

01-02-18a Ecclesiastes

Let's begin our study together in the Word of God by spending a few moments in silent prayer. It gives us an opportunity to talk to ourselves even before we talk to the Lord, to clear our minds, to lay aside the baggage that we accumulate during the week and even during the morning, and to concentrate our attention on the spiritual food that God provides for us that sustains us, that guides us, and that strengthens us so that we can live in a way that's pleasing to Him. Shall we pray? Father, thank You for the opportunity that we have to assemble with believers of like mind, to enjoy fellowship, to receive the benefit of spiritual gifts that You have granted to each one of us.

We thank You for the sustaining grace that brings us to this point in time so that we can have another day, another opportunity to redeem the time and to make fruitful all of the work that You've done to bring us into this life and to sustain us to this point. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the work that He accomplished on the cross on our behalf so that we have been rescued from a hopeless, helpless, and useless condition. You have given our lives purpose and meaning.

You have defined for us a path in which to walk. You have called us by Your grace with a high calling. We pray this morning as we worship and fellowship together that God the Holy Spirit will be able to minister Your Word to our souls in such a way that our minds are transformed, our hearts are strengthened, our perspective on each occurrence and each situation in our lives will be elevated so that we see our lives from Your viewpoint.

We pray for those that have the rule over us. We thank You for a Christian president. We thank You for a man who appears to be seeking to implement his faith in his governing.

We pray that You will protect him and preserve him from attack and from the undermining influences of those who would not only disrespect him personally, but also disrespect You. We ask that our nation will be preserved and that the principles that guided those who founded it will be preserved so that we can worship and fellowship and live as believers and continue to enjoy the freedom and opportunities that are ours in this great land. We pray for those who minister Your Word overseas, not only evangelists, but also pastors and teachers and those who labor in many cases with little fanfare and with little visibility.

We pray that You will grant them a special bounty of Your grace, that You will uplift them and encourage them and give them a glimpse of that eternal fruit that is being born as they labor sacrificially far from home. We pray this morning as so many churches become a gathering place for believers that Your Spirit will be active and that Your Word will be powerful and that all of us, as members of the body of Christ, will be convicted and will be turned in those areas where we need turning, we strengthen in the areas where we need strengthening and that the entire body of Christ will be alive and fruitful and produce that eternal fruit that reflects Your glory. We ask

Your blessing on us now as we worship together.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. For our Scripture reading this morning, I would like to read the passage that we are studying because we have a lot to cover and sometimes my Scripture reading can take up half of the first lesson or more and we want to focus our attention this morning on Ecclesiastes, the last portion of the first chapter and into the second chapter.

So in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, we have studied in great detail the first 11 verses and we have scanned verses 12 through 18. And this is where we resume our study this morning. Just by way of very quick review, Solomon has introduced his subject.

He has introduced himself as Kohelet, the one who is bringing together those who have an interest in this subject. These are described elsewhere as the remnant, those who are on the narrow road, those who recognize there is something more to life than what can be seen. And even among believers, there is often a great misapprehension that our Christian life, our life as sons of God, consists in what we accomplish, in impact, in visible ministry or visible attainment.

Solomon as Kohelet, the one who gathers, the one who assembles, and that verb is always used of people, he is calling together the scattered few who are seeking to enter through the straight gate that leads to life. And he points out the futility if you want to use that term, of human effort to achieve eternal results. We've seen that the Havel, Havel Havelim, the transience, the impermanence, the ethereal nature of man's existence and man's efforts are so brief like a vapor, vapor of vapors, it's an ultimate vapor.

We saw that he has beautifully expressed this in verses 3 through 11. It has a parallel structure, an inverted parallel or chiasm, which introduces three concepts illustrated by the sun, by the wind, by the water, and then is reflected in human efforts to speak, to see, and to hear. And then there's a third threefold expression in the last portion of that section where he looks at time, the past, the present, and the future.

There is such a tight structure from just a literary or poetic point of view, you could spend hours analyzing the interweaving of this, and it's because Solomon is, in the modern parlance, a genius. God has given him wisdom that excels wisdom of any other man in his dispensation. So as he expresses the subject, and this is the point of the book, how do you escape the confines of this brief human life? How do you make something last? He concludes that section by pointing out that there is no word which can be said, or actually there is.

