

The Refrain (v. 8)

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

אָמַר הֶבֶל הַבְּלִיַּם הֶבֶל [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.").