

Introduction:

The author continues in this chapter to unmask the illusion that wealth is something special. The attitude of most people living “under the sun,” is that those who have wealth have reached a special area of comfort, peace, and security that those without it do not have. They can buy whatever they want to buy, they have comforts and possessions to fill their lives with joy and excitement, they can travel and take life easy. They don’t have to work, and they have money to protect them from all the evils of life. So it seems anyway to those who are young and have not thought it all through. It is this illusive ability of money that leads some to put it in the place of God. God revealed in Chapter Five that this is not the whole story. There is more to wealth than meets the eye. There are unforeseen things that wealth brings with that negate its value.

1. There is no lasting satisfaction to money. The more one has the more one wants. 5:10
2. The more money one has the more people one has to support and the more responsibilities it brings. Many times wealth brings more headaches than it solves. 5:11
3. When all the veneer of the value of wealth and possessions is stripped away, the only real advantage of wealth and possessions is to look at it. 5:11
4. One of our most precious possessions is sleep. For many it takes about eight hours out of the day, and those who enjoy it are greatly benefitted from it. Wealth and possessions severely diminish the ability to enjoy sleep. 5:11
5. The tentacles and claws of wealth and possessions can be driven so deeply into the hearts of those who have it that they will actually hold on to their wealth even when it hurts them and they would be better to get rid of it. People have lost friends, families, health and even their lives in their quest for it. 5:12
6. Those who go through all the effort and toil to gain riches and then successfully master it then later lose it are in a very sorry state of mind. 5:13
7. In the final analysis “life under the sun” begins when one enters naked and it ends when one leaves the same way. This means that all the labor put forth to gain wealth and possessions is actually a wasted effort. Truly “you can’t take it with you.” 5:14-16

God’s counsel is to take a pass on wealth as a pursuit of life. If it comes as a matter of course, enjoy it and use it wisely, but don’t seek it. The real joys of life are eating, drinking and enjoying ourselves in all our labor. 5:18-20

The sixth chapter begins with another grievous evil that wealth can lead to.

1. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,

This is the fourth of five times that the word “evil” is used(5:13, 14, 16; 6:1, 2) in connection with the love of wealth and abundance. Since this term can refer to things that are unpleasant and painful in either the physical/emotional and spiritual/moral realms, each time it is used one must seriously ponder which is under consideration.

ra’ 7451, “bad; evil; wicked; sore.” ...Ra’ refers to that which is “bad” or “evil,” in a wide variety of applications. A greater number of the word’s occurrences signify something morally evil or hurtful, often referring to man or men:... Ra’ is also used to denote evil words ... evil thoughts... or evil actions... Ra’ may mean “bad” or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness: ... (Vines Expository Dictionary)

It appears in this case to be “*bad’ or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness.*” Those who set as their goal of life the accumulation of wealth and abundance may find this serious problem at their own doorstep some day.

and it is common among men:

before speaking of the evil itself, he first addresses the rationalization that it doesn’t happen very often and won’t happen to me. He has seen this happen over and over again. The word “common” is used when a writer wants

to describe something that either “great” or “large,” something that “represents plurality in number or amount.” or “numerical recurrence.” It refers to things that happen over and over and over again. happens so often, that it must be factored in as a real possibility of what could occur if we seek for wealth and abundance.

rab 7227, “many; great; large; prestigious; powerful.” This adjective has a cognate in biblical Aramaic. The Hebrew word appears about 474 times in the Old Testament and in all periods. First, this word represents plurality in number or amount, whether applied to people or to things. ... Rab is applied to people in Gen. 26:14:... In Gen. 13:6, ... to things: ... sometimes used of “large groups of people” Exod. 5:5. This basic idea of “numerical multiplicity” is also applied to amounts of liquids or masses of non-liquids: “And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly...” Num. 20:11; a “great” amount of water came forth. ... Used in conjunction with “days” or “years,” rab means “long,” and the resulting phrase means “a long time”: “And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines’ land many days” Gen. 21:34.... The word can be used metaphorically, describing an abstract concept: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,... Gen. 6:5--... The use of rab does not describe the relative value of the thing modified, but its numerical recurrence. ... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

There is a great multiplicity to this problem, it recurs very very often, and in a variety of ways. It is something that must be factored in to one’s assessment of the value of this quest, and should be seriously pondered before setting wealth and abundance as a goal in life. This particular problem may not be reported in the newspaper and we may not personally know many of them, but the inspired revelation that we must trust with all our heart is that this happens a lot.

2. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor,

Our gaze is directed to a man who has everything. He has riches and wealth. Both of these terms emphasize the accumulation of treasure, riches and wealth. He has been successful in all his endeavors, and not only has all that one could desire in possessions, but has also lived in such a way as to maintain and enhance the way others look at him. He is a man who has “honor” and a good reputation. This term takes in “honor,” “wealth,” “significant and positive ‘reputation’” “majesty,” and “splendor,”

kabod 3519, “honor; glory; great quantity; multitude; wealth; reputation [majesty]; splendor.” Cognates of this word appear in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Akkadian. It appears about 200 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods. Kabod refers to the great physical weight or “quantity” of a thing. The word does not mean simply “heavy,” but a heavy or imposing quantity of things.... Kabod often refers to both “wealth” and significant and positive “reputation” (in a concrete sense). ... The second emphasis appears in Gen. 45:13, where Joseph told his brothers to report to his “father... all my [majesty] in Egypt.” ... Trees, forests, and wooded hills have an imposing quality, a richness or “splendor.” ... Kabod can also have an abstract emphasis of “glory,” imposing presence or position. Phinehas’ wife named their son Ichabod, “saying, The glory is departed from Israel:... 1 Sam. 4:21). ... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

This is a man who has reached all that “life under the sun” can offer to those who are enticed to leave God’s presence and seek for what the world can bring.

Yet even though this is all done “under the sun” God makes it clear here that it was still through His providential care that any man gains such a position. This is a fact men often overlook, but God wants us to remember.

“In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. 17 Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth. 18 But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as {it is} this day.” Deut 8:16-18

in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Mt 5:45

“And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14:16-17

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. James 1:16-17

so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires;

All that success can bring is within this man’s grasp. He lacks nothing of all he desires. The goals he set earlier in his life have all been reached. His “desires” have all been fulfilled. That for which he made himself “wait longingly” “sigh,” “crave,” “long for” “yearn for” he has now gained. All the deferred pleasures and goals of youth have now been mastered.

183 ‘avah- to desire, to incline, to covet, to wait longingly, to wish, to sigh, to want, to be greedy, to prefer a) (in the Piel) to desire, to crave (food and drink) b) (in the Hithpael) to desire, to long for, to yearn for, to lust after (used of bodily appetites)

He now has a good reputation, wealth, riches, and everything he ever wanted. Few would not envy and wish for what this man has. Yet the next fact makes it all meaningless and futile. Fruitless and empty. There is no value to it at all once we read the next line.

yet God does not give him power to eat of it,

God does not even give the reason. He simply states as a fact that He controls all things and has determined that things are going to go differently than this man proposed. He will not have the “power” to eat of it. He will not “*have mastery*” “*dominate*” or “*exercise power over*” the remaining years of his life in the manner he intended.

7980 shalat- to domineer, to exercise power over, to dominate, to have mastery, to be master, to lord it over a) (Qal) to domineer, to lord it over, to become master b) (Hiphil) 1) to give power of 2) to get mastery of

The real point here is that man has so little control over his own life that it is foolish for him to make plans based on having that control. We cannot even see into the future let alone control it. This man reached all his goals and has a wonderful life ahead of him except for one problem. He does not have the ability to control tomorrow. What could happen? He could lose his health, or become paralyzed. He could die in an accident, be murdered, suffer a stroke, or heart attack without any warning whatsoever. There could be a war in which all the people are removed from their land, there could be an economic collapse and he ends up with nothing. He worked hard, won all that he desired, then had it taken from him just as he was to begin enjoying it.

but a foreigner consumes it.

It does not even go to his children or to someone he knows. A “foreigner” who did not work for it gets it. Someone who is “*unknown*” and “*unfamiliar*.”

5237 nokriy- foreign, alien a) foreign b) a foreigner (substantive) ... d) unknown, unfamiliar (figuratively)

It does not even end up helping his wife, children or those whom he loved. Someone who does not even know him ends up with everything.

This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

Whatever way this might come about, it is vanity. Vanity is “*used of what soon vanishes away,*” “*a vapor*” or “*bubble*.” It therefore aptly describes things that are “*empty, fruitless,*” “*meaningless or purposeless*.”