I did a little additional work on verse 10 because in all of the translations that I've checked, this is expressed as a question. Is there anything of which it may be said, see, this is new? But that is a very strange translation of what is fairly straightforward in Hebrew. In Hebrew, this begins with the word yesh, Y-E-S-H, and that is kind of like H-A-Y in Spanish.

H-A-Y, I, means there is in Spanish, and yesh means the very same thing in Hebrew. Normally, if

this was going to be an interrogative, the word order would be different. And what it literally says is there is a word which is spoken.

There is a word which is spoken. That's literally what the translation of verse 10 is. Yesh dabar.

Dabar is the classic D-A-B-A-R, means word. And then you have the verb amar, A-M-A-R, preceded by a particle, S-H. It's not technically a particle.

It's a demonstrative, translated which or that. There is a word which is spoken. Look, this is new.

You hear this all the time. People are always saying, look, here's a new thing. Here's something different.

Star Trek, they always say, it's like nothing we've ever seen before. Well, Solomon answers that by saying, it has already been unto the ages which were before us. This has occurred over and over again.

So what is the category? There are some things which are in fact new. He is talking in the context of under the sun, in the realm of human endeavor, human exploration, human discovery, and this is all under the heading of the answer to his original question. What is the prophet? What is the lasting, i.e. eternal consequence of what man can do under the sun, the toil in which he toils, the labor in which he labors? What can you carry away as your prophet, your Yitron? So when someone says this is new, they're not just saying, look, it's a new invention, or look, it's a new breed of corn.

Gregor Mendel produced a hybrid that did not exist on the earth before, and there are many things you could put in that category. But here is a way to make something last. There are new philosophies, new religions, new cults, new approaches to life.

Just check your local bookstore from week to week. Watch the news. How old is Scientology? It seems like a new thing, but in reality the thought behind it is ancient.

The New Age approach to life is nothing but warmed-over Eastern mysticism, and that is old and goes back. There are parallels to all of our modern cults and religions and approaches to life going back. They're as old as the flood.

And yet someone says, oh, here's a new... I saw... what did I see? I saw a billboard down south when I was in the valley, down in McAllen, driving between McAllen and Harlingen, and there was a bulletin board up, and there's some brand-new thing, and they've got a website. I can't even remember the name of it, but it's got some foreign name, and this is now going to be the answer to those who are seeking fulfillment and control over their lives, and it's Valley High or some new thing. People are constantly thinking that they're inventing the answer to life.

This is how to get the deeper meaning. This is how to get the lasting fulfillment, the permanence.

But it has been unto the ages which were before us.

And then in verse 11, you still have this triad or threefold look of time. There's no remembrance of former things. Well, right now, he's saying, right now, we don't remember the former things, and in the future, there's not going to be remembrance of the current things.

You've got the past, the present, and the future, just like you have talking, seeing, and hearing, just like you have the wind, the sun, and the water. Three is the number of perfection. Three is the number of completion.

When you use the number three, it's availed in this Old Testament milieu, in the Old Testament world, in the mind of Hebrews. Three is the number of God. Holy, holy, holy.

It's perfect. The triangle, the strongest geometric structure that we have used from ancient times to the present to build bridges, to build roofs. So interwoven into this is you can look everywhere.

It's a complete view of what's under the sun, and yet the answer is lacking. So there's no remembrance by those who will come after you. You've got people in the past, people in the present, people in the future, all subject to the same condition, all glassed in under this dome that prevents finding the answer.

Well, we begin here this morning in verse 12. I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem, and I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. Well, this is interesting to me because you go to Proverbs, another Solomonic book, and he personifies wisdom.

Chakma, C-H-A-K-M-A-H. It's always hard for me to decide what consonant to use for the rough consonants of Hebrew because you have kof, which is a Q, you have the hard C-H, the chet, and depending on who you read, it's rendered all different kinds of ways, but we'll spell it C-H-A-K-M-A-H. Chakma, which is often used of biblical wisdom, divine wisdom, wisdom from above.

