

WISDOM THAT HUMBLER

Learning to live within what God has made temporary

Understanding “life under the sun” in Ecclesiastes

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TODAY'S AGENDA



- 1. What “under the sun” really means**
- 2. What “vanity” and “vexation of spirit” really mean**
- 3. Is this life without God, or under His control?**
- 4. Solomon’s wisdom and Job’s wisdom**
- 5. How this applies to us today**

Ecclesiastes shows that life is real and meaningful but intentionally limited by God – and wisdom is learning to accept those limits rather than fight them.

BUT BEFORE...

- **Solomon's life**

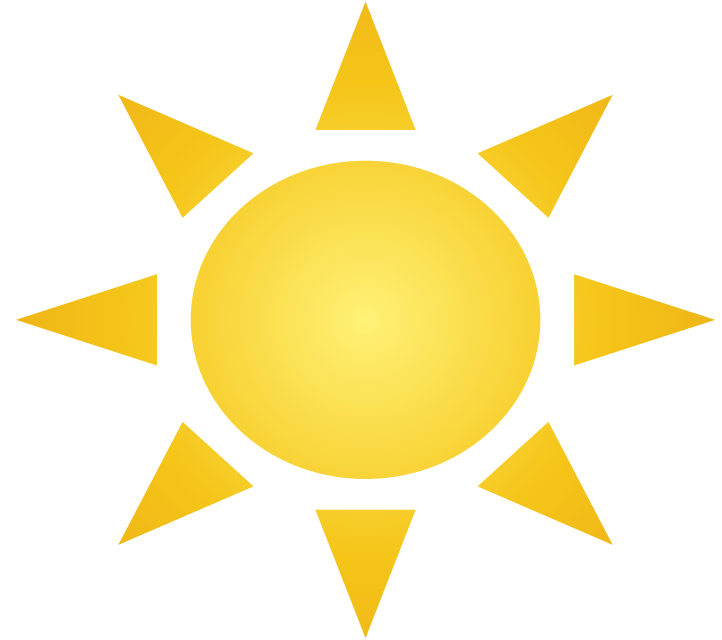
- Solomon **strayed in heart and practice** (1 Kings 11:1–8)
- God **disciplined him** (1 Kings 11:9–11)
- God **did not fully remove blessing or covenant standing** (1 Kings 11:12–13)
- God had already promised **mercy would not depart** (2 Sam 7:14–15)
- God still loves Solomon even after his fall. (Nehemiah 13:26)
- Solomon himself says **his wisdom remained** (Ecc 2:9)

- **CB note on Ecclesiastes:** *“In any case Solomon’s “wisdom” was given him by God (1 Kings 3:5-12; 4:29-34) and this “wisdom” was therefore “from above” (James 3:17) as Luke’s was (see note on Luke 1:3). Moreover, Solomon did not lose it, for it “remained with” him (Ecc. 2:9).*



1. What does the term “under the sun” really mean in Ecclesiastes?

Let's take a look



“under the sun”

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able find it.

**Ecclesiastes
8:17**

Used 29 times in Ecclesiastes

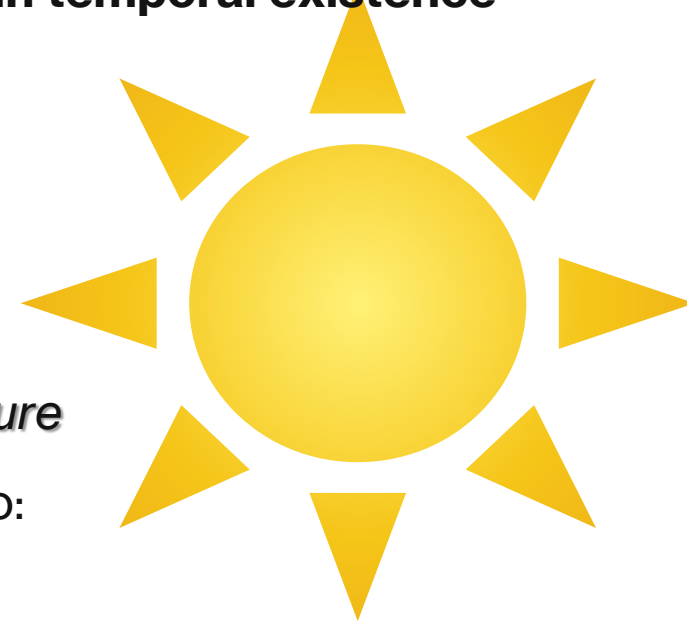
“Under the sun” describes life as it is experienced within temporal existence – finite, observable, and subject to limitation.