“... used of that which soon vanishes away, like vapour, or a bubble; to breathe, to become vain, insignificant and worthless... so very often of anything evanescent, transient, frail. Hence the signification vanity, something vain, empty, fruitless; specially of idols...” (Wilson 465)

hebel 1892, “breath; vanity; idol.” Cognates of this noun occur in Syriac, late Aramaic, and Arabic. All but 4 of its 72 occurrences are in poetry (37 in Ecclesiastes). First, the word represents human “breath” as a transitory thing: ... Second, hebel means something meaningless and purposeless: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” Eccl. 1:2. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

This one point makes wealth and the accumulation of possessions fruitless. It is such a waste of time and effort if it ends like this. For a man to work and toil and labor and reach all his goals and then have the right to enjoy it removed and given to someone he does not even know is not only vanity, it is an evil affliction(Disease-KJV).

choli 2483, “sickness.” This noun occurs about 23 times. ... The meaning of “sickness” occurs in Deut. 7:15: “And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases [madweh] of Egypt...” Choli is used metaphorically as a distress of the land in Hos. 5:13. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

It is a sickening and dreadful thing to think about. Words can hardly express how unfair and despicable it is. Yet it is a part of the sin-cursed world in which we live, and it is wise to take into consideration the possibility. There is not a man in his prime anywhere, no matter how successful he might be to whom this is not possible. Therefore all who seek for wealth as an end within itself should be warned and think through the risks. Even if they should get it all, it is a common thing that they never get to enjoy it.

3. If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many,

The Spirit continues to reveal how stark life without the power of enjoyment can be. Even with all the outward

signs of enjoyment and success a man can still have nothing. To illustrate this he speaks of a man who has begotten a hundred children. This would be considered a great blessing and crown of honor. A sign of success and prosperity.

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. 5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate. Ps 127:3-5

Added to this great gift, reward and blessing of many children is the additional blessing of a long life.

As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is {but} labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. Ps 90:10

Once again a wonderful outward success story. Who would not view such a man without feeling in their heart that they had been blessed with a good life? Who would not say that they had gained all that life has to give? Yet once again, by adding a few more facts, the stark and bleak reality is not at all what one would think.

but his soul is not satisfied with goodness,

This man's "soul" is not satisfied. The soul is the "essence of life," "the inner self," "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers."

nepesh 5315, "soul; self; life; person; heart." This is a very common term in both ancient and modern Semitic languages. It occurs over 780 times in the Old Testament and is evenly distributed in all periods of the text with a particularly high frequency in poetic passages. The basic meaning is apparently related to the rare verbal form, napash. The noun refers to the essence of life, the act of breathing, taking breath. However, from that concrete concept, a number of more abstract meanings were developed. In its primary sense the noun appears in its first occurrence in Gen. 1:20: "the moving creature that hath life," and in its second occurrence in Gen. 2:7: "living soul." However, in over 400 later occurrences it is translated "soul." While this serves to make sense in most passages, it is an unfortunate mistranslation of the term. The real difficulty of the term is seen in the inability of almost all English translations to find a consistent equivalent or even a small group of high-frequency equivalents for the term. The KJV alone uses over 28 different English terms for this one Hebrew word. The problem with the English term "soul" is that no actual equivalent of the term or the idea behind it is represented in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew system of thought does not include the combination or opposition of the terms "body" and "soul," which are really Greek and Latin in origin. The Hebrew contrasts two other concepts which are not found in the Greek and Latin tradition: "the inner self" and "the outer appearance" or, as viewed in a different context, "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers." The inner person is nepesh, while the outer person, or reputation, is shem, most commonly translated "name." In narrative or historical passages of the Old Testament, nepesh can be translated as "life" or "self," as in Lev. 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for [yourselves]...." Needless to say, the reading "soul" is meaningless in such a text. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

While outside observers might congratulate this man as being successful and having it all, his inner self is not satisfied. He does not feel "fulfilled," doesn't "have enough." Though he has all the things God created life to offer, they have not left him feeling satisfied. He keeps looking for something more. Always hoping that the next event might make life satisfactory.

"7646...sabea...saw-bay'-ah; a prim. root; to sate, i.e. fill to satisfaction (lit. or fig.): --have enough, fill (full, self, with), be (to the) full (of), have plenty of, be satiate, satisfy, (with), suffice..." (Strong p 113)

What is life worth to a man who has all the outward visible signs of success, but does not feel the inward ones? When he has all the goodness that life has to offer, but finds that it is not enough?

Such a man cannot find anything that will fill with satisfaction, nothing that gives enough, nothing that fills or satiates. He is always empty, never can he find anything that ever gives him the feelings that he has found the quality of goodness. When all this is added to the definition of goodness, it becomes clearer.

