

## The Refrain (v. 8)

**VERSE 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity (הַקֹּהֶלֶת הַכֹּל הֶבֶל)**

**אָמַר הֶבֶל הַבְּלִים** [noun m.s.constr. *hebel* vanity + noun m.p.abs. *hebel* + Qal perf.3m.s.

*amar* say + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. *qoheleth* speaker in an assembly + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. *kol* all + noun m.s.abs. *hebel* vanity; futility)]!"

**ANALYSIS: VERSE 8**

1. This verse at the end of Solomon's observations on life under the sun echoes 1:2 ("Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, 'Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.'").
2. Chapter one verse 2 and chapter twelve verse 8 are exit points.
3. Chapter 11 verse 7 thru 12:7, presents the possibility of a resolution to the enigma of the problems of life which the author of Ecclesiastes struggled with.
4. The difference here between the main body of the book is that instead of the call to enjoyment, this section (11:7-12:7) brings the Creator into view.
5. Remembering the Creator enables a person to handle life's enigmas.
6. This is tantamount to making the fear of God the foundation of one's life.
7. Otherwise, all is vanity and a chasing after the wind.
8. Again, this final section, unlike the previous calls to enjoyment, begins with a call to enjoyment and ends with death, so the call to enjoyment cannot come last.
9. Rather, it comes first to highlight the limited amount of time the youth has to enjoy life before it is too late.
10. Here, Solomon provides the solution or bridge between life and death in his call to regard one's Creator.
11. His assessment of human life and endeavor is that "all is vanity" or "all is meaningless."
12. This negative take on life must be understood in a context of living life apart from a relationship with the Creator.
13. This is the only way to make sense of life; otherwise, the whole of it is vanity.
14. Throughout Ecclesiastes Solomon presented a wide variety of examples that illustrate the theme of this book, which is that life is *hebel* (1:14 "I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after the wind.").
15. Solomon's own personal quest for meaning through a series of endeavors (1:11-2:11) ended on a sour note (2:17-20 "So I hated life, the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me, because everything is futility/vanity and striving after the wind. Thus I hated the fruit of my labor which I have labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I labored under the sun.").

16. Death negates all categories of human endeavor or human failure (2:18 the wise man and the fool; 2:21 assets left to another; 2:23 the work-a-holic; 2:26 transfer of assets; 3:19 no advantage over the fate of animals; 4:4 trying to outdo one's neighbor; 4:7-8 lonely without dependant rich miser; 4:16 loss of popularity; 5:7 "many dreams and many words; 5:10 love of money and its abundance; 6:2 frustrated enjoyment of wealth; 6:3-4 long life, many offspring, but no enjoyment of life, and not even a proper burial; 6:11 many empty words; 6:12 not knowing the future; 7:6 laughter of fools; 7:15; 8:14 why sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous perish; 8:10 wicked engaged in a show of religiosity but are forgotten; 9:9 marriage and labor the sole reward; 11:8 long life; 11:9 the days of youth).
17. Other texts dealing with vanity: Pss. 62:9 "Men of low degree/rank are only a vanity (*hebel*) and men of rank are a lie, In the balances they go up. They are together lighter than breath (*hebel*)."; 89:47 "Remember what my life span is. For what vanity You have created the sons of men!"; 119:37 "Turn my eyes from looking at vanity. And revive me in Your ways."; Prov. 22:8 "He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, and the rod of his fury will cease.").

### The Epilogue (vv. 9-14)

#### **VERSE 9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people**

**knowledge** (וְיִתֵּר שְׁהִיָּה קִהְלֵת חָכְם עוֹד לְמִדְרֵעֵת אֶת־הָעָם) [*waw w/noun m.s.abs. yother more, better; beyond this, and further; term used at 2:15; 6:8, 11; 7:11, 16 and 12:12 + rel.prefix w/Qal perf.3m.s. hayab be + noun m.s.abs. qoheleth Preacher + adj.m.s.abs. chokmah wise + adv udh repeat + Piel perf.3m.s. lamadh teach in Piel, learn in Qal + noun f.s.abs. da-ath knowledge + d.o. marker + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. am people*]; **and he pondered,**