It is:

- *life as lived within time*
- *life bound by mortality*
- *life where outcomes cannot be secured or made to endure*

Across these uses, “under the sun” consistently applies to:

- **labor and profit (1–2)**
- **justice and injustice (3:16; 8:14)**
- **oppression and inequality (4:1)**
- **human destiny (death, time, chance (providence) (9:3, 9:11)**
- **The work of God, wisdom and governance (8–10)**
- **Life “under the sun” is experienced but cannot be fully seen through or explained.**



2. **Vanity** in old testament translated by:

hebel (Hebrew)

mataiotēs (Greek LXX)

Let's take a look at both

VANITY OF VANITIES: CORE IDEA IN THE HEBREW

- הֶבֶל *hebel* (*vanity kjv*) used 73 times in the OT.
- **38 occurrences alone in the book of Ecclesiastes**

Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon – הֶבֶל (hebel)

1. Breath, breathing

life-breath; what is breathed out

Verses: e.g. Isa 57:13, Job 7:16

2. Exhalation — vapor, mist

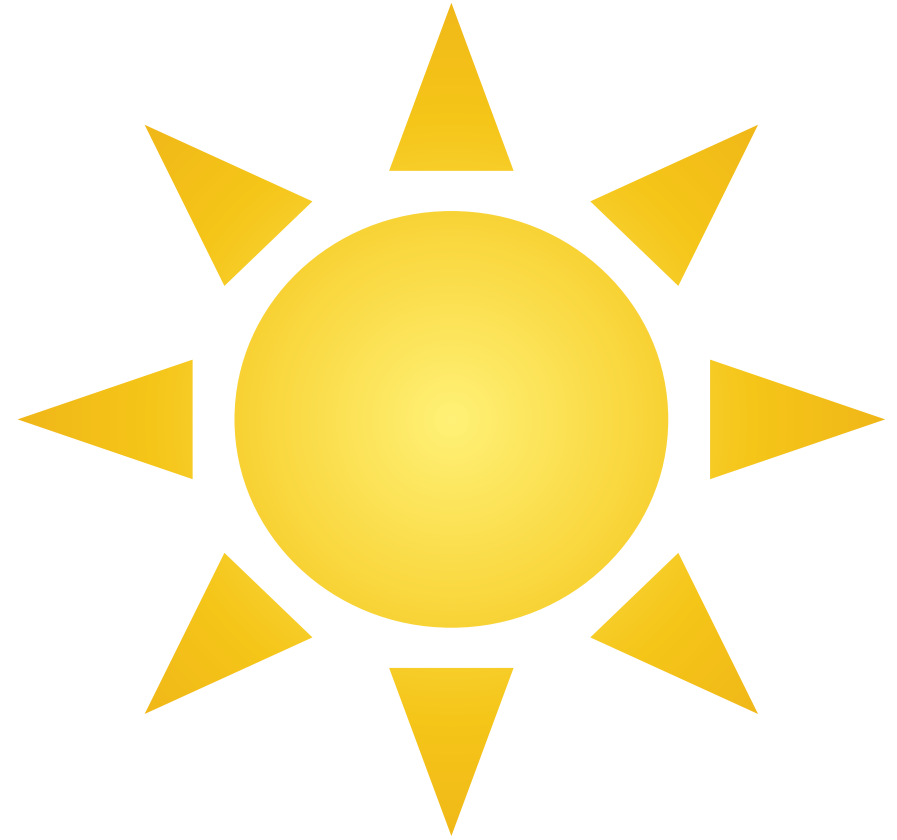
what vanishes quickly; vapor, fog, darkness, nothingness