"2896...towb, tobe; from 2895; good (as an adj.) in the widest sense; used likewise as a noun, both in the masc. and the fem., the sing. and the plur. (good, a good or good thing, a good man or woman; the good, goods, or good things, good men or women)... also as an adv. (well):-beautiful, best, better, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, fair... favor, find, glad, good... graciously, joyful, kindly, kindness,... loving, merry, most, pleasant, + pleaseth, pleasure, precious, prosperity, ready, sweet, wealth, welfare, (be) well([-favoured])." (Strong p 45)

Goodness includes those things that make one "glad," "joyful," and "merry." Things that are "bountiful," "pleasant," and "sweet." Take these two thoughts and mold them together and what does one come up with? A man who can find nothing in this life that will satisfy him. Nothing in this life that brings any joy, or gladness. Can find nothing to find pleasant and sweet. The man who in his inner self never feels satisfied with anything

that this life has to offer. Whether this be his state of mind, or the circumstances he is living under is immaterial. The one who is never happy and knows nothing good or pleasant is not going to find any enjoyment in life.

or indeed he has no burial,

A second point is the man who “has no burial.” This term is defined:

6900 qebuwrah or qeburah- a grave, burial, the burial site a) a grave b) burial

One simple question offers the obvious meaning to this statement. When a man dies, who does he count on to bury him? Obviously his friends and family. If he has no burial, then it means that his life has been lived in such a way that he has no friends and family or they do not care enough about him to show him this honor at his death. If any man can live his whole life, and at the end of it can not find a single person who would be concerned enough about him to give him a burial or to attend his burial, would that be a life not worth living? A life of squandered opportunities and of misplaced priorities. A man who has a full bank account, but no friends, and no one who cares about him would indeed be living a life not worth living. When Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol”, this was the kind of man he had in mind. A man so possessed by his possessions that he never took the time to make a friend in the world. He never bothered to take the time to help anyone or to in any way keep friends and loved ones interested in him. What is the point to such a life? Where is the happiness? Where is the value and the joy? A life with no one who cares about one, and a life in which no one would even bother to attend the funeral would be empty. Better to be dead at birth than to live such an empty life.

I say that a stillborn child is better than he--

These are strong words, but they are true and they are something to be soberly reflected upon. The man who cannot find satisfaction in all that God has created for him to enjoy will find no value in life no matter how long he lives. If men and women cannot find joy, happiness, and contentment in the life God created for them, then they would be better off as a miscarriage.

5309 nephel or nephel- an untimely birth, an abortion, a miscarriage

This is one of those things that only God could say. No man would dare to make a statement like this. But it is in the inspired book. It warns us to listen to God and to trust Him with all our heart, and to gratefully enjoy the things He created for us to enjoy. Overreaching into things that are forbidden leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness that ultimately can lead to this situation. God is not content however simply to state it as a fact, he wants the reasons clearly understood:

4. for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. The reason for the above strong assertion is now offered. The still born child comes in emptiness, and departs in darkness. What a terrible let down for the parents, and for the child who was prepared to enjoy all that God had to give. The name which the parents had so lovingly selected to give this precious infant also is covered in darkness. This is the terrible circumstance of a child who dies before it is born. It is born in vain. There was no profit to it, all hopes are dashed, all plans emptied of their joy and the parents are left with great sorrow and grief. Yet this is not only true for the parents.

5. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything,

This infant never got to see the sun. Never knew the joy of being held by a mother, of feeling the love of a father. Never saw brothers and sisters, never enjoyed the spring or the summer, never knew the beauties of fall and winter. Never sat by the fire, never learned to love the things of this life, did not get to enjoy a meal and a good beverage, never enjoyed marriage and being a parent. It never knew any of this, but:

this has more rest than that man,

Koheleth maximizes the sorrow of the loss of life in a stillborn infant in order to show just how bad it is for a man who lives a full life but refuses to enjoy all that God has given, never being satisfied, always grumbling, complaining, and overreaching. The stillborn death of an infant is a horrible and terrible thing, a life cut off even before it began, but God states that the infant is actually in a better position in some respects than the man who lives many years, has many children, but is not satisfied and has no one to bury him. He has more rest. He has more quietness and peace.

6. even if he lives a thousand years twice over

Yet even this does not adequately finish the comparison. One could add to his wealth and children an additional 2,000 years of life and it still wouldn't make any difference. He would still have been better off to be a stillborn child. Consider this well! Even if he could be wealthy, have many children, and live 2,000 years, it would not change the comparison. The stillborn child still has the advantage.

--but has not seen goodness.