So Solomon is going to use this tool to seek and search out concerning all that is done under heaven. Then it says this burdensome task that God has given to the sons of men by which they may be exercised. If you are familiar with the history of Protestantism in England and America, and in particular if you have had exposure to the Brethren movement, Jim Elliott, for example, the missionary who was speared to death by the Aka Indians down in South America.

Elizabeth Elliott, she's got a daily radio program I've been hearing lately. His widow. He was from this tradition, and if you read the journals of Jim Elliott, which I have on my bookshelf, he uses this term.

This is a Brethren term. To be exercised is to be tested, to have your faith put on the line. You exercise yourself unto godliness.

They take this from the old King James, and it survives here even in the New King James, and you'll find it in the New Testament in some of Paul's writings in the old King James. To be exercised is to be tested, to be tested, to be strained, to be under pressure of some sort. That is not what this passage is saying.

But you get the idea that someone from that tradition may have been involved in the translation or in the interpretation of this passage when they use this term, but we'll come back to this. A burdensome task God has given to the sons of men by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

What is crooked cannot be made straight. What is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, Look, I have attained greatness, and I have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge. And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind, for in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

It is little wonder when you read this section that Ecclesiastes is such a hard book to understand because these concepts, as expressed in the English of almost any translation, just confuse me and always have confused me. You can get an idea from the English of the first 11 verses, especially when it talks about vanity, vanity, it's all a waste of time, and then you get down here, and even in wisdom and knowledge, he says it's all vanity and chasing the wind, and you get the idea that he's just throwing up his hands and giving up. Well, hopefully from our extensive treatment of the first 11 verses, we understand that futility, or the idea that it's all a waste of time, is not what's in view.

It is the impermanence. It's the fact that it doesn't last. And I gave you some illustrations last time.

There are many things that don't last, but people don't consider them futile at all. Many things are transient. You watch a movie.

It only lasts a set amount of time. Physical relationships between men and women. It's a very brief act, but there are very few people that consider that futile.

For some people, that's all that's on their mind. Their entire life is angled around trying to have another experience like unto that. There are many things in life.

Raising children, if you look at the span of your life, is less than two decades. It's transient, and it's gone. Childhood for children is half that time, and yet no one considers it futile or vain, but it's transient.

There are people who, when they get to be grandparents, are so happy to once again have the

opportunity to observe and to interact with toddlers and with babies and with children because it was so brief, and it's something to look back on with great emotion and great enjoyment. And, of course, it's even better being a grandparent. You get all the benefits and very few of the attendant responsibilities that are on the negative side.

But there is a difference. This is my point. If there's one thing to get out of our correcting of understanding in the first 11 verses, it is that there is a big difference between something being transient and something being futile.

At the same time, when you look at something that is transient and compare that to something that is permanent, which would you rather have? Wouldn't it be great? Because most of the things that we engage in that are transient, you want to return to. You want to do over and over again. And this is why we have these pictures of repetition because when something is transient, you have to go back and do it again and again.

The author of Hebrews spends some time talking about the Levitical priesthood. Was the Levitical priesthood futile? Was the Levitical priesthood a waste of time? Not at all. God instigated that.

God set that up. God gave that to Israel as a system of worship. But the author of Hebrews points out the high priest had to go in again and again.

It was a cycle. It was repetitious. It had to be done over and over because its effects are transient.

It doesn't have a lasting, permanent effect. The Bible says the law is just and righteous and good, but it's not permanent. That's what you get from Hebrews.

I thought about using that as our Scripture reading this morning, but I would have to cover about three chapters. So there is a big difference. It is not futile, but it is impermanence.

It's not futility, but impermanence. It's in view. So Solomon says, where is the lasting value? Where is the eternal fruit? That's what we've established thus far.

Well, as we come to verse 12, Solomon says, I kohelet. And it's somewhat unusual. When you find someone using the Hebrew word ani, this is emphatic because the word I is bound up in the verb.