Verses: e.g. Eccl 1:2, Ps 39:5–6, Job 27:12

3. Abel (proper name)

so named from transitoriness / brevity of life

Verse: Gen 4:2



- **Does not mean “meaningless” – not a good modern translation (NLT, etc)**
- **Hebel does not mean “meaningless” – it means something real, but like vapor: temporary, insubstantial, and unable to be grasped (secured).**

הֶבֶל

Transliteration	Pronunciation
<i>hebel</i>	heh'bel
Part of Speech	Root Word (Etymology)
adverb, masculine noun	From הֶבֶל (H1891)

Dictionary Aids
TWOT Reference: 463a

KJV Translation Count — Total: 73x
The KJV translates Strong's H1892 in the following manner: vapour (1x), altogether (1x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. vapour, breath

הֶבֶל

Transliteration	Pronunciation
<i>hebel</i>	heh'-bel
Part of Speech	Root Word (Etymology)
proper masculine noun	The same as הֶבֶל (H1892)

KJV Translation Count — Total: 8x
The KJV translates Strong's H1893 in the following manner: Abel (8x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abel = "breath" <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. second son of Adam and Eve, killed by his brother Cain

Strong's Definitions [?]
הֶבֶל Hebel , heh'-bel; the same as H1892; Hebel, the son of Adam:—Abel.

IF SOMETHING IS LIKE VAPOR (HEBEL), THEN:

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able find it.

Ecclesiastes
8:17

1. It does not last

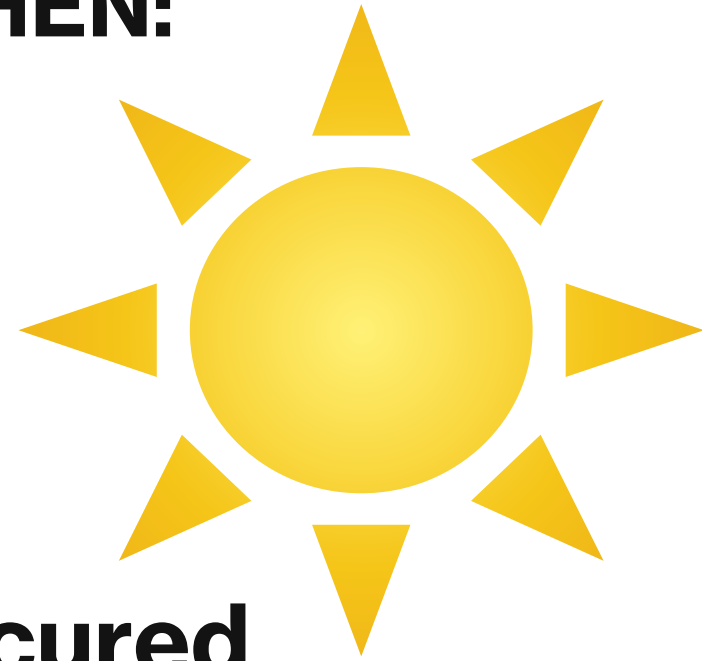
- Vapor appears – then it disappears
- **Temporary**

2. It cannot be held or secured

- Vapor cannot be held or stored
- **No lasting gain**

3. It cannot be controlled

- Vapor moves, shifts, and changes
- **Outcomes cannot be stabilized or traced**



HOW DOES LIFE BEHAVE LIKE VAPOR?



1. Life passes – like vapor that disappears

- Ecc 6:12 – “his hebel life”
- Ecc 9:9 – “days of thy vanity”
- **Connection to vapor:** Life appears for a moment, then is gone – like breath on a cold day

2. Gain cannot be secured – like vapor you cannot hold

- Ecc 1:3 – “What profit...?”
- Ecc 2:11 “All was hebel”
- **Connection to vapor:** Your work is real, productive, and meaningful in the moment – but you cannot make those results permanent, secure, or ultimate (like trying to grasp vapor)

3. Outcomes cannot be controlled – like vapor you cannot direct

- Ecc 8:14 – injustice reversed / Ecc 9:11 – time and chance / Ecc 8:17 – cannot find out God’s work
- **Connection to vapor:** Outcomes do not follow a stable pattern – you cannot control or trace them like vapor that shifts and cannot be directed.