Here is the real problem and point of comparison. The term goodness is the same word used in verse three. They are the things in life that God has designed to make one "glad," "joyful," and "merry." The things that are "bountiful," "pleasant," and "sweet." This is also the term used in the first chapter of Genesis to describe all that God had made being "good." There are people who refuse to enjoy the things God created. They are not good enough or do not meet with his approval. Hence they refuse to see any goodness in life. Nothing is pleasant or sweet to them. They never feel glad joyful and merry as they experience the things God has created for them. With this outlook, there really isn't much difference is there? The man chooses never to enjoy the things spoken of above, while the stillborn child never has the choice to enjoy them. Neither sees any goodness, but the one who rebelliously refuses to do so is judged by God to be in a much worse condition than the one who had no choice. The child's life was squandered but he had no choice in the matter. The man squandered and wasted his life by his own choice.

Do not all go to one place?

The grave is as far as Ecclesiastes generally takes us. Though it is possible that he speaks of the eternal consequences involved in this, it does not make it any more powerful and leaves "life under the sun" behind. It seems best since the section has primarily focused on the naked came and naked left that we remain there here. Both the stillborn child and the man came naked and left naked. Both the stillborn child and the man never gained any enjoyment out of life, but the man felt dissatisfaction while the child did not. Though one lived 2000 years and the other died before birth. They both go to the same place and God concludes that the latter is better than the former.

7. All the labor of man is for his mouth,

The author now draws another inference about "life under the sun." No matter how hard a man works, no matter how much he labors and toils, this is the one fundamental reason for all labor. If man is to survive, he must eat and drink, and if we are honest, this is all we really labor for, and what ought to satisfy us. When Jesus and Paul later speak on this same theme, they add clothing

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 1 Tim 6:7-8

"Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." Mt 6:31-33

But there can be little fear of contradiction that of all these the most fundamental and basic need is for food and drink. If we could learn to be content in these realms we would be so much happier. It would lower the level of expectations to a degree where we would be truly happy.

And yet the soul is not satisfied.

Yet sadly this is not often the case. The natural state of the soul is not satisfied with such things. The "essence of life," "inner self," "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers." is not satisfied with the above. It should be! God counsels us that we feel "satisfied." This is a different word from the one used earlier. It means "to be full," "to be filled up" to the full extent of what is expected," and even "filling to overflowing."

male' 4390, "to fill, fulfill, overflow, ordain, endow." This verb occurs in all Semitic languages (including biblical Aramaic) and in all periods. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 250 times. Basically, male' means "to be full" in the sense of having something done to one. In 2 Kings 4:6, the word implies "to fill up": "And it came to pass, when the vessels were full,..." The verb is

sometimes used figuratively as in Gen. 6:13, when God noted that “the earth is filled with violence.”... Used transitively, this verb means the act or state of “filling something.” ... Male’ is sometimes used in the sense “coming to an end” or “to be filled up,” to the full extent of what is expected. ... Male’ is used of “filling to overflowing”-- not just filling up to the limits of something, but filling so as to go beyond its limits: “For Jordan overfloweth all his banks... “ Josh. 3:15. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

“... to be abundant and overflowing; to fill, as anything does a vacant space with its own bulk or abundance, with an acc. of place; to fill a place with anything, with an *acc.* of place, and of the thing filling, to fill up; to fill the hand... to be filled, to be full, with an acc. of the thing with which anything is full; to be filled with that which takes full possession of the mind; to be fulfilled or completed...” (Wilson p 164)

This is what the soul ought to be when it gets food. It ought to feel full to overflowing. Such a person will always be happy if they have such an attitude. Yet, no matter how much is stored away to that end, a man’s soul is never satisfied. There is always more needed. No matter how much in advance a man is prepared, he would always like a little more.

This seems to be the point here. Since you can never really be satisfied no matter how much you have that there is no point in beginning to walk down this path. There is no good reason for setting as one of our goals in life the complete fulfillment and satisfaction of the soul. The soul is never satisfied! It is never filled to overflowing, never filled to the full extent of what is expected. The most basic thing of life is the appetite, yet even when the stomach is as full as it can be, it is not long before man is thinking and pondering over the next meal. So it is with the soul. No matter how much one possesses, it is only a short time before one is seeking for even more.

8. For what more has the wise man than the fool?

The next few verses are among those difficult sayings that the Bible has from time to time that are capable of more than one possible interpretation. It is one of those places that after you read all the commentaries, you feel that they don’t really understand it either, but just did the best they could with it. With the same term used in verse 7(soul) and verse 9 (appetite) it is clear that Koheleth is still speaking of the desires of the soul. The most basic thing we learned in verse seven is that man works to eat. That’s how simple life can be broken down to. Yet without God’s help, direction and counsel, the soul cannot be satisfied. If this be the case, then it seems to me that the most likely meaning of this verse is that if both the wise man and the fool “under the sun” miss this most basic truth then how can one have an advantage over another?