**searched out and arranged many proverbs** [וְאָזַן וַחֲקַר תִּקַּן מִשְׁלִים הַרְבֵּה] [*waw w/Piel perf.3m.s. azan give ear; "pondered" + waw w/Piel perf.3m.s. chaqar search out, investigate + Piel perf.3m.s. taqan become straight; only at Eccl. 1:15; 7:13 and 12:9; "arranged" + noun m.p.abs. mashal proverb; from vb. mashal to represent, be like + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be many*]).

**VERSE 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of**

**truth correctly** (בְּקֶשׁ קֹהֶלֶת לְמִצָּא דְבַר־חַפֵּץ וְכָתוּב יֵשֶׁר דְּבַר־יֵאֱמֹת) [*Piel perf.3m.s. baqash seek + noun m.s.abs. qoheleth preacher, speaker, communicator + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. matsa find + noun m.p.constr. dabar word + noun m.s.abs. chapetz delighting in + waw w/Qal pass.part.m.s.abs. katab write + noun m.s.abs. yosher unright; “correctly” + noun m.p.constr. dabar word + noun f.s.abs. emeth truth*].

**VERSE 11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these**

**collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd** (מְרֻעָה אֶחָד) [noun m.p.constr. dabar word + adj.m.p.abs. chakam wise men + d.a.w/prep kaph w/noun m.p.abs. dorbonah goad + waw w/prep kaph w/noun m.p.abs. masmer nail and at Isa. 41:7 + noun m.p.constr. ba-al master + noun f.p.abs. asuppah collection + Niphal perf.3p. nathan give + prep min w/Qal part.m.s.abs. ra-ah to pasture; “Shepherd” + adj.m.s.abs. ebad one].

**VERSE 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned** (וַיִּתֵּר מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזֶּהָר) [*waw w/noun m.s.abs. yother “But beyond this” + prep min w/pro.3m.p. hem literally “from these” + noun m.s.constr.w/Is.suff. ben son + Niphal imper.m.s. zahar admonish*]:

**the writing of many**

**books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body** [בְּשָׂר]

(עֲשׂוֹת סְפָרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קֵץ וְלֹהֵג הַרְבֵּה יִגְעַת) [*Qal infin.constr. ashah do; “making” hence “writing” + noun m.p.abs. siprah book; vb. is sapar count + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be great; “many” + adv ayin no + noun m.s.abs.getz end + waw w/noun m.s.abs. lachag study; “devotion to books” + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be great + noun f.s.constr. yebi-ah wearing + noun m.s.abs. bashar flesh; body*].

**VERSE 13** The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His

commandments, because this *applies to* every person (שְׁמוֹר כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם)

סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו [noun m.s.abs. soph end; “The conclusion”; plus dabar + noun m.s.abs. dabar word, speaking + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + Niphal perf.3m.s. shama hear; “has been heard” + waw w/d.o. + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + Qal imper.m.s. yare fear + + waw w/d.o. + noun f.p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. mitswah commandment + Qal imper.m.s. shamar keep + part ki because + aj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.constr. kol all + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam)].

**VERSE 14** For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden,

whether it is good or evil [שֶׁהָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל־נַעֲלָם אִם־טוֹב וְאִם־רָע]

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעַל [part ki for + d.o. + noun m.s.constr. kol every + noun m.s.abs. ma-asheh deed, act + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + Hiphil impf.3m.s. bo bring in hiphil + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. mishpat judgment from shapat to judge + prep al “everything” + noun m.s.constr. kol all + Niphal part.m.s.abs. alam be hidden + part im whether + noun m.s.abs. tob good + waw w/part im + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil]).