VANITY OF VANITIES: GREEK (LXX)

- ματαιότης (*mataiotēs*) mat-eye-ot-ace
- Used in Romans 8:20, Eph. 4:17, 2Pet. 2:18
 - Translated “vanity” in each
- EWB Critical Lexicon: folly, vanity, emptiness, **as to results**

Rom 8:20 For the creature was made subject to **vanity**, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected [the same] in hope

Rom 8:20 “For the creation was subjected to a condition where it **cannot produce lasting result**, not by its own will, but by the One who subjected it – in hope.”

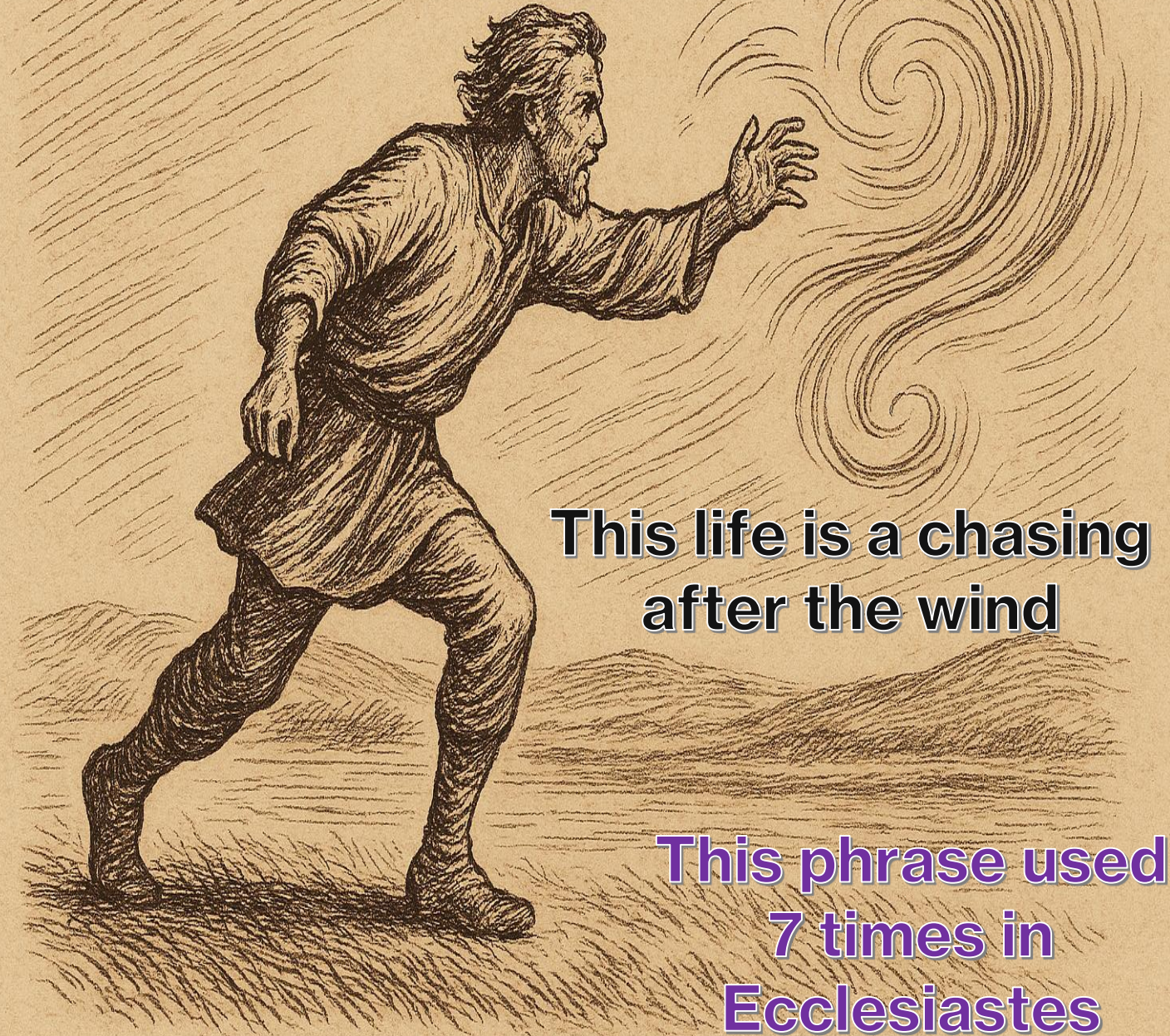
- **As to results** = Creation was subjected to transience and cannot secure its outcome, and in the same way, the believer’s walk in Ephesians and Peter can be real and engaged yet still fail to produce fruit. This is vanity ‘as to results’
- If *mataiotēs* meant **moral corruption itself**, Paul could have used:
 - kakia (evil) ponēria (wickedness) phthorá (corruption) adikía (unrighteousness) anomia (lawlessness) hamartia (sin, missing the mark)

