

Ecclesiastes 2:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought,
and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all
was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit
under the sun.

Analysis

This climactic verse concludes Solomon's grand experiment with pleasure, accomplishment, and acquisition (2:1-10). After denying himself nothing and achieving unprecedented success, he 'looked on all the works that my hands had wrought'—a comprehensive retrospective assessment. The threefold verdict is devastating: 'vanity,' 'vexation of spirit,' and 'no profit under the sun.' The Hebrew 'yitron' (יֵתְרוֹן, profit/advantage/surplus) appears nine times in Ecclesiastes, asking whether life yields lasting gain. Solomon's conclusion: when evaluated from an earthbound perspective ('under the sun'), even spectacular achievements produce no enduring advantage. The phrase 'vexation of spirit' (רָעוּת רוּחַ, re'ut ruach) literally means 'shepherding wind'—capturing the frustration of expending energy on what cannot be grasped or retained. This isn't regret over sinful pursuits (much of what Solomon accomplished was good and God-honoring) but recognition that even legitimate achievements, when treated as ultimate, prove unsatisfying. The verse drives readers toward the conclusion that lasting profit comes only from fearing God (12:13).

Historical Context

Solomon's unparalleled resources enabled the most comprehensive test of materialism and accomplishment in human history. His 'works' included the

Temple, royal palaces, extensive building projects, gardens, pools, forests, servants, herds, treasure, and cultural achievements (1 Kings 4-10). His 'labour' reflects the Hebrew 'amal' (עָמַל)—toil, trouble, and strenuous effort. Despite having everything wealth, power, and wisdom could provide, Solomon discovered what later saints would rediscover: 'Man shall not live by bread alone' (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). Augustine famously prayed, 'You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You'—capturing Ecclesiastes' experiential wisdom. The verse anticipates Jesus's parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), who amassed wealth but was 'not rich toward God.' Only eternal treasures yield lasting profit (Matthew 6:19-21).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What 'works' and 'labour' in your life are you hoping will provide lasting satisfaction, and what does Solomon's verdict suggest about such hopes?
2. How does this verse challenge the assumption that achieving your goals and dreams will finally make you happy?

Interlinear Text

וּפָנִי יָרִי	אֲנִי י	בְּכָל	מַעֲשֵׂי	לַעֲשׂוֹת	יָדִי
Then I looked	H589	H3605	on all the works	had wrought	that my hands
H6437			H4639	H6213	H3027
וּבְעֵמָל	שָׁעַמְ לִי	לַעֲשׂוֹת	וְהֵנָּה	הַכֹּל	
and on the labour	that I had laboured	had wrought	H2009	H3605	
H5999	H5998	H6213			
הַכֹּל	וְרָעוֹת	רוּחַ	וְאֵין	יֵתֵר וֶן	
and behold all was vanity	and vexation	of spirit	H369	and there was no profit	
H1892	H7469	H7307		H3504	
תַּחַת	הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:				
H8478	under the sun				
	H8121				

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (Spirit): I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Ecclesiastes 1:3 (Parallel theme): What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

Exodus 39:43 (Parallel theme): And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them.

1 Timothy 6:6 (Parallel theme): But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Genesis 1:31 (Parallel theme): And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.