds some unique features, literarily, to our reading of Ecclesiastes.

So, these are the words of the Kohelet, the preacher, the teacher. Some identify him with Solomon, given the introduction here, son of David, king in Jerusalem. And certainly, we see a Solomonic identity with the Kohelet, even if Solomon is never mentioned by name in the book.

His introductory statement, hevel of hevels, the NIV reads meaningless, the KJV vanity, some translations, futility. And we've looked at this keyword, Hevel, before. I'll use that regularly when we see it here in our reading of the text throughout.

Hevel of hevels says the teacher, the Kohelet, utterly Hevel, everything is Hevel. This is actually in the superlative, and so basically, he's making the proclamation and the judgment right from the very beginning of the book, setting the stage for the dilemma of Hevel. And as we've looked at before, hevelness kind of becomes a symbol of sorts for the fallen world and everything that takes place experientially and observationally in a fallen world.

The wise man has great vexation over the fact that everything that he sees and experiences around him seems to be permeated by this fallen condition, this hevelness. And he's not able to resolve the problem. And so, we're going to join him in a quest, in a journey, as we deal with the text and as it unfolds.

In the opening question, what I would call an interrogative question rather than just simply a rhetorical question, verse 3. What does man gain from all the labor of which he toils under the sun? The word gain here is the Hebrew word yitron. I understand this word to be a solution to the dilemma of Hevel. Now I know that's a bit of a semantic stretch there, but again Kohelet tends to do things with words that we don't necessarily find in lexicons and dictionaries.

The word yitron, in a more literal sense, means surplus or profit or gain, as you see in the NIV translation here. It's something that is left after, and so thus the term profit in a merchandise transaction kind of a context. But Kohelet doesn't seem to be using the term in that sense, in that kind of a context.

And with the idea of hevelness being so front and center in the book, it seems as we move forward the word yitron takes on this kind of allusion to something which resolves the dilemma. Something which extends beyond the hevelness of this world that might actually bring a resolution to the problem of life's fallenness. Now we know in biblical theology, and as we extend our way throughout the rest of scripture, we find that God does provide a solution to hevelness.

As a matter of fact, in Romans chapter 8, we find that Paul says that this corruption that we experience in the present world, is not the end game. There's a redemption of creation, and of course a redemption of humanity, the redeemed themselves, that is dealt with in Romans chapter 8 and elsewhere, especially in the New Testament. But Kohelet doesn't necessarily see things from that full revelatory perspective.

He's simply observing life under the sun, as a wise sage might do, and it's not from a backslidden perspective. It's certainly not from an idolater's perspective, at least as we read the book of Ecclesiastes we don't see that kind of indication. But it is a limited perspective, and wisdom itself is limited because wisdom is implemented by a mortal being.

Kohelet's not divine, and he does not see things as God does, and the very fact that he doesn't see everything that God does actually adds to the vexation because it's beyond his grasp as a man to resolve the problem of life's fallenness. So the goal, the quest, as a matter of fact, it's kind of interesting, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, the message, as he paraphrases the book of Ecclesiastes, he refers to the Kohelet as the quester, and he actually translates the Hevel term, smoke. And so his introduction would be, smoke, smoke, all is smoke, says the quester.

And so we see this kind of quest, this journey, I would call it a wisdom journey, to seek to see if there's anything that resolves the dilemma, the greatest dilemma that all mankind, all humankind, experiences, and that is our fallen mortal condition. So what yitrim, what gain, what solution might be found from a man's labor, his amal? Now this term amal is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, it refers to work and labor in a general sense, but here in the book of Ecclesiastes, it seems to be that amassing of effort that is done or undertaken in this Hevel experience that we all live in, a fallen world, to see whether or not an amal, a work, a toil, a kind of effort, provides any solution that lasts beyond the grave. And we find that Kohelet discovers that whether you amass a little or you amass a lot, whether you strive and you labor and you toil, or whether you just cruise through life, either way, it goes, you can't take anything beyond with you to the grave.

In any case, beyond this opening question, this interrogative question that really sets the quest or sets the journey before us for what Kohelet is seeking to find, we have an introductory poem. And so, in chapter 1, verses 4 through 11, there's a poem

regarding the cyclical nature of life. And so, this is very observational, and it's very tied to God's creative order.

And so we find that God creates cycles in life, and we find that in the rotation of the earth, we find that in the various seasons and such, but we find that that cyclical nature doesn't provide any kind of an endgame. And it's that endgame, it's that resolution to the life experience that we all commonly have in a fallen world, that Kohelet seems to be seeking for, that he seeks to discover. And he finds right away from the very opening of the book that the cyclical nature of life tells us from creation that we're really not going to find a resolution to the dilemma of life's fallen condition.

In other words, when God cursed the world in the Fall in Genesis chapter 3, we were kind of stuck into a routine by that. And we're not going to get out of that routine until revelation, redemption takes place in the creation of a new heavens and new earth. And I'm of course extending beyond what Kohelet actually tells us by saying that, but it does seem like the present experience of the cycles of nature and the cycles of life indicate some sense of heaviness that we experience without a resolution naturally to Yitron, a resolution to the dilemma of Hevel.

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north.

Round and round it goes, ever returning to its course. And so that cyclical sense is permeating this poem. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, there they return again. I would suggest that he's alluding perhaps here not just to nature, but nature is almost representative of here what we find in a mortal condition, from dust to dust. A new birth comes, but that birth too is heading towards the grave.

And then another generation comes, only to pass away to the next generation. But one generation does not know what the next generation is going to be involved in. And so that frustrates the wise man because there's no lasting legacy that a man can extend beyond his own mortal years.

All things are wearisome, wearisome to a wise man who knows this, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. And so even on an individual level, and we're going to see some of this applied through the lens of wisdom later on in chapters 4 and 5, especially Kohelet realizes that a man seeks and amasses great wealth and treasure, and he doesn't even have enough.