The wise man knows how things work, he makes wise decisions and avoids many of the troubles and problems of life. The fool is dull, foolish and stupid. Because of his lack of understanding of things, he brings many troubles and problems upon himself while missing great opportunities that present themselves to him because he is too foolish to see them. No greater contrast of mind could be made than this. From the highest to the lowest, from the brightest to the dullest. Yet the haunting question: “what more has the wise than the fool?” The term “more” has the idea of “*superiority,*” “*advantage,*” and of being “*better.*”

3148 yowther- as a masculine noun: 1) superiority, advantage, excess as an adverb: 2) excess, better as a conjunction: 3) besides, moreover, more

Hence his question is actually a comparison. What advantage and superiority does the wise man have over the fool? What makes the wise man better than the fool? He doesn’t answer it either positively or negatively. Which is where the difficulty in the verse comes in. Before commenting further, we will examine the next question as well.

What does the poor man have. Who knows how to walk before the living?

The poor man is the man who is “*poor; weak; afflicted; humble.*” It generally emphasizes “*some kind of disability or distress.*” It is a person who must live “*from day to day*” and may be “*oppressed.*”

`ani 6041, “poor; weak; afflicted; humble.” This word, which also appears in early Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew, occurs in biblical Hebrew about 76 times and in all periods. This noun is frequently used in synonymous parallelism with ‘ebyon (“needy”) and or dal (“poor”). It differs from both in emphasizing some kind of disability or distress. A hired servant as one who is in a lower (oppressive) social and material condition is described both as an ‘ebyon and `ani: “Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy,...” Deut. 24:14-15. ... Financially, the `ani lives from day to day and is socially defenseless, being subject to oppression. ... The godly protect and deliver the “afflicted” Isa. 10:2; Ezek. 18:17, while the ungodly take advantage of them, increasing their oppressed condition Isa. 58:7. ... `Ani can refer to one who is physically oppressed: “Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine” Isa. 51:21. Sometimes the word means “humble” or “lowly,” as it does

in Zech. 9:9, where it describes the Messiah: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass..." (cf. Ps. 18:27; Prov. 3:34; Isa. 66:2). (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

This man is poor weak, afflicted, possibly even disabled and in distress, living from day to day on a limited means and possibly even being oppressed. We would generally consider such a person to be in terrible straits. Yet this one knows how to walk among the living. He is not like the man above, who was wise enough to live 2,000 years, have many children but was never satisfied. This man knows how to be satisfied. This one knows how to live his life among the living.

His wisdom has given him the ability to get along with people. Which one of these stations in life should be most sought after? Which has the most value and satisfaction. Work it out in your own mind. No one can be satisfied for no matter how much you put in your mouth, there will never be an end to it. Whether you are so rich you don't even know what to do with it all, or so poor you know not where your next meal is coming from, there is little difference in your feelings of dissatisfaction. Neither one is going to feel comfortable with what they have and both will wish they had more. Therefore what is the difference between the two? Why should the one be sought after then? From the standpoint of having or not having the fool and the wise man are in the same position.

The difference between them is the term "know." This poor man has "*observed*" and "*experienced*." He has taken the time to "*experience with the senses*." He has been "*investigating and proving*," then thought about it all carefully through "*reflection and consideration*."

yada` 3045, "to know." This verb occurs in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Arabic (infrequently), biblical Aramaic, and in Hebrew in all periods. This verb occurs about 1,040 times (995 in Hebrew and 47 in Aramaic) in the Bible. Essentially yada` means: (1) to know by observing and reflecting (thinking), and (2) to know by experiencing. ... In contrast to this knowing through reflection is the knowing which comes through experience with the senses, by investigation and proving, by reflection and consideration (firsthand knowing).... Consequently yada` is used in synonymous parallelism with "hear" Exod. 3:7, "see" Gen. 18:21, and "perceive, see" Job 28:7. ... Thirdly, this verb can represent that kind of knowing which one learns and can give back... In addition to the essentially cognitive knowing already presented, this verb has a purely experiential side. The "knower" has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing. ... (Vines)

This gives the poor man more than the man above. It should be the real quest for all "under the sun." It ultimately leads one back to God.

9. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.

This proverb captures the essence of the above. Rich or poor, wise or fool, if one can learn this truth, they can be happy "under the sun." All must learn how to be content with whatever they have. This is such an important truth that it is repeated three times in the NT.

