



Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

WHAT IS THIS LIFE ALL ABOUT?

Remember your Creator. Only here does Qohelet call God by this name, and he does so by design! ...You may consider yourself autonomous, but you are incapable of knowing what should be done, incapable of knowing what wisdom is. You are a creature. Our problems do not stem from our failure to stay in our garden. All the evils, and I choose my words carefully, all the evils of the world stem from our taking ourselves to be the Creator. —Jacques Ellul

Ecclesiastes is part of the Wisdom Literature of the OT which includes Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and the Psalms. The goal of the Wisdom Literature is to teach us how to live in this present world—a world created by God but impacted by sin.

Prologue: *Is There Any Meaning to Life?* (1:1-11)

The Futile Pursuit for Life’s Meaning Under the Sun (1:12-3:15)

- The Introduction to the Pursuit (1:12-18)
- The Pursuit of Pleasure (2:1-11)
- The Pursuit of Wisdom (2:12-17)
- The Human Conclusion to the Pursuit (2:18-26)
- A Glimpse into the Divine Perspective (3:1-15)

The Foolish Pursuit of the Self-Life Under the Sun (3:16-6:12)

- The Observation of the Self-Life in the World (3:16-4:16)
- The Instruction against the Self-Life to the Godly (5:1-6:12)

The Humble Pursuit of God’s Wisdom Under the Sun (7:1-12:7)

- Wisdom Is Better Despite Its Limitations (7:1-10:20)
- Wisdom Is Better If One Accepts Life’s Realities (11:1-12:7)

Epilogue: *Fear God and Keep His Commandments* (12:8-14)

In 12:8, the Teacher reminds us again of his theme statement:

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity! (cf. 1:2)

Life under the sun is vanity (*hebel*, “vapor”):

- Fleeting
- Futile
- Frustrating



Only when we accept this reality will we be ready to hear truth.

We don’t want to admit that we are fundamentally dishonest about reality, that we do not really control our own lives. ...It can’t be overstressed, one final time, to see the world as it really is is devastating and terrifying.

—Ernest Becker

Vanity. Hebrew, *hebel*, literally, “vapor, breath.” Used 38x in Ecclesiastes. It signifies that which is insubstantial, transitory.

The core meaning of hebel is “enigmatic.” Something that is hebel cannot be grasped or controlled. ...In the OT, hebel is also the name for Adam and Eve’s second son, Abel (Gen. 4:2)... Abel’s unjust and meaningless murder is just the kind of reality that Qoheleth wrestles with.

—Craig G. Bartholomew

For us the “meaninglessness” of life which the Teacher so ruthlessly exposes would seem to lead to despair or nihilism; for him it is an incitement to true piety. The insignificance of all that is done under the sun leaves him awestruck and silent before God. His inability to control or predict the future provokes him to dependence on God.

—Duane A. Garrett

LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF TRUTH (12:9-11)

- The Teacher taught the people knowledge.
- The Teacher taught words of delight.
- The Teacher taught words of truth.
- The Teacher's words are like goads.
- The Teacher's words are like well-driven nails.
- The Teacher's words are given by one Shepherd.

LIMIT YOUR HUMAN OVERTHINKING (12:12)

In addition, my son, take heed: one can write many books—there's no end to it; and one can study so much that it wears the flesh.
(Complete Jewish Bible)

But beyond this my son, [about going further than the words given by one Shepherd], be warned: the writing of many books is endless [so do not believe everything you read], and excessive study and devotion to books is wearying to the body. (Amplified Version)

- Make the Word of God your primary foundation for truth.
- Realize that you can pursue knowledge in numerous books, wear yourself out in studying, have more information than you can ever need and still not know the truth (cf. 2 Timothy 3:7).

LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (12:13-14)

Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot; this is what being human is all about.
(Complete Jewish Bible)

- **Fear God!** Worship Him alone.
- **Obey God!** Trust Him and follow His commands.

Why?

- **God is your Creator.** Your life is all about glorifying Him.
- **God is your Judge.** Your life is totally accountable to Him.
- **God is your Shepherd.** His life was given for you.

"Goads" are prodding sticks, and people who master this wisdom literature are similar to "well-driven nails" in that they are stable and secure.

—Thomas Constable

*The **one Shepherd** is a welcome complement to the majestic title, "your Creator." The God afar off is equally the God at hand, who knows and can be known... Curiously enough, as vs. 12 perceives, this may not suit us. We grow addicted to research itself, in love with our hard questions. An answer would spoil everything.* —Derek Kidner

This is the "whole of humankind" is a poignant theological insight. It is only in relationship with God as God and in submission to his will that we find ourselves to be truly alive and on the road to full humanity. —Craig Bartholomew

To obey God is to be truly human. ...Humanity sought to become like God in disobeying him but instead they lost the one thing that made them truly human.

—Duane Garrett

The decisive act of judgment upon the lost is the judgment which they pass upon themselves by rejecting the light that comes to them in and through Jesus Christ. In the last analysis, all that God does subsequently in judicial action towards the unbeliever is to show him, and lead him into, the full implications of the choice he has made. ...The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference.

—J. I. Packer