Even though he might gain millions and billions in our modern terminology, he might still never be satisfied by the work of his hands. And a billionaire too must go to the grave. And so just amassing treasure for treasure's sake, Kohelet is going to deem later on as pure folly.

What has been will be again, again pointing out the cyclical nature of life and even history. History tends to repeat itself, not just nature. What has been done will be done again.

There is nothing new under the sun. And so, this under the sun phraseology we're going to be exposed to frequently throughout the book, under the sun is really just simply a matter of perspective. It's not necessarily life lived from a fallen perspective in a backslidden state, but rather from a mortal or horizontal perspective.

The wise man is only able to see so much as he observes life under the sun and experiences it as a mortal being. Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new? Now again, we want to be careful not to read this into every aspect of living.

The video camera that I'm speaking about right now did not exist in Kohelet's day. In some sense, that's something new. An iPhone, an iPad, cell phones, and modern things that we experience, are new things in some sense.

But Kohelet is simply saying that life tends to repeat itself both historically as well as naturally, and there's nothing that brings about some kind of a change from the mortal fallen condition that the earth was cursed with back in Genesis chapter 3. There is no remembrance of men of old. This, by the way, becomes a mini motif in the book of Ecclesiastes, the idea that there's no lasting legacy, again, even from the wise and the wealthy. And even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow, and so this thing of no lasting legacy repeats itself onward and onward.

After the opening poem here that establishes the cyclical no-Yitron situation that we find in this world, Kohelet speaks in the first person, and he waxes eloquent regarding his own qualifications to be able to undertake this journey to see if there is any resolution, any Yitron to the Hebel condition. I, the Kohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to studying and exploring by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

By the way, the variation here to under the sun is nothing more than a literary variation. I don't think this is a different perspective than the under the sun perspective here. Notice that Kohelet is going to seek and explore this issue through the lens of wisdom, and we're going to find that this affirmation is repeated multiple times in the next segment of scripture, in the next segment of verses.

We also find here that his journey to find Yitron is something that becomes an obsession for him. He devotes himself. He's uniquely qualified, and he's very purposeful.

He's very intentional in what he is seeking to do here. What a heavy burden God has laid on men. We explored that word burden in an earlier lecture.

It's the Hebrew word inyon, and inyon is found multiple times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. As a matter of fact, we find that this idea of inyon, much like Hebel, much like Yitron, much like Amal, work or labor, needs to be understood in the unique way that Kohelet seems to be using it here. It's not just a burden on one's back, such as laboring in a field might entail, but rather it's a kind of sense in which man is obligated to find, or able perhaps to find and discover and explore, and yet is ultimately incapable of, through the implementation of wisdom, of actually coming to a solution.

And again, this is all focused on the issue, the problem of the heaviness of life. Man is mortal, and yet he recognizes that there's something beyond him, but he's not able to grasp it. He's not able to resolve it and master it.

And so, for the wise man, an inability to actually get to the end of the line, that's a frustration. It becomes a heavy burden laid upon man. I've seen all things that are done under the sun.

All of them are meaningless, or Hebel, chasing after the wind. Now the companion phrase to Hebel that we find quite frequently, especially in chapters one through four of Ecclesiastes, ret ruach, is the idea of chasing after or grasping after the wind. Now Hebel, as we explored in an earlier lecture, literally means mist or vapor.

It's something that is ephemeral. It's something that is transitory. In the unique way in which Kohelet uses the term, it also becomes something which is sometimes futile or vain, and thus the KJV's translation, Vanity of Vanities, and you'll oftentimes find that word Hebel 38 times in the book, translated vain or vanity by certain translations.

And so, when you see something that is described as a grasping after the wind, you really do get the sense of futility there, because it's impossible to actually grasp the wind and pull it back. You just can't get it out or into your hands. You can't master the wind.

And Kohelet recognizes that the Hebel-ness of life and the mysteries of life, they can't be grasped. In some sense, it's rather ironic that through the implementation of wisdom, ultimately wisdom is Hebel, in resolving the dilemma of Hebel. And so in

that sense, all of these achievements and all of the wisdom that man might be able to bring to the table, none of this was able to resolve the problem, the problem of Hebel-ness.

What is twisted cannot be straightened. What is lacking cannot be counted. Now this is simply a proverb, but it's a proverb that describes the dilemma that Kohelet is wrestling with here.

In other words, man is unable to straighten what God has made crooked. Man is unable to add to something that God has meant or made to be lacking. In other words, man's wisdom is ultimately unable to resolve or move beyond what God has desired to be.

I thought to myself, look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me. We noticed in an earlier lecture that that does seem to be a somewhat awkward statement for Solomon to make. Again, it doesn't make this just rule out Solomonic identity here, but it is interesting that only one king reigned over Jerusalem before Solomon, and that was David.

And so this kind of a statement does seem awkward, although Solomon could have, quite frankly, been just using superlative language here and hyperbolic language to just simply stress the fact that he was as wise as possible or as wise as any man had ever been, and he was uniquely qualified to undertake this quest or this journey. I've experienced much of wisdom and knowledge, and of course, we see that in Solomon's narratives in 1 Kings 3-11. Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom and also of madness and folly.

Now this is somewhat difficult, right? Because we see that Kohelet affirms the fact that the quest that he has undertaken is being made through wise eyes. It's through the lens of wisdom that he explores these things that are described as hevel, and he seeks to find a resolution to the problem of hevelness. But in the process of doing so, he's also going to not leave any rock unturned.

He's going to also explore whether or not folly and madness, are kind of a parallel to folly, it's really the polar opposite of wisdom here. If wisdom's not able to supply a resolution to the dilemma of hevel, then perhaps the opposite will. Perhaps folly and madness provide something that man might be able to bring to the table.

And the question ultimately becomes, in a fallen world, is it a better thing to pursue folly and madness? Kohelet is ultimately going to say no. He's going to say a man who walks in folly is like a man who walks in darkness. He stumbles over things.