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," 6 so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" Heb 13:5-6

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. Phil 4:11

And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 1 Tim 6:8

The term "better" is the same "goodness" that was used in verse 3 and 6. It refers to things that make one "glad," "joyful," and "merry." Things that are "bountiful," "pleasant," and "sweet." Things are much more pleasant and sweet when we have them. There is more joy and gladness in what we can see with our eyes. It is not wise to allow the dissatisfaction of the soul to make us want more than we presently have. We must not allow our "desire" to wander. The term translated "desire" was also used in verse Three and in verse seven where it was translated "soul" It is the "*essence of life*," "*the inner self*," "*what one is to oneself*" as opposed to "*what one appears to be to one's observers*." We must not allow the essence of our life which does not want to be satisfied to wander. It can lead to being unhappy with everything. Here is why covetousness is so ardently condemned. It leads one further and further from happiness and satisfaction. It must not be allowed to wander. This is the general term in Hebrew for "*movement*." It is translated "*to go, walk, behave*" and generally has the "*sense of going*"

halak 1980, "to go, walk, behave." This verb appears in most Semitic languages (although it has a different meaning in Arabic). It is attested in all periods of Hebrew. Old Testament Hebrew attests it about 1,550 times, while the Aramaic uses it a few times.

Essentially, this root refers to movement without any suggestion of direction in the sense of going, whether of man Gen. 9:23, beasts Gen. 3:14, or inanimate objects Gen. 2:14-- ... halak may be translated "to go." (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

We must learn to stay at home with what we have, instead of wandering and going from place to place in our minds to what we could have. We must firmly resist the temptation to believe we would be happy with different possessions. God wants us to be content with the wife of our youth, our children, our homes and possessions, our lot in life. The soul will constantly move us to go in other directions and we must firmly stand against it for it is not wisdom but folly. Its ultimate end is total dissatisfaction with everything. If we get there, we would have been better off to be an untimely birth.

What one has is certainly much better than allowing the seat of the affections to walk and go forth wherever it might desire. Once the desires of the heart are allowed to freely travel about, it is difficult to ever be content with what one has. There are always so many things one can be captivated by. It is a road that has no end. Learn to be satisfied with what you can see (what you already have), and not to be flitting from one desire to the next by allowing your desires to fix on one thing and another. This is certainly a difficult thing to accomplish. But it is well worth the effort to do so.

This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

This "wandering of the soul ("the inner self," "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers.") is vanity. It leads to greater and greater desires and lessor and lessor return. It is a bubble, futile, empty worthless and meaningless. It is a dead end path. The very epitome of:

There is a way {which seems} right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Prov 14:12

This is another one of the multitude of things "under the sun" which when closely examined do not yield what they promise and are thus vanity. It is insignificant and worthless, transient and frail, it is empty and fruitless. Just grasping after the wind. You know you have it when nothing satisfies you any more.

10. Whatever one is, he has been named already. For it is known that he is man; (NKJV)

Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; (NAS)

That which hath been is named already, and it is know that it is man: (KJV)

Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago; and it is known what man is; (ASV)

I give the renderings of the other translations to manifest the difficulty the translators contend with in translating the Hebrew in this place. Though the words and emphasis may be a little different in the four translations, the main emphasis is the same. It is a return to the thought offered at the beginning of this book.

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. 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages which were before us. 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later {still.} Eccl 1:9-11

Thus whether we understand his exact and specific meaning here due to difficulties in translation is kept to a minimum since we cannot miss the broad and basic point. No matter what you are doing, no matter what you are in regard to occupation, or in regard to morality or simply the major emphasis of your life, you are not the first one on this earth to have such notions.

You are only another in a long line of humanity that has walked this earth since its beginning. There is nothing special about your outlooks or your activities, you are only another of many. When one looks at life in this way, it removes from it the ability to take pride in what one is doing. I am not the first and I will not be the last to take this approach (whatever the approach might be). That being so, it would be much wiser on my part to take an approach which leads to happiness and contentment. Especially when the conclusion of this thought is brought out.

There is just so much to man. God created him that way and that is how it is. God created man with the basic need to eat and drink. He made man with the basic drives of his life. Sin destroyed and ruined all that man could have been and left him a mere shell. His soul which had been designed for such great purposes must now be

carefully controlled lest the flesh take it over and lead him to binge again and again on things that will destroy him. We may not like all this, but it is the truth!

And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.

“Contend” is a broad term for “*judge*,” “*plead*,” “*debate*,” or “*wrangle*.”