Creation was subjected
to limitation—
not because it lacks value,
but because God determined
that lasting gain
cannot be produced within—it—
and this was done in hope.

VEXATION OF SPIRIT = A CHASING OF THE WIND

- **Hebrew (Masoretic Text)**

- רְעוּת רוּחַ (re'ût rûah)
- **רְעוּת (re'ût) re-ooth** – occupation, tending, preoccupation, a state of being engaged ;
- **רוּחַ (rûah) roo-ahet** – wind, breath, spirit
- **THEREFORE** a striving or chasing the wind. A thing that cannot be grasped. Describes the attempt to secure lasting gain within life (under the sun) from what God has made temporary.
- This condition can arise from:
- labor (2:11), wisdom (1:17), success (4:16), and even God-given gifts (2:26)
- The frustration lies not in the thing itself, but in pursuing from it what God has not allowed life (under the sun) to yield.



**This life is a chasing
after the wind**

**This phrase used
7 times in
Ecclesiastes**

VEEXATION OF SPIRIT = A CHASING OF THE WIND

רְעוּת (f. of the word רָעַי i. q. רָעָה, רָע, of the form פְּלִי = פִּלָּה, מָתוּ = מָת a man; from the root רָעָה No. 3).

(1) *a female companion, friend*, Esth. 1:19; Exod. 11:2; preceded by אִשָּׁה *altera, altera, one, another*, Isa. 34:15, 16; Jer. 9:19.

(2) *desire, study* of any thing. רְעוּת רוּחַ a vain pursuit, Eccl. 1:14; 2:11; 17:26; 4:4, 6; 6:9; compare רָעָה רוּחַ Hos. 12:2, and Chald. רְעוּת.

• **Companion** = one you are *joined to*

• **Striving** = something you are *joined to in pursuit*

Same underlying concept:

Intentional engagement toward something



This life
is a
chasing
after the
wind

This phrase
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Ecclesiastes

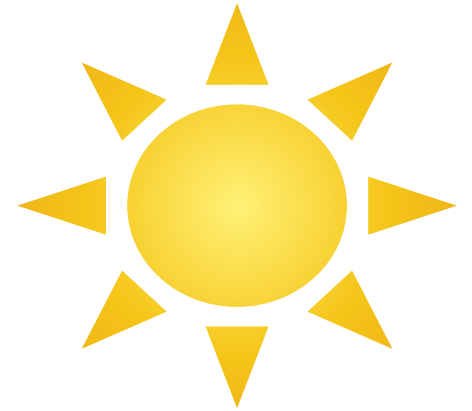
3. Is the book of Ecclesiastes a picture of life “without God”?

Or is it life with God; with Him in complete control?

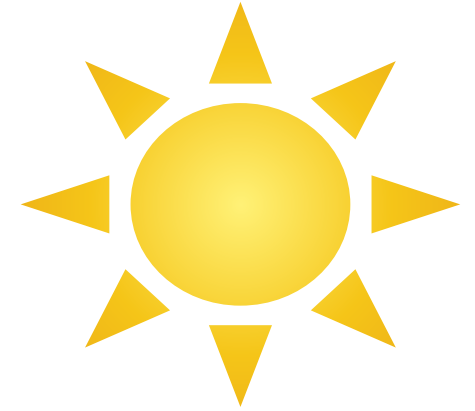
Lets take a look

Life “under the sun” is not life without God —it is life fully under His rule, yet within limits He has set.