He is not able to achieve and he is not able to extend his... In other words, you're going to find that folly is not embraced in a positive sense throughout the book of

Ecclesiastes. But our Kohelet figure here, in the autobiographical segments of chapters one and two, he's going to say, hey, I've checked it all out. I've looked under every rock, so to speak.

And I've discovered that none of this is able to provide some resolution to the dilemma of life's fallen condition. So, he applies himself to understanding wisdom and also madness and folly. By the way, it's through wisdom that he observes and experiences and even flirts with madness and folly.

So again, he's looking through the lens of wisdom even as he explores madness and folly through wisdom. But I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. It's something that cannot be grasped.

For with much wisdom comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief. And this isn't necessarily saying that wisdom is bad or that wisdom is going to necessarily make you a great pessimist.

But he's simply saying that the wiser he becomes, the more he realizes that this can't be grasped. This cannot be resolved. It's kind of like you'll hear scholars in various fields.

They'll talk about the more that you know, the more you realize that you don't know. And so we sometimes among college students will talk about freshmen coming in and acting as if they know everything. And by the time they graduate, they realize how far they still have to go.

And so, when amassing wisdom, the wise man says, I've actually discovered through my wisdom how little I really understand about the universe and about the way things work. And I realize how ultimately unknowable these things are. And so this brings him additional grief and vexation.

We'll see that kind of a motif borne out later on in the book as well. Continuing the autobiographical line of thinking here, I thought in my heart, come now I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good. Again, through wisdom he tests pleasure, he tests madness, he tests folly.

But that also proved to be hevel. In other words, pleasure, madness, folly, all of these things, they too were not able to provide anything beyond the present experience. Laughter, I said, is foolish.

As a matter of fact, later on, when he explores by wisdom various proverbial statements regarding how one might find advantage in a fallen world, he finds that laughter and the pursuit of folly, it ultimately is like a crackling of thorns. It's just noise, it's nothing beyond just noise. And what does pleasure accomplish? I tried



cheering myself with wine and embracing folly, my mind still guiding me with wisdom.

Again, Kohelet is experiencing all things possible in order to discover whether or not there's anything to provide a resolution in this journey. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven. Again, another variation to the under the sun phraseology.

It's not here as if he's looking down from heaven, it's not as if he's pursuing something through godliness or holiness in this phrase, whereas elsewhere he's pursuing something from a backslidden worldly perspective. He's just simply saying that I'm checking all things out here, under the sun or under heaven, basically synonymous, during the few days of their lives. And so, the transitory nature of a hevel existence, a mortal existence, is being highlighted here, the few days of their lives.

I undertook great projects. I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

We know from antiquity that the kings and nobility of the ancient world, they derived great pleasure from the building of parks and gardens and such things. It kind of showed off their grandeur, their greatness as kings. I made reservoirs of water grown flourishing trees, and so Kohelet was able to master the waterways to irrigate the cities.

I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born into my house, so he was a wealthy man. It makes me think of Job. In the introduction of the book of Job, Job is described as the greatest of all the men of the East.

And then it goes on to describe his flocks and his herds. In the ancient world, an amassing of these kinds of things demonstrated a man's greatness. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers and a harem as well. Now it's kind of interesting, a lot of folks will read the word harem here, and of course, we think about Solomon, we think about 700 wives and 300 concubines, and we say, yeah, harem does make sense if this is Solomon.

It's actually kind of interesting. This word harem is actually a word that is found only once in the Hebrew Bible. And when you think about it, if you only have a word found once in the Hebrew Bible, and remember dictionaries and lexicons, they don't come fallen out of heaven-inspired, and so scholars try to wrestle with exactly what

this word might mean behind the word harem, and you'll see translations go in different directions.

Some translations actually translate this treasure chests, or in other words, some kind of an amassing of wealth. And so, this isn't necessarily saying that the Kohelet had all of these women, and he's pursuing some kind of a hedonistic quest for pleasure. I mean there is some sense in which the text here is describing an amassing of all these things, and he certainly sought after pleasure and folly and madness to see if any of that brought any kind of lasting value.

But I wouldn't read too much into this concept of a harem here. But it is perhaps referring to a harem. Certainly, the greatest men of the East, or the kings of the ancient world, would have amassed harems, and so this wouldn't seem too out of line for that.

The delights of the heart of men, treasure chests, and wealth, as well as harems, could be described that way. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all of this, my wisdom stayed with me.

And so, it's somewhat interesting here, Kohelet seems to be saying, I've gained it all, and I'm uniquely qualified to search out whether there's anything that might be able to provide some kind of a lasting legacy beyond the great. Anything that might be able to provide some resolution to the problem of the fallenness or the heaviness of life. I'm exploring this all by wisdom as I investigate and experience myself through the amassing of the great things that I've been able to gain and achieve in my life.

And so again, Kohelet is uniquely qualified in wisdom as well as in wealth. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure.

Again, he leaves no rock unturned. My heart took delight in all of my work, and this was the reward for my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done, and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was hevel, a chasing after the wind.

Nothing was gained, there was no yitron found under the sun. And so really chapter 2 and verse 11 here seems to bracket or work in companionship with chapter 1 and verse 3. In chapter 1 and verse 3, Kohelet asks, what yitron is there to be found under the sun? And after amassing all these things and exploring through wisdom, madness and folly, pleasure, and the amassing of great wealth, Kohelet discovers that in this, no yitron is found. So, then he continues on.

I turn my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly, paralleling back again to chapter 1 and verse 7. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? Kind of makes you think back to the poem on the cyclical nature of life, chapter 1 and verse 9. I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is

better than darkness. Now he sought to find what was worthwhile in life. We're going to find later on that Kohelet is going to seek not just yitron, ultimately yitron is not to be found in the book of Ecclesiastes, but he seeks to find what is tov, what is better.