And in both Greek and Hebrew, you regularly find the verbs expressed in the first person, and they don't depend on the pronouns the way we do in English. In English, just because of the structure of our language, we almost always use a pronoun when we use a verb. You'll notice sometimes people are writing a little quick note, and they'll say, got your message.

Was glad to hear from you. We'll see you soon. And we leave out the pronoun, but it's real cryptic and shorthand, and it's unusual.

And we notice that someone must have been in a hurry because they didn't include the pronoun. Well, it's just the reverse in Hebrew. You normally don't find the pronoun, and when it's included, it's emphatic.

And so in English, we have to add a word, and we say, I myself. And we have ani, or the word, the pronoun, I, in verse 12. So he says, I myself, Kohelet, was king over Israel and Jerusalem.

And this flies in the face of the people that say that this was an artifice that was employed by some unknown author to suggest that this is in the pattern of Solomonic thought, but it wasn't actually Solomon that was writing. And it's so important to understand that if the Bible says this is Solomon writing, that's who it is. And that tells us the time in which it was written.

It tells us some things about the vocabulary that is employed. And that's going to be very important in this verse 13 that follows before we get finished, because I cannot tell you the truckloads of literature that have written on Ecclesiastes that all come to the conclusion, I would say 98.5% of all of the scholarship that's ever been done on this book says that it was written late. And they base it on a lot of things.

And if it's written late, then it's not Solomon writing. And when they come to this verse, they have to start doing a big fan dance. Solomon says, look, I, Kohelet, was king.

And when we say was, some people point to this and say, now see, he says was king, like now he's not. It's ridiculous. It's literally have been, have been.

It's a perfect in Hebrew. And the perfect is often used in Hebrew. And I could give you, I could spend the rest of the morning showing you passages where the perfect is used in the sense of this was true in the past and it continues up into the present.

I'll give you one example from our recent study in Genesis. You remember when the brothers come before Joseph and they don't know who he is. And he accuses them of being spies.

He says, no, you are spies. And they say, literally in Hebrew, we have not been spies. What does that mean? We have not been spies in the past, continuing up to the present.

Because we have not been spies in the past, we are still not spies in the present. That the perfect carries the idea that this has never been true and is not true now. Well, that has a negative in it.

We have not been spies. Here Solomon is saying, I, Kohelet, I myself, Kohelet, have been and continue to be king over Israel in Jerusalem. There is no other son of David that was king over Israel.

This is the preposition that's used here in verse 12 when it says over Israel. This is al, al, which means over or upon. And al Yisrael, after Solomon, what happens? The kingdom splits.

You have Jeroboam and Rehoboam. You have the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. What son of David was king over Israel in Jerusalem? The northern kingdom kings never ruled in Jerusalem.

There's not a one of the northern kingdom kings that ever sat on a throne in Jerusalem. Jerusalem became the capital of the southern kingdom, of Judah, which is not called Israel anymore after the kingdom divides. So, I ask you, when the Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, one, one, says I have been and continue to be king over Israel in Jerusalem, who is that? It's Solomon.

We've been told twice now who this is. And anybody that assumes that someone other than Solomon wrote this book is going to be useless to us in terms of their understanding of the book. And it will permeate translation.

It will permeate interpretation. It will permeate the application. And this is why all of these truckloads of literature that have been written on Ecclesiastes can wind up being so non-helpful because the assumptions that are made are false.

However, if you take this de facto as truth, you've got a lot of things to straighten out because there are some language issues. So here we go. We are going to take the high road.

We're going to say if the Bible says it was Solomon, then it was Solomon, in the same way that when the Bible says the Lord Jesus Christ was in the heart of the earth three days and three nights, that's what it is. There is no such thing as a Thursday crucifixion. I'm sorry, a Friday crucifixion.

It is a Thursday crucifixion because you've got to have three days and three nights. You need Friday, Saturday, and early in the morning on the third day. You've got to have Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night for the Lord Jesus Christ to be in the heart of the earth three nights, which is what the Bible says.

How on earth did the church arrive at Good Friday? Well, the same thing has happened here. The longer I live, the less impressed I am with our church traditions. And people say, this is ancient.