Ecc 5:18 Behold [that] which I have seen: [it is] good and comely [for one] to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it [is] his portion.



Life “under the sun” is not life without God —it is life fully under His rule, yet within limits He has set.



- **God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy (2:26)**
- **God gives the ability to enjoy life (3:13; 5:18–19)**
- **God appoints times and seasons (3:1–11)**
- **God has made everything fitting in its time (3:11)**
- **God does things that endure – humans cannot add or take away (3:14)**
- **God tests and reveals the condition of man (3:18)**
- **God distributes wealth, possessions, and the power to enjoy them (5:19; 6:2)**
- **God governs outcomes beyond human control (7:13–14) God sees and will judge all actions (3:17; 12:14)**
- **God is to be feared within life (5:7; 12:13)**

TODAY'S AGENDA RE-CAP

1. What “under the sun” really means
2. What “vanity” and “vexation of spirit” really mean
3. Is this life without God, or under His control?
4. Solomon's wisdom and Job's wisdom
5. How this applies to us today



**4. Was Solomon's wisdom
'from above' and did it ever
depart from him?**

Lets take a look

Solomon's wisdom

- Was God given; thus Divine – 1 Kings 3:12
- Solomon possesses great wisdom and uses it – Ecc. 1:16-17; 7:23-25
- Given to examine life “under the sun” – Ecc. 1:13
- His wisdom remained with him – Ecc. 2:9



5. Did Solomon possess the wisdom that Job did?

Lets take a look

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

- Psa 111:10 The fear of the LORD [is] the **beginning of wisdom**: a good understanding have all they that do [his commandments]: his praise endureth for ever.
- **Psa 51:4,6** 4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in thy sight: **that thou mightest be justified** when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest. ... 6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: **and in the hidden [part] thou shalt make me to know wisdom.**



JOB'S WISDOM

Job justifies God:

- “I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.” **Job 42:2**
- “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” **Job 2:10**
- “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” **Job 13:15**
- “God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?” **Job 9:4**

Job condemns man (including himself):

- “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him?” **Job 7:17**
- “How can man be justified with God?” **Job 9:2**
- “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.” **Job 40:4**
- “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” **Job 42:5-6**