And here we get the first glimpse of a kind of better-than-theology, wisdom theology in the book of Ecclesiastes. He finds that wisdom is better than folly as he explores the merits of both. He found that wisdom is better than folly just as light is better than darkness.

The wise man has eyes in his head while the fool walks in darkness. But I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both, and that is death. We explored the inevitability of death as a prominent motif earlier on in an earlier lecture, and here we get a glimpse of the inevitability of death that repeats itself again and again and again throughout the book.

In other words, wisdom is better in the here and now, but the problem is that wisdom still provides no lasting yitron. In other words, wisdom is going to kind of be leveled out by the great leveler of all things, the equalizer, death. And so the fool and the wise man both too must die.

Then I thought in my heart, and by the way we would refer to these as reflection speeches in a literary sense, the fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise? There's no yitron to be found in wisdom. I said in my heart, this too is hevel.

And by the way, the hevel idea oftentimes takes on the aura of judgment, and so it's as if Kohelet says I observe hevelness and I proclaim it as hevel. In other words, there's this negative connotation that comes along with many of the indictments against life lived in a fallen world. They're proclaimed as being hevel.

For the wise man, like the fool, will not long be remembered. Makes us think back to chapter 1 in verse 11, where though there is no remembrance of men of old, they will not be remembered by those who follow. And so, he repeats himself.

That very cyclical nature of repetition that we find in the book of Ecclesiastes is characteristic of the book. For the wise man, like the fool, will not long be remembered. In days to come, both will be forgotten.

Like the fool, the wise man too must die. The inevitability of death. And so Kohelet proclaims after observing and experiencing and reflecting upon these things, says, so I hated life.

Now naturally when somebody reads that, they think, okay, this is really pessimistic, isn't it? But you have to remember in the line of argument of Kohelet, he's simply voicing his vexation. He's a wise sage musing over these things, and it vexes him. It frustrates him.

There's no shortage of angst in Kohelet as he observes the dilemma, and I think the dilemma is an appropriate word, for life lived in a fallen world, where wisdom is incapable. It's not able to grasp anything that provides a lasting resolution. So, he hates life, I hated life, maybe a bit hyperbolic here, but again in the line of argument, remember Kohelet is not just simply saying, I'm a death monger, I'm just simply frustrated by what I see here, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me.

It was ultimately unable to amass anything that would provide a resolution. All of it is hevel, all of the stuff is hevel. The effort that is extended and expended in the pursuit of these things, it's a chasing after the wind.

Ruach, again, a chasing after the wind. I hated all things I had twirled for under the sun, because I must leave them to one who comes after me. We saw that theme at the end of the poem on the cycles of life.

Someone who comes along and later on Kohelet is going to say, this person could be a fool. Who knows whether he would be a fool or a wise man, yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and the skill that I have under the sun. This too is hevel.

In other words, I labor and I toil, I strive, and there's no ceasing to this striving, and yet I can't take any of it with me and I might leave it to somebody who is a fool, who squanders it and folly. So, my heart began to despair, this is why he hates life, over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then he must leave it all to one, all he owns to someone who has not worked for it.

This too is hevel and a great misfortune. And so, no labor and no achievement extend beyond the grave, and it might actually be squandered after you've come and gone. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving for which he labors under the sun? All his days, his work, his amal, is pain and grief.

Even at night, his mind does not rest, so the stress kind of carries over even into the nightfall into sleep. This too is hevel. And so, in light of the toil of labor, Kohelet resolves to find something which is good, something which is better.

And here in verse 24, we begin the first of our Enjoy Life refrains. A man can do nothing better, our wise man observes, than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too I see is from the hand of God.

For without him who can eat or find enjoyment? And we're going to see throughout the Enjoy Life refrains that Kohelet recognizes that good things come from the hand of God. I would describe these as graces, that wisdom that a wise man is able to recognize and even extrapolate in understanding that all of this anxious striving and all of this toil and labor, which is ultimately unable to produce anything, this must not be the pursuit of man, but rather the reception of the common or the regular gifts that God provides in a fallen world. So, this too I see is from the hand of God.

To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner, He gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to one who pleases God. This too is Hebel, a chasing after the wind, right? Ruach. So, there's no product of labor that extends beyond the grave, but in the here and now, man does have a capacity to nevertheless receive the enjoyment that God provides as a gift to him.

So even in the midst of all this angst and toil and grieving, Kohelet finds something that is nevertheless better, something which is good. And we're going to find this kind of thinking extended and explained in more detail throughout the book. Now chapter 3 begins with a poem, a very interesting poem, a poem on time.

Time becomes a mini-motif throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, we're going to see the issues that are dealt with regarding time in chapter 3 repeated again in chapter 8. Chapter 3 begins with a statement that I believe is the front end of an inclusio, a bracketing that ends with chapter 3 in verse 17. And this issue of time is a very flexible concept that seems to reflect the activity of God as well as the activity of man as man seeks to navigate through a fallen and oftentimes rather challenging world. And so, the beginning of chapter 3, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.

And what follows is a set of binary pairings in a parallel fashion with some chiasmic arrangement in verses 2 through 8. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down, and a time to build. A time to kill parallels with a time to tear down, a time to heal parallels with a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

So there seems to be some escalation there in verse 4 between the parallel lines. Weep and mourn, laugh and dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain.

Now this issue of scattering stones and gathering stones could be euphemistic, could be a kind of an idiomatic statement perhaps regarding sexual activity. This would seem to parallel with a time to embrace and a time to refrain. Others believe that scattering stones and gathering stones is simply referring to some activity in terms of warfare and such in the ancient world.

A conquering army would come in and scatter stones throughout fields or maybe it might be a matter of scattering stones and tearing down fortifications and things of that kind. The problem with that of course is that there doesn't seem to be a very sensible parallel to embrace and refrain unless we're dealing with the kind of embrace where there might be a treaty or some kind of an arrangement of peace. But it's rather ambiguous as many things in Ecclesiastes are.

