

Ecclesiastes 2:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth,
therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

Analysis

Solomon begins his experimental investigation into pleasure with deliberate intent: 'I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure.' The Hebrew 'anasekah' (אֲנַסֶּכָּה, I will prove/test) indicates systematic experimentation—not reckless indulgence but controlled investigation to determine whether pleasure provides lasting meaning. The phrase 'said in mine heart' shows this was reasoned decision, not impulsive hedonism. Solomon possessed unlimited resources to test pleasure's claims comprehensively. Yet the verse's conclusion delivers the verdict before detailing the experiment: 'this also is vanity' (hevel, הֶבֶל). Pleasure-seeking, no matter how refined or extensive, proves as ephemeral as vapor. This preemptive conclusion doesn't mean pleasure is inherently evil but that it cannot bear the weight of ultimate meaning. The verse teaches that human beings created for God cannot find satisfaction in created things, no matter how pleasurable—only the Creator Himself can fulfill the deepest human longings.

Historical Context

Solomon's court provided unprecedented opportunity for pleasure-testing. His wealth (1 Kings 10:14-29), international connections (1 Kings 10:1-13), and peace-time prosperity (1 Kings 4:20-25) enabled pursuing every conceivable pleasure. Ancient Near Eastern royalty often indulged lavishly, but Solomon's investigation was methodical—comprehensively testing whether pleasure delivers on its promises. This verse introduces the experiment detailed in verses 2-10, where

Solomon tries laughter, wine, building projects, acquisitions, entertainment, and sexuality. His conclusion anticipated Augustine's famous prayer: 'You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.' The New Testament echoes this: the prodigal son's pursuit of pleasure in the far country (Luke 15:13) left him empty and broken. Modern consumer culture promises that the next purchase, experience, or entertainment will satisfy—Ecclesiastes exposes this lie through comprehensive empirical testing.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What pleasures are you pursuing with the hope they'll provide lasting satisfaction, and what does Solomon's verdict suggest about those hopes?
2. How does this verse's preemptive conclusion challenge the assumption that you just haven't found the right pleasure yet?

Interlinear Text

אָמַרְתִּי	אֶנִּי	בְּלִבִּי	לִי	נָא	אֶפְסֹךְ	הָ	בְּשִׂמְחָה
I said	H589	in mine heart	H1980	H4994	I will prove		thee with mirth
H559		H3820			H5254		H8057
וְרָא	הָ	בֵּט וּבִ	וְהִנֵּה	גַּם	הָ	וְאֵל	הַבָּל:
therefore enjoy		pleasure	H2009	H1571	H1931	and behold this also is vanity	
H7200		H2896				H1892	

Additional Cross-References

Luke 12:19 (Parallel theme): And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 (Parallel theme): Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

Psalms 27:8 (Parallel theme): When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

James 5:5 (Parallel theme): Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

James 5:1 (Parallel theme): Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.