

# Ecclesiastes 2:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

## Analysis

**Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair** (וְסָבֹתִי אֲנִי לִיָּאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי, v'saboti ani l'ya'esh et-libi)—the Hebrew verb 'ya'ash' (יָאֵשׁ) means to despair, lose hope, or give up. This isn't passive melancholy but active, deliberate despair—Solomon intentionally let his heart confront the futility he'd been avoiding. The phrase 'went about' (saboti) suggests a turning, a change of perspective. After pursuing labor's meaning through achievement, Solomon turned to examine it from the opposite angle: accepting its ultimate meaninglessness 'under the sun.'

This verse models brutal honesty before God. Rather than maintaining false optimism or denying reality, Solomon allowed himself to feel the full weight of **all the labour which I took under the sun**. This despair isn't the end of wisdom but the necessary path through which God brings us to see that meaning comes not from our labor itself but from receiving God's gifts with gratitude (2:24-26). Paul later echoed this pattern: 'we despaired even of life' led him to trust 'God which raiseth the dead' (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

## Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature typically promoted labor as inherently meaningful—Egyptian instructions and Mesopotamian proverbs promised that diligent work produces prosperity and honor. Ecclesiastes breaks this paradigm by acknowledging that labor 'under the sun' (evaluated apart from God) ultimately proves empty. For Israel's post-exilic community, struggling to rebuild after

## Related Passages

## Study Questions

- ## Interlinear Text

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