“... to judge; to plead, to debate; to strive, to wrangle... strife, discord: a man of contention may be taken, either actively of one ready to contend, or passively of one who is liable to contentions with and from others...” (Wilson p 94-95)

1777 diyn or (Gen. 6:3) down- 1) to judge, to contend, to plead a) (Qal) 1) to act as judge, to minister judgment 2) to plead a cause 3) to execute judgment, to requite, to vindicate 4) to govern 5) to contend, to strive b) (Niphal) to be at strife, to quarrel

Man cannot argue with God, he cannot debate, strive or wrangle with him. It is folly to do so because God is mightier than he. “Mightier” is defined:

“... one that has superior, overbearing strength...” (Wilson p 275-276)

God is superior in wisdom, knowledge, strength, and power. There is no realm in which a man can fight against God and win. One might rebel against his laws, his code of righteousness, and his means for making man happy, but in the final tally, it is man who will be broken against God and not the opposite.

The point is simply this. No one has ever lived who has won his battle against God, no one has ever lived and found happiness in seeking things in rebellion against him. No one ever has, and no one ever will. So why fight God? Why seek for happiness in areas where he says it cannot be found? Why rebel against his commands and ordinances? Simply learn to live within God’s system. That is the only way to be happy in this life under the sun.

11. Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?

For there are many words which increase futility. What {then} is the advantage to a man? (NAS)

Again, a difficulty in translation presents itself. The term “things” can also be translated “words” With this difference comes a difference in understanding the sense. The term is defined “*speech*,” “*a word*,” “*a thing*,” or even “*business, occupation, acts, matter, case*,”

1697 dabar- speech, a word, speaking, a thing a) speech b) a saying, an utterance c) a word, words d) business, occupation, acts, matter, case, something, manner (by extension) (BDB)

Thus the term could be either of the above. It all depends on what the Holy Spirit is referring back to. If He is continuing the idea of “contending with the almighty” of verse 10, then “words” would be His thought. There are many words spoken in contending with God, but they all increase vanity and futility. If He is still on the theme of the inability of man to be satisfied with “things” then the translation would be things. Both are thought provoking and contain sound advice to anyone seeking to live right in this world.

With the addition of many things in a man’s possession comes the increase of vanity. The more one has, the more trials they bring. They actually in the hands of most men work the opposite of what one would think. One would think that the more one had, the better things would be for them, but it is not so. Hence how is man better if he has them?

With the fact clear that man cannot contend with God and win, what is the point of many words in that direction? Why should a man think that the more he speaks the greater chance he has of winning? Job found this was not so. The writer of Ecclesiastes has already drawn the same conclusion.

*Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up **a matter** in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your **words** be few. Ecc 5:2*

As an interesting note the term “a matter” and “words” are both the same term DABAR that is used here. Hence either way fits the context, and either way is scripturally sound. The reader is left to select for himself which one he feels best fits the context. Man is not bettered by arguing and contending with God. The more words the more muddled it gets. Man is not bettered by gaining things. It leads to heartache and dissatisfaction. How then is man the better?

12. For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

These final words of the chapter form the conclusion and reason for the thoughts above. He asks two different questions. First, “who knows what is good for man?” and second, “Who can tell us what will happen in this world once we leave it?” Both of these questions have held high priorities in the minds of most thinking men. They wonder about these things and seek for answers. All young men wrestle with this as they consider what to do with their lives, and all old men wrestle with whether or not they made the right decision.

These two questions form the heart of what makes men do what they do. They feel that it is good for them to do it, and/or they feel that it will have a good affect on those who will come after them. Many have chosen their lives vocation on the answer to this question. Many have found self-esteem from thinking their answer was right. People want to believe that what they are doing is good to be doing and good for them to do. They want to believe that it will have a good affect on those who live after them (primarily their children and hopefully others as well). But as the question is posed, all feel the nagging doubt as to whether it really is or not. Is what we are giving our children really going to benefit them, is what we are doing really good? Who can tell us such a thing? Who really knows it? The answer to both of the above ultimately leads a man to God. Only an eternal God who created man and has his own purposes in doing so can answer the above questions. No one else possibly could.

all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow?

In these words are found the true reason for serving God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and might! This life is vain, it soon vanishes away, it is insignificant and worthless, it is transient and frail, it is empty and fruitless. It passes like a shadow. It is so quick, and so transitory that a shadow which cannot be touched, felt, smelled, tasted or in anyway even seen is used to illustrate it. What a sad lot man has been given due to the sinful rebellion he has chosen to walk in. In reaching out for the knowledge of good and evil, he lost all hope of knowing even why he is here and what his purpose is. He lost all ability to even know what good is, and to know how to best conduct himself.

I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Jer 10:23

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. Pr 3:5