#### **ANALYSIS: VERSES 9-14**

1. In these final verses in Ecclesiastes, the author comments on his work as a teacher of wisdom.
2. There is a switch from the 1<sup>st</sup> person to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person.
3. The epilogue represents an experienced Solomon, who comments on the speech of a younger struggling Solomon.
4. This is not to say that the main body of this book is hopelessly tainted and not to be taken seriously.
5. In v. 9 the author describes himself in complementary terms but in a reserved manner.
6. He refers to himself as a “wise man” to be sure, and on that has worked hard at his task.
7. With a series of verbs (*taught, pondered, searched out/investigated, arranged*) he describes his laborious efforts.
8. He reports that he did not merely engage in this enterprise for his own sake, but that he also “taught” others what he had discovered.

9. He states that he “searched out many proverbs” rather than actually creating proverbs.
10. He organized his collection of proverbs (“arranged” or “set in order”).
11. He spent time “pondering” these proverbs so as to arrive at the correct interpretation.
12. In v. 10 “the Preacher” adds yet another aspect to his work as a wisdom teacher.
13. Here he is not referring to his struggles with the ways of God that constitutes the book of Ecclesiastes, but to his efforts that led to the book of Proverbs (?).
14. “Delightful words” or “words of delight” here refers to something that is pleasant.
15. Pleasant, that is, only to those who are truth-seekers.
16. His words in the body of the book are at times troublesome and problematic.
17. They do not readily evoke delight.
18. His ‘better-than’ proverbs stand up to the truth test, he asserts.
19. Even when he is exposing human folly and vanity, including his own extravagant excess, he writes that which “is upright—words of truth.”
20. In that regard, the book of Ecclesiastes is the most difficult book in the canon to defend.
21. In v. 11 that author proceeds from his description of his passion to the writings of wise men in general.
22. He likens wisdom teaching to goads that prod cattle into line, which refers to the positive and sometimes painful effects of wisdom teaching on the hearer.
23. Cattle prods had nails sticking out of the prod which was painful and compelled an animal to go in the right direction.
24. Those who became “masters of *these* collections” are liken to “well driven nails.”
25. In other, words those who master these “collections” are immovable (1 Cor. 15:58).
26. Principles of truth are of no value if there is no redirection of human behavior (goads), and if there is no resultant stability in a world of opposing views (not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine).
27. The ultimate source of these words of the wise is God who is here designated as “one Shepherd” (cf. Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:11).
28. In the final verses Qohelet issues a warning against wisdom that is speculative and points his “son” to what is ultimately important in life (‘my son’ references in Proverbs 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2).
29. In v. 12 Qohelet admonishes his “son” that there is no end to the “writing of many books” with the implication that the focus should be on mastering the sayings of the wise that have come from the “one Shepherd.”
30. Solomon experienced first hand this wearisome endeavor (Eccl. 1:16-18).
31. A person can get caught up in always learning but never coming to an understanding of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:6).
32. Ecclesiastes is to be included in the words of the wise or it would not be in the sacred canon of Scripture.
33. The epilogue concludes with closing formula—“the end of the matter, when all has been heard” (literally).
34. It is composed of two imperatives.
35. The first is “fear God” which is in line with the traditional wisdom teaching in Proverb (1:7) and Job 28:28.
36. It occurs three other times in this book (5:7; 8:12, 13).
37. For “fear of the Lord” see Job 28:29; Ps. 34:11; 111:10; Prov. 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17).
38. The second is “keep His commandments” which does not occur in the body of this book.

39. Here the epilogue goes beyond what is found in Ecclesiastes and provides a critique of Solomon's empirical approach.
40. Two motives are given for lining up with the two imperatives.
41. The first comes at the end of v. 12 and expresses the viewpoint that everyone should fear God and keep His commandments.
42. The second motive is given in verse 14 declaring that every person will be held accountable.
43. Furthermore, the judgment Qohelet speaks of is comprehensive in nature.
44. It even includes things that are hidden, whether good or evil.
45. Cf. Prov. 16:2; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10.
46. The foremost commandment is to believe in Jesus Christ to escape eternal condemnation (Jn. 3:16).

**END: Ecclesiastes Chapter Twelve**  
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