A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away. And so again we find a parallel arrangement between search and keep and throw away and give up, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak. And so, tearing and mending here might have something to do with relationships here given the parallel to silence and speaking.

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. And so we saw in an earlier lecture dealing with the poem on time that time is a very flexible concept. We might refer to a period of time as a point in time, in other words, a particular date, maybe even a particular time of the day, or we might be referring to something that is more substantive.

In other words, a concept of time such as a good time to do this or to do that. I mentioned in an earlier lecture that if it snows two or three feet for a skier we might refer to that as a good time to ski. Or if you're talking about a beautiful evening you might say this is a good time for a cookout, to eat out, or something like that on the patio.

And so, there are different senses in which time might be used in the Hebrew language as well as in the English language. The Hebrew word that is used throughout the poem on time is *et*. And again, it's a very flexible term like our word time in English is.

And the issue in the poem on time becomes what sense of time is Kohelet actually referring to here? And as we explored in that earlier lecture there are some senses of time in which God might be the subject. It might be that God determines the times, a time to be born and a time to die makes some sense there if God is the one who determines the time of one's death which certainly seems to be characteristic of Kohelet's thinking elsewhere in the book. You also have the issue of God's establishment of the cycles of life.

In this sense, the poem on time would tend to mirror the opening poem on the cycles of life in nature that we find in chapter one. You also have God designing things according to their times so suitability in time becomes an issue here. That seems to be supported by chapter three and verse eleven.

He has made everything beautiful or suitable in its time and certainly, a wise man would need to learn to recognize the suitability in God's design of the times and God's orchestration of the way things ought to work in this heaven world. But we also have various ways in which time might be interpreted with man as the subject. A wise man needs to know how to navigate the times and certainly wisdom can be described in large part as the implementation of precepts in order to be able to navigate life's uncertainties and timing becomes a major element in navigating life's uncertainties.

And so, a wise man will know appropriate times. A wise man will know when is the proper time to do this or to do that. As a matter of fact, in one of the proverbs in chapter ten, we find that Kohelet makes reference to a proper time, a proper et, in reference to the proper time to eat.

And so there we find appropriateness of timing with man as the subject. And then we also find that timing becomes a major element. In other words, when you talk about, for instance, certain disciplines I was thinking about comedy.

Comedy is oftentimes a matter of timing. Right? And so sometimes it's a matter of a wise man implementing the proper timing. Not just knowing the appropriateness of when things ought to be, but also being able to implement in their activity a proper timing to when to speak and when to refrain from speaking or when to embrace and when not to embrace.

Those kinds of things. And actually what you find is you kind of catalog through the poem on time with these binary pairings and their parallel structure. You find that there's not a uniform sense in which time seems to be described throughout the poem.

In other words, you could say that the poem is about God's determined times. In other words, God determines the time in which things ought to take place or do take place. And that would make sense with some of these like a time to die, but it really makes very little sense with others such as a time to weep and a time to laugh.

God doesn't necessarily dictate the time in which an individual laughs or weeps. And so there you have more a sense of man as the subject, the appropriateness. Man will know when it is appropriate to do this or to do that.

Or it could be that God has designed suitability in time. Perhaps that's the meaning behind weeping and laughter. God has made suitable times for weeping and mourning and suitable times for laughter and that kind of activity.

And so, as you work your way through the poem on time, I would suggest keeping in mind all five of those senses in which time might be understood. And just like with the Hebel concept and other ideas in the book of Ecclesiastes, it almost seems as if Kohelet is kind of wrapping all of these ideas together. As a wise man navigates a fallen world, wisdom demands an understanding of God's design of the times, God's design of suitability in times, and God's ultimate determination of the times.

Even as a wise man makes decisions, ultimate outcomes are always contingent upon God. And so, God determines when certain things do occur, even if man must navigate and make decisions in an uncertain future. We find also that Kohelet certainly could be emphasizing man as the subject throughout the poem.

And man in the necessity of man as a wisdom being, as one who implements wisdom to navigate the times and to understand these things. And so, what you find here is that inherent flexibility that is so frequently employed through poetry. And I think that's one of the reasons why Kohelet uses a poem such as this to be able to communicate so many ideas and wrap it into a very terse and concise structure.

Now verses 9 through verse 14 seem to comment on the poem in time. And so, with verse 9 we have again a question, What does the worker gain what Yitron is that is to be found from all his amals? Seeming to repeat what we found back in chapter 1 in verse 3 with the introductory question. Now it almost seems to be stated as a rhetorical question here.

In other words, I continue to search and I have not yet found. I have seen the burden, the inyon, we saw that back in chapter 1 in verse 10, or verse 13. I have seen the burden, the inyon, that God has laid on men, the sense in which there is something beyond, and yet he is unable to grasp the timing of these things and even unable to grasp the reality beyond the grave.

He has made everything beautiful or suitable in his time. So, in God's activity of things, in God's design of things, there is appropriateness in time, there is regularity or consistency in the times, and yet man is not able to grasp these things. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

And so, this motif of the imposition of limitation by a sovereign God, God keeping man in such a place where he's never able to get a proper footing, grasping all things which God does. By the way, not only is wisdom found in the book of Ecclesiastes to be ultimately incapable of providing anything lasting for man, but wisdom also is



found to be ultimately incapable of discovering in a concrete way and grasping and managing the divine. I know that there is, with verse 12, what we find here is another enjoy life refrain, and so within these musings on time, Kohelet then jumps into this next refrain, I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live, that everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil.

This is the gift of God. I know that for everything, I know that everything God does will endure forever. Again, as opposed to man's activity, what God does will endure forever.

Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it. God does it so that men might revere him. As I stated in an earlier lecture, this is the one place in Scripture that I'm aware of where there seems to be some answer to the question of why.