Do you think you're smarter than Calvin and Luther? Well, if Calvin and Luther thought that the Lord was crucified on Friday, then on that point, yes, I am smarter than them because I take what the Bible says as fact. This says Solomon wrote it. So don't listen to anybody that tells you he didn't.

He says, I myself. How much more clear can he be? I myself, Kohelet, was and am king over Israel in Jerusalem. That settles it for me.

That and verse 1. And I set my heart to seek and search out. If you get a New American Standards, it says I set my mind. What does it say? It says I set my mind.

Well, this is lev, L-E-V, it's heart. And it isn't even the word set. This is the verb natan.

It's the verb from which the name or the noun Nathan comes from. Nathan, natan, means to give. I gave my heart, Solomon says.

I gave my heart. And then we have two infinitive constructs here that are translated in the New King James to seek and to search out. Well, let me get my translation for you here.

I gave my heart to seek out and to explore. To seek out and to explore. The first verb emphasizes finding something.

You've got to locate it first. When the ancient explorers were trying to find the passage to the far east for the spice and tea trade and so forth, they started sailing west. They were looking for a shortcut.

After they found out that there was a great big continent in their way, then they began to find the northwest passage, find a way to get across the continent without having to go all the way around the horn there in South America. You first have to find it, and then once you find it, you can explore it and see its nature. So this is to locate and to explore.

You seek it out, you locate it, figure out where it is, and then once you find it, you look into its nature and get the details. So that's why there are two verbs here. To seek out and to explore.

By wisdom. By chakma. We are left in limbo a little bit on what kind of wisdom this is, because chakma is not a technical word for divine wisdom.

It is just like the English word wisdom. We use that sometimes of biblical wisdom or spiritual wisdom. We use it other times of just generic wisdom.

It has the same range of meanings in Hebrew. So we're not told. It doesn't say wisdom from God.

It just says he's going to use intellectual power. He's going to use everything that has come to him from God, because we know Solomon's wisdom in every area. Biology, science, all of it.

So he's going to give his heart to locate and explore by wisdom concerning all that is done under the sun. The verb for done here is asah. We know that that's to manufacture, to make something out of something.

All that is done under the heavens. It literally says hashamayim. This is the same phrase that you find in Genesis 1. In the beginning God created hashamayim.

All which has been done under the heavens. Now this is expressed in a present tense in verse 13

in most of the English translations, but in the Hebrew here of verse 13, this is a perfect, and it's in the passive, that which has been done. Sometimes the perfect is put for the present, but in this case we say all that has been done under the heavens.

Now this next phrase is one we're going to need to work on, because he says, this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man by which they may be exercised. There's an interesting phenomenon that I had no knowledge of until I took Hebrew and Greek. We take for granted when we go to a dictionary, we go to Webster's or the Random House or any of the other dictionaries, and we know that there are years and years of scholarship and refinement and tracing the roots of our language back into the Latin and the Greek and the other places from which we derived our words.

And when you go to the dictionary, that's the last word. When you look it up in the dictionary, you figure this is it. This is where you get the exact spelling.

This is where you get the exact range of meanings. This is where you get usage. Can you make this word into a plural? I had to look up a word the other day.

I saw it in the plural, and it was a word I had never seen in the plural. And I thought, well, that's bizarre. But I looked it up, and it was there.

And that, to me, is the last word. The dictionary is the final authority. Well, when I first began to study Hebrew and Greek, I thought, well, the lexicon, which is the foreign language dictionary, that's the final authority.

You go to the lexicon, and that's Moses coming down from the mountain. In Hebrew, the final authority for over 100 years was the Brown, Driver, and Briggs lexicon, BDB. And all of the scholarship of this century in the Old Testament has its roots in what BDB says these words mean.

So it became a real crux in my mind when I would go and do a word study, as I was trained to do from the original language, and find every occurrence of a word, and look at its usage, and seek to divine its meaning from context. This is how we learn a lot of our words, isn't it, in English? We didn't look up every word that we know in our vocabulary in the dictionary. We heard people use it.