SOLOMON'S WISDOM

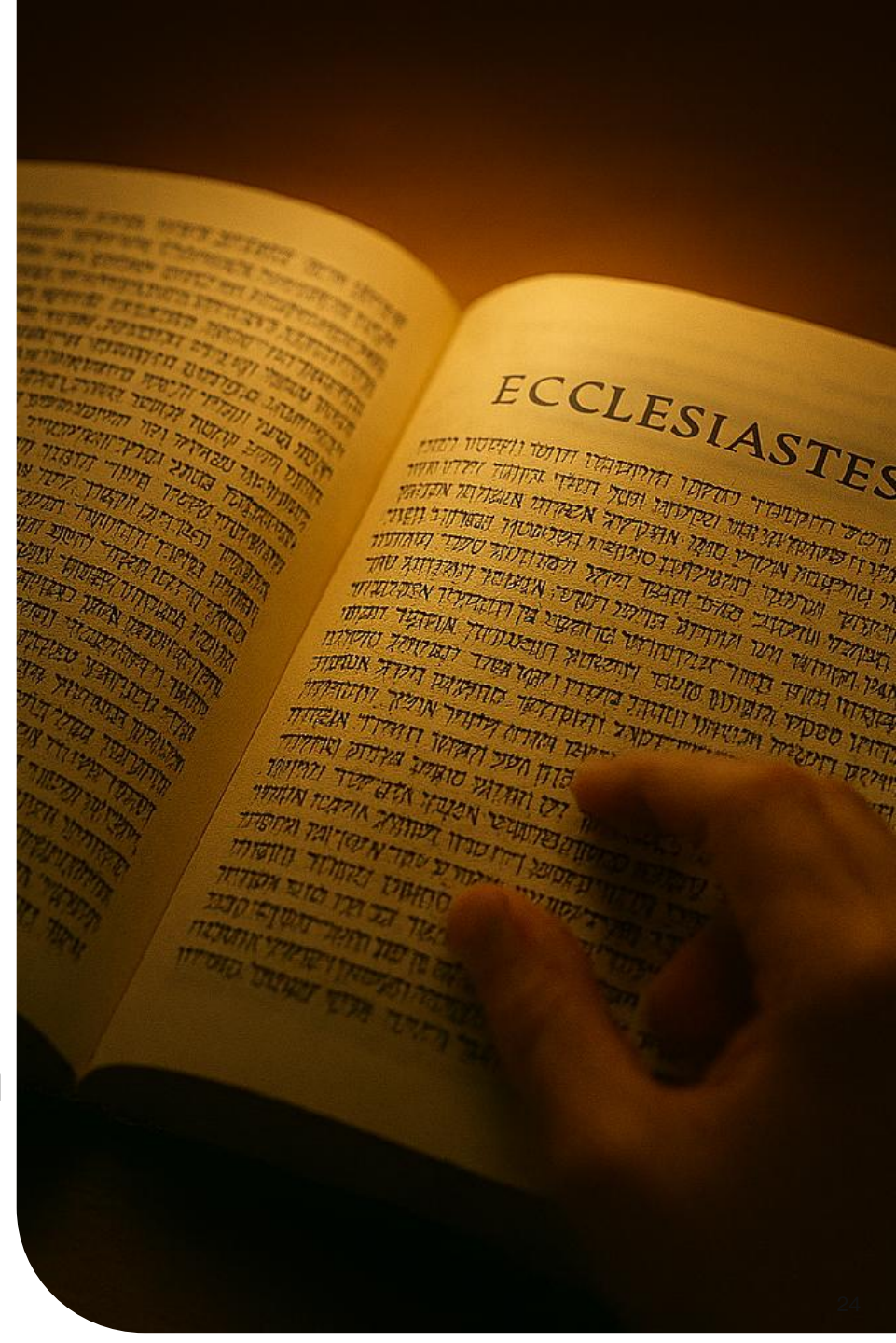
- **Solomon in Ecclesiastes justifies Him:**
- “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever... nothing can be put to it...” **Ecclesiastes 3:14**
- “Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?”
Ecclesiastes 7:13
- **Solomon condemns man:**
- “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” **Ecclesiastes 7:20**
- “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” **Ecclesiastes 7:29**
- “...the heart of the sons of men is full of evil...”
Ecclesiastes 9:3



TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

Psalm 90:12 (KJV) *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”*

- Wisdom comes from **recognizing the limits God has set on life**
- Life is **finite, appointed, and governed by God**
- This is the foundation for **Job and Solomon alike**



TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

- **Solomon – Ecclesiastes**

- “All the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow...” **Ecclesiastes 6:12** → Life is brief, insubstantial, and cannot secure lasting gain (**vain = / הֶבֶל hebel**)

- “All the days of the life of thy vanity... which He hath given thee under the sun” **Ecclesiastes 9:9** → Days are **given by God**, therefore enjoyed – but not made permanent

- **Job – Job**

- “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle” **Job 7:6**
→ Life is moving rapidly toward an end

- “For my days are vanity.” **Job 7:16**
→ “Vain days of my life”
Same word:) הֶבֶל hebel)



6. How can all this fit into our current lives and is this wisdom that can be imparted to us, today?

In our hope & calling; Ephesians 1:17 and 4:17

Ephesians 1:17 – wisdom that humbles

Ephesians 1:17 - That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the (spirit of wisdom and revelation) in (the knowledge of him:)

- ✓ This wisdom was prayed for
- ✓ In Eph. 1:9 – the Mystery of His will had been revealed to them.
- ✓ This wisdom concerned their walk, their personal relationship with the Lord. It is a wisdom that humbles.
- ✓ “By grace are ye saved...not of yourselves...gift of God...not of works, lest any man should boast” Eph. 2:8,9

How this connects to Ecclesiastes

- Ecclesiastes shows the limit of life under the sun
- Romans 8:20 says creation was subjected to that condition
- Paul in Ephesians shows what happens when that condition is lived out in the mind

Ephesians 4:17 – what is “vanity of mind”?