Why is it that man is not able to have one up on God? Why is it that man is not able to master the divine? Why is it that God allows things to happen in this world that keep men on unsure footing? When man discovers something that he thought he might have figured out but then he examines or he observes an exception to that, such as the righteous getting what the wicked deserve, why do these things occur? Well, ultimately, in a very broad sense, God does it so that man might fear him. Again, I like to align this back to Genesis chapter 11 in the Tower of Babel situation. What mankind sought to do in the building of the Tower of Babel was to achieve divinity, to achieve some sense to grasp the divine, to have one up on God.

What we find in Ecclesiastes is that God imposes a limitation upon mankind so that man might never have one up on him and so that man might fear or revere God. Even a wise man is going to recognize that ultimately through the implementation of his wisdom, he's never able to have any guaranteed securities. And we see this reflected in the Proverbs that follow.

Whatever is has already been and what will be has been done before and God will call the past into account. Now this might be reflecting some sense of accountability regarding the deeds that one has done but the Hebrew here is rather ambiguous. The way that the NIV has translated this would imply as much that God is going to call the past activities into account, kind of setting the stage for some kind of a judgment that follows in verse 17.

And I saw something else under the sun. In the place of judgment, wickedness was there. In the place of justice, wickedness was there.

And so Kohelet observes that certain things occur that seem to not make any sense even in a life, in a world where God has designed suitability in the timing of things. There seems to be an absence of a suitable place for God to meet out judgment in its

appropriate time. And so, I thought in my heart, and Kohelet is going to muse over the possibility of some kind of an afterlife judgment here.

God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked for there will be a time for every activity and a time for every deed. And the language here is very similar to what we find in chapter 3 from verse 1 in my view seemingly to bookend and bracket this whole segment together. It is interesting that in chapter 3 and verse 17, this expectation of some form of judgment seems to align itself very well with the conclusion to the whole book in chapter 12 in verses 13 and 14.

As a matter of fact, the language is virtually identical there. I also thought as for men, God tests them so that they might see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals.

The same fate awaits them both as one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath. Man has no advantage over the animal.

Now Kohelet here is not speaking about annihilationism in some kind of theological sense. He's not writing a systematic theology textbook. He's simply observing from an under the sun perspective that man has no advantage over the animal.

In the same sense that he did in chapter 2 where he says the wise man, just like the fool, both too must die. Wisdom has no advantage over folly in terms of the inevitability of death. Man has no advantage over the animal in terms of inevitability of death now in chapter 3. All go to the same place.

All come from dust and to dust all return. For who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into earth. Now in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 7 after musing over the aging process, Kohelet does seem to recognize that mankind will return to his creator but at this point, he's simply observing a dust to dust kind of a situation.

He's observing that man goes to the common grave just like the animal. So, I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to eat or for a man than to enjoy his work because that is his lot. Or as I stated in an earlier lecture his allotment.

This is the Hebrew word *heleq*. And now we've been kind of reading through and we've seen a number of enjoy life refrains at this point. I spent time with an entire lecture dealing with the enjoy life motif and the enjoy life refrains and their escalating nature and we looked at some of the key terms that are employed in these enjoy life refrains.

We looked at the function of these enjoy life refrains. At this point I would just remind you that the enjoy life refrains seem to be set within the context of Kohelet's

musings and observations over the heaviness of life. It's not as if he waits to the very end of the book and says I've seen all of this ugliness and all of these problems that mankind and wisdom was ultimately unable to grasp and master and so I'm just going to kind of concede that you might as well just kind of kick back and enjoy life now.

He's basically saying here that in the midst of all of this God nevertheless provides heleq's graces, allotments, whereby man might be able to find joy, simcha, in life. And it's not the idea of some kind of a hedonistic pleasure but rather some kind of a God given joy that man is able to extrapolate out of the very simple pleasures of life that God grants him with. It's a matter of perspective in large part.

Does a man strive and toil to amass treasures that he cannot take with him or does he receive from God the gifts of life and take advantage of those gifts in the present? That is a question of wisdom and that is a question that Kohelet suggests is such that a wise man will embrace and explore. And so, he finds that there is nothing better, even in light of the inevitability of death, for a man than to enjoy his work because that is his allotment, that is his gift. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Again, this idea is that man cannot see anything beyond the grave.

Now with chapter four, we continue on with this idea of Kohelet's observations and some of his reflections based upon those observations. And these observations again are made from an under the sun perspective concerning life lived in a fallen world and some of the things which are representative of and elements or aspects of life lived in a fallen world and certainly in a fallen world we're all familiar with suffering. Suffering is something that is a common experience.

If you've never suffered you're probably just too young. There's going to be an experience of suffering in your life. And we all know others who have suffered probably far greater things than we have.

And we look at life in that kind of a context and obviously that's not something that encourages but rather it discourages. And so, we find that reflection voice in the words of Kohelet beginning in chapter four. Again, I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun.

And so Kohelet lived in a world where injustices were common. We live in a world today where injustices are common. I have a friend of mine who described life in one particular country as a kind of life where people just had to budget bribes because it was the only way that you could get by in life.

And so, it was a world saturated by a culture of corruption. And we know situations like that in whatever context that we might live in today. And we know situations of great suffering.

Today as I speak there are refugee crises happening all over the world. People who have been displaced. We recognize that these are people who seemingly lack any kind of a comforter.

And so Kohelet observes these things. He says I saw the tears of the oppressed. That they have no comforter.

Power was on the side of their oppressors. This is the kind of language that is common among the prophets as they observed the powerless and the powerful and how the powerless had no voice. And they have no comforter.

And I declared that the dead who have already died are happier than the living who are still alive. Again, Kohelet's not necessarily making a theological statement here against the sanctity of life. He's simply saying that suffering is no way to live.

Now again, Kohelet is not looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 1 which talks about the God of all comfort. We recognize that we're dealing with two different contexts here. Kohelet from the under the sun perspective is simply suggesting that this is no way to live.

