**Ecclesiastes 2:3-9**

*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-2/ecclesiastes-23-9/*

*Solomon pursues the heights of pleasure and the diverse ways a man might enjoy himself, all while holding on to wisdom. He reflects upon the experiences of his unparalleled accomplishments and acquisitions.*

Solomon now puts together a deliberate strategy to see if he can find gladnessthrough *wine.*Solomon executes a quite deliberate plan to *stimulate*his *body with wine*while carefully avoiding the foolishness or destruction that often accompanies drunkenness. His plan to *stimulate*his *body with wine*requires that he maintains his composure, *while*his *mind was guiding*him *wisely.*Solomon had seen the*folly* of alcohol abuse. He tells us in Proverbs 20:1,

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.”

Knowing this, Solomon sets up a game plan that allows him to *take hold of folly,*and *stimulate*his *body with wine*while avoiding the unwise behavior of intoxication. While Solomon warned about the misuse of wine and prohibited drunkenness (Proverbs 23:29-35), wine is also referred to as a gift from God that makes the heart glad (Psalm 104:14-15). The Bible uses it as a symbol for the full enjoyment of life (Ecclesiastes. 9:7-10; 10:19; Zechariah 10:7). Solomon makes it clear that his *mind was guiding*him *wisely*. He plans to find out whether wine can bring the gladness his heart desires, while avoiding *folly*.

Solomon’s plan also includes *how to take hold of folly* in evaluating other human activities. Solomon is diving into an exploration of the activities of the world, but with a part of him tethered to wisdom so that he does not stray too far.

The subject of his investigation will be *to see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven*. This investigation will explore building, landscaping and beautification, land development, lifestyle expansion, the acquisition of financial riches, music, and sexual pleasure.

Solomon again refers to one of the important limitations to his experience: Time. He adds the clause *during the few years of their lives*. He reminds us of the fleeting nature of human existence. Man has only a short time on earth, so Solomon plans to investigate all the things people usually seek to gain satisfaction and *test*whether they do, in actuality, satisfy the human heart.

As a very successful and wealthy king, Solomon had the resources to explore his human desires and drives to the fullest extent. He could exercise his creativity to its fullest—he *enlarged* his *works*. He undertook the grandest projects and pursuits of his time. The repetition of *for myself* refers to the quest to see if these pleasures brought the fulfillment of gladness to his heart (2:1).

We can identify with the first part of the list. Even today when people come into a large sum of money they often build elaborate homes. Solomon *built houses for*himself. He *planted vineyards for*himself as well. Perhaps to make the finest wines. He also pursued beauty in the grounds of his houses. He *made gardens and parks for*himself. He*planted in*the gardens*all kinds of fruit trees.*He also *made ponds of water.*But these ponds were not just for decoration. They were to *irrigate a forest of growing trees.*This estate Solomon constructed had all the characteristics of the greatest estates we can think of in the modern era. But Solomon did not stop there.

Such a vast estate would require substantial maintenance. And in order to host guests, to display his vast wealth, many servants would be required. So Solomon*bought male and female slaves and*also*had home born slaves.*This staff would tend the garden, maintain the grounds, pick and prepare the fruit, make the wine, and host the guests. In fact, when the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon she commented on his fabulous estate:

“When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. Then she said to the king, ‘It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me.’”
(1 Kings 10:4-7a)

The comment that the Queen of Sheba had “no more spirit in her” indicates she despaired of ever meeting the standard set by Solomon. No one could catch up to him. Such is the nature of possessions—they are comparative. If we look to them for meaning, they will be lacking. The Queen of Sheba was dispirited because she realized her possessions were paltry by comparison. But Solomon will soon tell us that he enjoyed his lavish lifestyle, yet realized it didn’t provide true meaning in life.

Next, Solomon expanded his business interests. He *possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded*him*in Jerusalem.*This would have brought in a lot of cash. Solomon*collected for*himself*silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.*Much of this cash he gained through diplomacy and military might. 1 Kings 10:14-15 tells us,

“Now the weight of gold which came in to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, besides that from the traders and the wares of the merchants and all the kings of the Arabs and the governors of the country.”

He is the richest man. He has the most lavish and impressive estate in which to live.

He is also a connoisseur of music. He acquired *male and female singers.*Now Solomon could enjoy music whenever his heart desired. But he didn’t stop there. Solomon completed the age-old list which claims the “good life” for a man is “wine, women, and song” by adding women. Solomon refers to sexual pleasure with the phrase *the* *pleasures of men—many concubines.*A concubine was a woman who was available as a sexual partner but did not enjoy the status of being a wife. 1 Kings 11:3a says of Solomon, near the end of his reign:

“He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines”

That certainly fulfills the phrase *many concubines.*Solomon reigned forty years (1 Kings 11:42). To add *three hundred concubines*during that forty year reign would require adding roughly one new concubine every other month for forty years. It seems likely that Solomon added a disproportionate number of concubines earlier in his reign, when he was younger, and possibly as a part of this pursuit of exploring pleasure, including the *pleasures of men.*

Many of the seven hundred wives came through treaties with other nations. They were diplomatic marriages that might not have brought to Solomon a wife that was physically desirable. But it is interesting that even seven hundred wives wasn’t sufficient for Solomon’s sexual appetite. Solomon also had three hundred concubines to satisfy the *pleasures of men.*Solomon would have had to add roughly two women per month to his harem over his forty-year reign to reach 1000 wives and concubines.

It seems that Solomon did, indeed, explore the full range of pleasures available to him. His quest was to determine if these pleasures, pleasures without limitation, could bring him the gladness his heart desired. All the possible spoils of man’s effort are achieved. He gives them all a try. He *became great* and *increased*. Once again Solomon displays his self-awareness, stating that his increase was *more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.*And yet, although Solomon had indulged in this vast array of consumption of pleasure, his *wisdom also stood by*him*.*He did not lose his perspective.

Solomon likely would have written Ecclesiastes earlier in his reign since 1 Kings 11:1-13 tells us that Solomon’s heart was turned from the LORD by his wives, whom he loved. This would indicate that later in life Solomon’s wisdom did not stand by him.

The problem, as stated by the Bible, was not that Solomon had so many wives. It was that Solomon took wives from nations God had forbidden Israel to intermarry, lest they turn their hearts to serve other gods (1 Kings 11:1-2). When David sinned with Bathsheba, God stated that if he had wanted more houses and wives, God would have given it to him (2 Samuel 12:8).

This seems odd to us. Jesus gave some explanation. He made clear that God’s design for marriage was one man and one woman. But Jesus also told the Pharisees that God compromised His ideal design to allow divorce because of the hardness of man’s heart (Mark 10:3-8). It seems that having multiple wives was allowed by God at this point in history, although it was not His ideal design.

Presumably, since Solomon says his *wisdom also stood by*him, it seems likely that at the time he is writing Ecclesiastes he has not started taking wives from forbidden nations.

**Biblical Text:
3I** **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. 4I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8Also, 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. 9Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.**