Ephesians 4:17 – in the vanity (gk. Matatiotes) of their minds

- Same word as Ecclesiastes LXX and Romans 8:20
- Means something real that cannot produce lasting result.
- **VANITY OF MIND = a mind that cannot produce lasting truth, stability or outcome.**

A kenos problem is a problem of substance. A believer is trusting in hollow ideas that have no real truth in them.

VAI

[844

VAIN (BE IN)

κενώνω, *here, pass.*, to be empty, as to contents.

2 Cor. ix. 3.

VAIN (BECOME)

ματαιιώνω, *here, pass.*, to become foolish, useless, empty, *as to results.*

Rom. i. 21.

VAIN (IN)

1. κενός, empty, (*as to contents.*)
2. εἰς κενόν, in vain.
3. εἰκῆ, without purpose, to no purpose.
4. μάτην, foolishly, *i.e.* fruitlessly, idly.
5. δωρεάν, gratuitously; hence, without

EWB Lexicon

“as to
results”

VERSUS

“as to
contents

2. μάταιος VAP

1.

VANISH AWAY (READY TO) 1.

{ ἐγγύς, near,
ἀφανισμοῦ, a disappearing.

Heb. viii. 13.

VANISH OUT OF SIGHT. 2.

{ γίνομαι, to become (תָּבִיאָה)
ἀφαντος, invisible, not seen. 3.

Luke xxiv. 31.

mataiotēs

VANITY (-IES.)

1. ματαιότης, folly, vanity, emptiness
as to results. (*non occ.*)

A mataiotēs problem is a problem of destination. A believer is putting real effort into a path that looks good but ultimately produces no lasting fruit.

Philippians – what happens when this limit is rejected?

Phl 3:16-19 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. 17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. 18 (For many **walk**, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end [is] destruction (**waste**), whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, *who mind earthly things.*)

*Mind translated "affection" in Col. 3:2 and "savourest" in Matt. 16:23 (**read**)*

Ephesians 4:17 – what happens when this limit is rejected?

1. A person expects life to give lasting fulfillment (vs 17-18)

- “vanity of their mind” and “understanding darkened”
- Mind seeking meaning, stability, fulfillment from “earthly things”
- Attempting to secure lasting gain from this life

2. Life cannot deliver (vs 18)

- “understanding darkened” and “alienated from life of God”
- Earthly things cannot produce what they expected

Ephesians 4:17 – what happens when this limit is rejected?

3. They turn elsewhere (v19)

- “have given themselves over”
- They give themselves over to these “earthly things”

4. Corruption (v19)

- “uncleanness...greediness”
- Always needing more – never satisfied
- “Whose end is waste” Phil 3:19

Ephesians 4:17 – spouse / family example

- **Vanity of the mind = when a person demands from life what it cannot give, they eventually turn to whatever will.**
- **A person looks to a spouse or family as the ultimate fulfillment for: love, companionship, stability.**
- **They demand security, emotional support, completeness in this.**
- **Reality: people change, people fail, relationships are finite**
- **Result: frustration, resentment, control behavior – anxiety, fixation, compromise, etc. – path to moral corruption.**
- **Behavior not the problem – it's the wrong source of life producing emptiness.**

Ephesians 4:17 – business example

- **Vanity of the mind = when a person demands from life what it cannot give, they eventually turn to whatever will.**
- **Someone builds a business and look to it as the ultimate fulfillment of identity, security, reputation and stability.**
- **They demand lasting fulfillment, peace, etc.**
- **Reality: These limitations are resisted; businesses change, markets shift, money doesn't bring peace, nothing is permanent.**
- **Result: Instead of accepting limitation, they push harder; more control, more expansion, more pressure - anxiety, fixation, compromise, etc. – path to moral corruption.**
- **Behavior not the problem – it's the wrong source of life producing emptiness.**

Finally – James says it wonderfully

- **Jas 4:13-14** Your life is a vapor. It appears for a little time. Then vanishes.
- Wisdom accepts what God has made temporary, instead of trying to make it last, instead of allowing it to define us
- Solomon says therefore to 'enjoy it all' and to fear Him and follow His commandments.
- All in this life His from His hand – it is a gift from Him. Worship the Giver, not the Gifts.