And he would actually be quite vexed by it. He says this is hell. This is not right.

But better than both is he who has not yet been who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. Maybe hyperbolic, but Kohelet is simply saying if life is the life that is lived only to suffer, then it's better to not live at all. To never have been born.

And I saw that all labor and all achievements spring from man's envy of his neighbor. And so it's not just a matter of amassing great things, but the motivation behind that striving, behind that toil, whether it be greed, whether it be envy, Kohelet is going to call all that too, hevel and folly. A man's envy of his neighbor, this too is hevel and chasing after the wind.

The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. Now Kohelet, the wise man, is going to be quite apt to launch into proverbs of wisdom here.

And Kohelet recognizes that while there is no lasting gain to amassing great things and treasures, as he has even experienced himself, following after the Jones's next door, as we would like to say here, that kind of envy of one's neighbor that prompts some people to pursue treasures and wealth, Kohelet says that's folly, but let's not just give up on labor. In other words, a man must work in order to be able to eat. And much in line with the wisdom of the book of Proverbs, we find that the sluggard, the lazy man, never gets anything in life.

And so, Kohelet is going to say, it's a fool who folds his hand, recognizing that all these things are ultimately for naught. Nevertheless, a fool would be one who would fold his hands and do nothing, ruining himself through that laziness. But a wise man is going to, in his pursuit of things, not pursue things that he can't take with him.

And so better one handful with tranquility and satisfaction than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. A word of wisdom. Again, I saw something meaningless or hevel under the sun.

There was a man all alone, he had neither son nor brother, there was no end to his toil. Yet his eyes were not content with all of his wealth. And so again, it's not just a matter of envy that prompts an amassing of wealth, which is ultimately just toil and folly, but it's also greed, one who is never content with what he owns.

For whom am I toiling, he asked, and why do I deprive myself of enjoyment? Ultimately, a wise man recognizes that greed for only the sake of amassing wealth, that is folly. This too is hevel, a miserable business. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work.

If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Now, Kohelet is going to launch into this idea of things that are better than, and he's going to discover that it is better for a man in this world to find companionship in his labor because he is able, through that, to be able to gain a greater advantage in this life.

And so again, it's just simply words of wisdom in a proverbial sense. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? This isn't necessarily saying that it's, you know, folly to be single and it's wisdom to be married or anything like that. He's just simply saying, life in this heavenly world is meant to be shared and life in this heavenly world as shared is a life that is more advantageous.

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. In other words, the wisdom here is simply stating that there is strength in numbers in a fallen heaven world.

Launching in chapter 4 in verse 13, Kohelet begins a kind of example story. Again, keeping on with this better-than motif. Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take a warning.

The youth may have come up from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no end to all the people who were before him, but those who came later were not pleased with the successor.

This too is Hebel, a chasing after the wind, right? Ruach. In other words, popularity was ultimately fleeting, and even while one man rose to the occasion and rose up in the ranks, ultimately there was not any kind of a lasting security to this. This too, Kohelet observes to be Hevel.

And so, with the amassing of treasures and wealth, the amassing of wisdom, and even the amassing of power, ultimately none of these things provide any kind of stability, nor can any of these things be brought beyond the grave. In chapter 5, Kohelet gets into some musings over reverence before a divine God. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.

Go near and listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. In other words, a wise man recognized his position before the divine. A wise man has the appropriate posture.

As a matter of fact, we looked at this in an earlier lecture on the fear of God, a matter of wisdom being described as the knowledge of God, an orientation, a proper orientation to God. Here we find Kohelet describing in more detail this proper orientation and reverence before God. Do not be quick with your mouth.

Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so that great chasm between the two that Kohelet reflects upon in his theology of God and man. So let your words be few, as a wise man would suggest.

If you recognize who God is, you're going to be careful as you come before him. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. And so much in line with the book of Proverbs, we find that Ecclesiastes, that Kohelet, describes the folly of being hasty with your language, especially as you stand before God.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. In other words, don't be rash with God, and don't be frivolous with God. He has no pleasure in fools.

Fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Again, more better-than statements.

Do not let your mouth lead you to sin. You know, just as much as the book of Proverbs states, there is great capacity within our mouth, within our words to do

great harm and trouble and to lead one into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, my vow was a mistake.

Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are hevel. Again, much in line with the teachings of Proverbs, being hasty with and being voluminous with your words often leads to folly. Kohelet would say words are hevel.

They are ultimately vain and fleeting. Therefore, stand in awe of God. If you see the poor oppressed in a district, in chapter four we saw a bit of Kohelet's musings over injustice.

Here we see in a political scheme, Kohelet also observes oppression. If you see the poor oppressed in a district and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things. In other words, corruption is something which is very typical in a hevel world, in a fallen world.

For one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them, both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all. The king himself profits from the fields.

Now the Hebrew here in verse nine is rather ambiguous. Some translations would actually read that the king is one who balances things out. In other words, affirming the role of the king and the role of government in squelching corruption.

Other translations such as the NIV would go so far as to suggest that even the king himself might be culpable in such a culture of corruption. The Hebrew would allow you to go either way there. It would seem a little bit awkward for Kohelet as a king, as he describes himself, to be dismissive of the activity of the king, so that is something to consider.

Nevertheless, this culture of corruption that is evident within the Hebrew world certainly seems to be very clear in verses eight and nine. Verse ten. Whoever loves money never has money enough.

I mean, that kind of describes the extremely wealthy in most cultures, always seeking to amass more and more. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. A little bit of irony there.

Most folks in the world think if only I had a little bit more if only I had a little bit more, I would be satisfied. Kohelet, the wise man, recognizes the folly in such a way of thinking that there's always going to be something more that mortal man seeks to achieve. This, too, is evil because, in the achievement of those things, nothing lasts beyond the grave.

