

Day Two

Ecclesiastes 2

Let us begin today's reflection by first reading the opening verses of Ecclesiastes 2. Allowing the Preacher's words sink into your thoughts, I will make some comments:

"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, 'It is madness,' and of pleasure, 'What does it accomplish?' I explored with my mind *how* to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding *me* wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, NASU).

If you will recall from the previous reflection, the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes ends on a sour note. King Solomon summarizes his

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pursuit of wisdom and knowledge with these discouraging words: "Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge *results in* increasing pain" (Ecclesiastes 1:18, NASU).

We need to remember that Solomon was given the most wisdom ever given to a man in the Bible. In multiple places in the Tanakh and the Apostolic Writings, the wisdom of Solomon is described as being beyond comparison. One good example of his wisdom, discernment, and knowledge is summarized in 1 Kings 4:29-34:

"Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was *known* in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom" (1 Kings 4:29-34, NASU).

The Biblical record states that Solomon probably received more wisdom, more discernment, and a greater breadth of mind than any person who has ever lived. (If this is too much for you, then Solomon at least had more wisdom than all of those who had preceded him.) We have an admonition given to Timothy from the Apostle Paul which elevates the benefits of taking these words to heart:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:1-17, NASU).

What Paul told Timothy could possibly be restated like this: **Learn from the authors of Scripture. Take their teachings to heart and recognize that from them you should order your life.** This was excellent instruction for Timothy, and for those of us who might read the words of Qohelet today. After all, the life experiences of Solomon which are recorded in the Book of Ecclesiastes should be more than

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enough to keep someone from seeking to indulge themselves in a manner similar to Solomon's during his later life.

When you consider that Solomon essentially tried everything available to him to satisfy his fleshly desires—and still concluded that it was all vanity—**we should learn and thus avoid** the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and find our own satisfaction in the Lord. Here is what he said to confirm the vanity or futility of seeking pleasures of the flesh:

“All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11, NASU).

A few verses later, Solomon actually concluded that he hates life itself because of the futility of his efforts:

“So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:17, NASU).

When you think about it, this is a horrible commentary on life emanating from the purported wisest man who ever lived. Here was the king of Israel, endowed with not only great wisdom and knowledge, but also the financial resources to buy anything, or do just about anything that his heart desired—and yet his conclusion was that it was all vanity and just striving after wind. This is not a very good testimony on the benefits of wisdom and misspent riches!

As a modern-day Believer in Yeshua, you have to ponder these words in lieu of the life which you now live in Him. After all, the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil—things which Solomon contended with during his lifetime—still exist today for all who are called into godliness. We need to remember that even though we have the words of Solomon, and the other authors of the Holy Writ, we still struggle against powers and principalities in high places. Paul described the war which God's people currently wage:

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“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH [Isaiah 11:5], and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS [Isaiah 59:17], and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE [Isaiah 52:7]; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*, and take THE HELMET OF SALVATION [Isaiah 59:17], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17, NASU).

We must put on the full armor of God to combat the unseen forces which war against us. This includes knowing the truth embodied in the Holy Scriptures, by consistently spending time reading and studying them, giving the indwelling Holy Spirit an opportunity to instruct us in all righteousness.

By taking some time during *Sukkot* to reflect on the Book of Ecclesiastes, we can each let its wisdom redirect our understanding about our current relationship with the Holy One of Israel. We can remember how important it is to love the Lord with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength—as we seek to serve Him during our lives.

Another admonition you might consider comes from the Apostle John. It summarizes some of the challenges which each of us has with the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil:

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NASU).

Here in a very succinct way, John describes three enemies which emanate from the world in which human beings live. These are worthy

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adversaries who innately wage war against each of us. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life are aspects of our common humanity which everyone must contend with and strive to overcome. Perhaps the conclusions which come from the heart of Qohelet in Ecclesiastes will remind the student of Scripture that when any of these inclinations are given free reign in our lives, that the consequences of such baseness will be total vanity.

We need to understand and embrace some of the other great words of encouragement which have been given to us, in the Apostolic Writings. By believing in these statements from the heart of our Father, our ability to deal with the relative vanity of life makes life worth living. Here is how the Apostle Paul explained it:

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Messiah (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Messiah Yeshua, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Messiah Yeshua. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:1-10, NASU).

We know that the Father in His great mercy toward us has made us alive and has set us in the Heavenly places with Messiah Yeshua. This is a gift of God which comes not from our human works, but by His grace alone. We have the opportunity to share this reality with those the Lord brings along our path, and demonstrate transformed lives via good works.

For those who have been redeemed, life is no longer vanity and striving after the wind. Now in the Messiah, life has meaning. Each of

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us has been given a purpose for living, as we share the truth about the forgiveness provided in His atoning blood. May we each take this to heart as we seek His face during this season of joy!