It's fascinating as your children grow, especially when they get to be 8, 9, and 10, and begin to use words that you use. And you wonder if they really know what they mean. But they use them.

I will give you one example. I've noticed the word apparently cropping up a lot in my daughters when they're talking. They say, well, apparently.

Well, do they know that that comes from appear, and that it means... And now, if I use it, I realize, well, I know where they got that. And I hear Patty use it, and I know where it is in our vocabulary,

and it has cropped up in theirs. And so I asked.

I asked one of my daughters the other day, well, do you know what that word means? And she said, well, that it appears to be so. And I said, yes, that's right. And I thought, well, she really does know what that means.

But she didn't look that up in the dictionary. She divined its meaning from the context, from hearing us use it over and over. Well, this is what the lexicographers had to do.

Because before Brown and Driver and Briggs got to work on this, you know, there were just very scattered and incomplete ideas. Everybody goes to... It's a dead language. Ancient Hebrew is a dead language.

They had to revive Hebrew to speak it in Israel. Before the 1940s and the effort to make Israel a state, Hebrew was still a dead language, and they literally resurrected it. It would be like somebody starting a new country and saying, we're all going to speak Latin, and going into the books and learning Latin.

And you have to be a little bit careful, because modern Hebrew, in its resurrected form, the words don't always carry the same meaning. Different context, different time in history. So my point is, these men did their best, in their time and with the materials that they had, to observe and to come up with this.

But they're men. And the shock to me is sometimes they just got it wrong. And with respect and with care and with double and triple checking, I sometimes go to the lexicon and decide that what the lexicon says is not right about what a word means.

It's just like what we do in the Christian faith. Sometimes we have heard things all our lives, we accept it as true, we figure the great gray heads of the past have developed this theology and it's got to be right. But before God, when you go to the scripture and you begin to be troubled with that understanding, you have to decide for yourself if this is so or not.

And Calvin and Luther and Spurgeon and whoever else you want to name, notwithstanding, you have to be willing to stand before God and say this is the understanding that I have based on what I see in the word. Well, I say all of that to say that verse 13b does not say this burdensome task God has given to the sons of men by which they may be exercised. That's just not what it means.

But this translation and all the others like it and all of your modern versions are based on the lexicon. Well, where did this come from? The word here when it says this burdensome task, the noun here is *inyon*, I-N-Y-A-N, and it is preceded by the Hebrew word *who*. Who is he? There's a little thing you memorize when you're in first year Hebrew.

Who is he? It's a little play on words. You could say who is he? That might be a question in English, but who in Hebrew is he? So this would be an emphatic in the same way that ani, because normally it's included in the verb. But the verb is way down the road here.

So after Hashemayim, and there's no mark or any other thing in the text, the next word after Hashemayim, the heavens, is who. And who is he or it in some cases, because you have masculine and feminine nouns in Hebrew. So you would say he for something that's actually a masculine noun.

So we have literally it, which is emphatic, and then inyon, ra. And ra, r-a, or r, it's the evil a. There are two a's in Hebrew, or two gutturals that you use to make an a. You have aleph, which is the first letter of the alphabet, and you have ayin. And I always think about the evil eye or the evil ayin whenever you see, because ra-a with an aleph means to see, and seeing is a good thing.

But ra with an ayin is the word for evil or calamity or catastrophe. So you have inyon ra. So it, whatever this inyon is, is an evil.

It's a bad thing. Well, I go to the lexicon. I say, I wonder what this inyon is.

I haven't really seen that word too many places in the text before. So I go to the lexicon, and I discover that the root of this word, inyon, is anah, a-n-a-h. Well, sometimes there are homonyms in Hebrew, just like there are in English, where the same word means more than one thing.

We have the word log in English. Well, that can be a fallen tree trunk. It can be a diary or journal that you keep of events.

It can be a number of things. And the same thing in Hebrew. Well, when this occurs in Hebrew, they do the same thing they do in the dictionary, where there will be more than one listing, and they'll Roman numeralize them.

