

Ecclesiastes 12:8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-12/ecclesiastes-128/>

The Preacher concludes by reasserting the elusiveness of complete understanding.

After all of these considerations, Solomon *the Preacher* (or Assembler) returns to his bold proclamation from Chapter 1, verse 2: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*. The Book of Ecclesiastes is about accepting reality. The best translation for the Hebrew word “hebel” (translated *vanity*) is “vaporous.” Life is full of mysteries we cannot solve. The mystery is not a problem we can fix. It is just our reality.

The question is how do we respond to “hebel?” One way is to fight against it, to try by reason, experience, and human control to eliminate the mystery, the uncertainty, and the unpredictability. When we do this, popular translations of hebel (such as “vanity” or “meaningless”) are appropriate.

The other choice is to acknowledge the mystery and allow it to spur us to faith. It is the difference between chasing the wind, which we can never catch, and turning to let the wind carry us. If we do the former, our lives will be all frustration and angst (madness). If the latter, like a kite on a Spring day, we can elevate to heights unimagined. Even if we don't understand the wind, the way it circles and twists (and even if we cannot see it), by accepting its reality we can live a life of joy and meaning, mysterious though it may be.

If we try to control the mysteries of life, we slip into *vanity*. If we let the mystery consume us we can slip into the apathy of meaninglessness. The key is the balance of wisdom, living with intention but holding our circumstances with open hands. Making the most of our choices while realizing their limitations. It is a paradox. But we find life by losing it; we discover by letting go; and we find our purpose by placing our trust in a God we cannot fully understand.

Can a man find a way to understand all that God has done from beginning to end (Can a man find a way to understand all that God has done from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Ecclesiastes 7:14; Ecclesiastes 8:17)? Solomon's conclusion is that such an undertaking is absolutely impossible, like trying to grasp vapor. We can choose wisdom over foolishness,

productivity over hoarding, and joy over madness; but we cannot do anything to eliminate “hebel,” the mystery (vapor) of life.

Although Solomon’s journey proved to be enigmatic, there are lessons learned along the way. Life is a joyous response to God, life’s Giver. Furthermore, he is strengthened in his commitment to live his days upon the earth by wisdom. Even in the midst of uncertainty, wisdom has clear advantages over folly just as joy has clear advantages over despair.

Although man cannot understand it all, he is here on earth with an opportunity and can do his best (in the midst of vapor) to steward the opportunity provided. Wise living is the best course of action for the best possible outcome of each day, as much as that outcome depends upon our choices and actions. There are no guarantees as to how day-to-day living will turn out. But God still expects us to live each day responsibly.

Biblical Text:

⁸**“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “all is vanity!”**