As goods increase, so do those who consume them. Somewhat of an irony that most of us have experienced as we have grown older and perhaps grown to be a little bit more wealthy or a little bit more financially stable. We find that our increase in wealth also is accompanied by an increase in bills, and an increase in expenses, and so it seems like there's never enough, and that just seems to describe the pursuit of chasing after something that mankind can never fully achieve to its satisfaction.

And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? In an earlier lecture, I was describing one gentleman that I once knew who, in his later years in life, even as he saw that death was coming in just a short time, he gained great pleasure in just looking at his bank statements. And that was all for naught. He couldn't take any of that bank money anywhere beyond the grave with him.

The sleep of the laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich man permits him no sleep. Again, a great irony that the laborer who has little is able to rest in a form of peace at night while the rich man who is anxiously striving for more and more is all in an anxious bubble there, and cannot even find rest in sleep. Verse 13.

I have seen a grievous evil, again a negative judgment, under the sun, wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner. So, it's not just a matter of wealth being amassed for nothing, but now you've got the irony, the ironic situation of wealth being amassed only to bring harm to its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune. And we've all probably known some who have lost things due to something that was not a part of their own or not because of their own responsibility or their own doing.

Sometimes in a corrupt society, people are scammed. People lose things in a hevel world and Kohelet is vexed by that. He would call that a great misfortune.

So that when his son, so that when he has a son, there's nothing left for him. Earlier on, Kohelet was vexed by the fact that a person could die with great wealth and leave it to somebody who comes after him and squanders it. Now you've got somebody whose great wealth has been lost due to misfortune, and now he can't even pass on an inheritance to one who comes after him.

Basically, the point here being that in a hevel world, man comes into this world with nothing, and in some sense, ultimately, he leaves with nothing. Naked, a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hands.

In this sense, wealth and treasure is hevel. This, too, is a grievous evil. As a man comes, so he departs.



What does he gain since he toils for the wind? It's great folly to be toiling after something that you can't take with you. All his days he eats in darkness with great frustration, affliction, and anger. Just as life lived in misery due to poverty or some kind of terrible affliction is a grievous thing, even when one prospers in this world, if through the process of prospering in this world, they found nothing but frustration, affliction, and anger, Kohelet says that's no way to live.

That's no way for a wise man or a wise woman to live in this world, especially given the fact that God has provided opportunities for enjoyment. And so, he affirms once again the enjoyment of life. Then I realize that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun, rather than find vexation and frustration, find satisfaction in the simple gifts that God gives you.

For this is his lot, his helot, his allotment. The wise man will observe and know the opportunities that God provides for him to find enjoyment. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, again, wealth in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, Kohelet's thinking, and enables him to enjoy them, if you're able to enjoy the things that God has gifted you with, to accept his allotment, his helot, and be happy in his work, this is a gift of God.

It's a matter of perspective. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart, rather than occupied by vexation and frustration, occupied with enjoyment and gladness of heart. But Kohelet waxes on.

I have seen another evil, in a long list of evils or grievous judgments that Kohelet observes in this fallen world, I've seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily upon man. Again, inyon, this heavy burden. God gives a man wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them.

Now this is somewhat interesting, isn't it? That you've got a situation where Kohelet observes a man who, because of his own doing, is unable to enjoy his wealth and his treasures that he amasses throughout his life, but now you've got a situation where God seems to keep a man from being able to enjoy the wealth and the things that he has gained in this life, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is hevel, a grievous evil. Once again, Kohelet is vexed by the fact that, even through the implementation of wisdom, knowing what is proper and good, and knowing how to best be able to receive the gifts from God that a man might be allotted, he finds that sometimes God gives and then takes away.

Much in line with the way that Job explained that early on in the book of Job. You find that this too, Kohelet cannot figure out. Why would God give to a man only to take it away from him? You think of tragic situations, for instance, where in a hevel world a man could seek a wife, and God finally grants him a wife only to take that

wife away, or maybe a couple seeks a child, and God grants them a child, and you wonder what sense does it make for God to give them that child, only to see that child tragically lost in some kind of an accident or something.

These are the kinds of things that Kohelet observes in this world, that as a wise man, he just can't figure it out. A man may have a hundred children and live many years, yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive a proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. Kohelet is all about the implementation of wisdom to find the possibilities in life, and if a woman cannot find enjoyment in the things that God has given them, then Kohelet is just not about that.

It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness, its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man, kind of reflecting some of the language that we saw in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3. Even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity, do not all go to the same place, again reinforcing that motif of the inevitability of death. All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.

Again, thinking back to chapter 5 and verse 10, where a man never has enough of. What advantage has a wise man over a fool? Reflecting back to chapter 2 and verses 14 and 15, where because of the inevitability of death, there was no advantage for a wise man over the fool. What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others? In other words, there doesn't seem to be any advantage.

Better what the eye sees, contentment, than the roving of the appetite, this too is heevel and chasing after the wind. Again, in some sense, even when a man learns to navigate life wisely, ultimately we're all still going to the same place. Whatever exists has already been named.

There's nothing new under the sun, thinking back to chapter 1. What man is has been known. No man can contend with one who is stronger than he. Remember in chapter 1 and verse 15, man cannot straighten what has already been made crooked.

I think in line of Kohelet's thinking here, it is God. When God dictates and when God designs, man is unable, ultimately, to take what God has designed and to change it in such a manner that man has power over the divine. The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone, thinking back to chapter 5, where the fool is described as one who has many words.

For who knows what is good for a man in life. If Kohelet was not able to find Yitron, he ultimately is looking for what is Tov. He's exploring and examining these things as we've seen through his various musings in chapters 4, 5, and 6 especially.

During the few and hevel days, he passes through like a shadow, pointing out the fleeting nature of life in this transient mortal existence. Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone? In other words, Kohelet repeats himself again. Man doesn't know anything about what takes place in the future, especially a future beyond his existence.