There's Roman numeral 1, Roman numeral 2, Roman numeral 3. Well, anah, a-n-a-h, if you go to Brown, Driver & Briggs and go to Roman numeral 1, it is the verb that means to answer or to respond. To answer or to respond. So I read all down through here, looking for my Ecclesiastes reference, because the nouns that are derived from the verbs will be listed under that.

Nowhere in Roman numeral 1 do I find my Ecclesiastes use of inyan. Instead, I find that they have a Roman numeral 2 way down below, because there's all kinds of usages for anah, and the word for time is in there and so forth. But you get down to Roman numeral 2, and they say that this verb, anah, means to be occupied or be busied, to be engaged in a task.

And as I look at this, the only places where this word is used in the Old Testament are Ecclesiastes. It's used as an infinitive. Oh, Ecclesiastes 1.13 and Ecclesiastes 3.10. And then the noun inyan underneath that, all of the usages for it are in Ecclesiastes.

Well, guess what? There are not even any foreign language cognates that are convincing. They try to list some. They say, well, it seems like in Arabic there's a similar word.

But here's the key. This is what I'm getting at. They say anah, Roman numeral 2, verb, to be occupied or busied with, only in Ecclesiastes, perhaps an Aramaic loan word.

Well, Aramaic doesn't exist in Solomon's day. There are no examples or no exemplars of that that we have down to the present. In other words, this is all a big assumption on the lexicographer's part.

They looked at this word in the context of Ecclesiastes and decided that it meant to be busy with a task. Well, what is the real root of this word? It is anah. It is to answer.

It is response or answer. And the bottom line here is, I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. What is he trying to locate and explore? It's the answer to the question that he raised back in verse 3. What is the eternal? What is the lasting benefit? He says everything is cyclical.

Everything seems to repeat. It all has to happen again and again and again. Where is something that transcends that cycle under the sun, under the heavens? I'm going to seek out by wisdom and find it.

Because the answer that man has, the response, he says, I set my heart to locate and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. The answer or response God has given to the sons of man by which they may be answered. The answer by which they may be answered.

Because when you get that exercise, that is the verb anah. You have the noun and the verb both in this passage. And you can see, well, if somebody is doing a superficial job, if they've already decided that everything is vanity and futility, well then, they've assumed that Solomon doesn't think there is an answer.

And so they've got to find some other meaning for the word because it makes no sense. But because we've spent our time in the first 11 verses when we get here, that works. And we're going to see this word is used several times in Ecclesiastes.

And that nuance works every place that this word occurs. And it changes your understanding of the passage. Because instead of a task or a dreary burden, this is what you come up with as the substance of life.

This is what you think is worthwhile, this answer, this response. And so we're going to see that in the same way that understanding Havel correctly changes what these words say and mean, we're going to find out that understanding what this Inyon is, it's translated business. Some places they translate it, it's a bad business that God has given to the sons of men to weary them

with or to burden them with.

It isn't what it says at all. And so the confidence that we have is that with a prayerful attitude, asking and seeking and knocking, God will illuminate for us even difficult things that are hard to understand. There is an answer.

There is a response. And it is possible to find it. We have to be humble in the sense of not being arrogant and not just throwing out the past.

We have to be respectful of those on whose shoulders we stand. But at the same time when we find that there's a flaw or that there has been a misunderstanding, whether it's in the understanding of the church or the tradition in theology or whatever it may be, there are times when that answer is just insufficient. It is not going to work to say Solomon did not write this book.

It isn't going to work to say that God has given men a futile task. So we have to look for a right understanding. So my suggestion to you is that we are not trying to be arrogant or thinking we're just blazing new trails and we're the only ones in Solomon to ever understand this book.

But the reason there has been such difficulty and such variety, remember I told you in the introduction that they've called this the black sheep of the Bible because it's been so hard to figure out. Well, this is the reason. If you just accept the assumptions, if you accept the traditions, if you accept the suggestions of those who have gone before uncritically and if you don't have an open mind and if you don't take the Bible at face value, you can end up in confusion.

And I think most of our confusion, most of our 435 denominations that are listed in the handbook of denominations in there on my shelf, this is the reason. We have to be willing to go back and start from scratch. And this is true in our lives.

And as an application, we sometimes find that things don't seem to be working, that we're not getting a satisfactory answer, a satisfactory result, a satisfactory response as we go through life, whether it's in child raising or in employment or in our personal efforts to walk with God or to be a good Christian, quote-unquote. There are frustrations. There are brick walls that we seem to run into and we pound our head and we say, where is the answer? Where is the ability I'm supposed to have? Where is the joy and the peace and the patience? Where is the eternal fruit? Ultimately, if you're looking at life from a biblical perspective, where is the eternal fruit that I'm supposed to be bearing in this situation? I want to be an overcomer.

I want to inherit those things in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 and chapter 21. He that overcomes, it says in Revelation 21, will inherit all these things. And I think, I want to be in that number.

They talk about the saints go marching in, how I want to be in that number. Well, I want to be one of those saints that goes marching in, into the kingdom, into the capital, into the new Jerusalem.

That's the answer I'm looking for.

That's the response that I want to have. But often, it seems as though there is a besetting sin, there is an area of failure, there is an inscrutable condition that we can't seem to get past. My encouragement to you and to me and to all of us, from the word of God, is there is an answer.

There is a way. There is an eternal fruit that can be born. If you want an area to exercise faith, that is it.

We have to keep going to God and not settle for a bad answer. Not settle for a faulty understanding. Not assume and give up.

And be reconciled to something that just doesn't make sense. There is nothing that gets my hackles up more than someone saying, Oh, you know, who has known the mind of the Lord? His ways are past understanding and past finding out. It's like two rails in a railroad track.

The sovereignty of God and the free will of man. And you're never going to understand it. You're never going to reconcile it.

You're just arrogant if you think you can. Excuse me. The word of God is the revelation of the purpose and the plan, the character and the mind of God.

Not a tantalizing, you know, the burlesque ladies in the old days, when it was, I guess you could say, a tasteful burlesque. But they would disappear behind the curtain and just stick a tantalizing leg out. And you'd say, well, what's behind the curtain? But you weren't supposed to see that.

Or the fan dancers and the bubble dancers. You know, they do this tantalizing thing, but the idea is you never reveal that. There's always something that is mysterious, and that is really the key.

I don't know how I get on this subject, but the sad thing about what goes on in the world today is people think they need to expose everything, need to show everything. What is really intriguing and what really captures the interest and the ongoing attention of someone is to always keep something veiled. There are a lot of places you could apply that.

But the point here is God is not engaged in a fan dance. God is not tantalizing us without the opportunity to learn and know. There is an answer to this question that Solomon has posed.

There is an answer for those things that we think are inscrutable and unknowable in every area of life. Why does Proverbs 2 say that you have to seek and search and apply your heart and lift up your voice? Because although these answers exist, they are not necessarily on the surface. And it becomes a test of your desire.

It is a test of your faith. It is a test of your dedication to God and the things of God. Are you willing to persevere? Are you willing to keep on digging, keep on looking and not settle? The prospector

who goes to the gold fields and finds a few nuggets in the creek and says, well, that's good enough for me and leaves, may have missed the mother load because he didn't persist.

He settled and said, well, this is good, this is enough. We're going to discover in this book that there is a rich and rewarding treasure of information that comes to those who persevere, who don't settle for second or third best. This is what Solomon is going to seek and search for by wisdom.

He's going to find that answer. And there is an answer for these seemingly unsolvable issues and situations in our lives as well. But those exist as a test of our faith.

This is what strings out the pack. We used to have extra credit questions at the end of our assignments in our math and science books when I was in high school. And a lot of the really good students might get 100% on the first 10 or 12 questions, but then they would have one or two bonus questions at the end.

And those were the stretchers. Those were the ones that would really discriminate. They do the same thing in the ACT and SAT.

There are always some questions that are designed to be too hard for most people to figure out so that you can find your really exceptional students. Well, the plan of God, the word of God, has those same things. How are you going to find the real overcomers? You've got to put a difficult obstacle in the way and see who will keep banging their head on that wall until it cracks.

And so we are not of those who fall back. But those who, by faith and patience, inherit the promises. Well, let's pause here and take our break.