

**BACKGROUND**

**Author and Date:** Jewish tradition says Solomon wrote it in his last year of life at the age of 60, in 930 BC.

**Theme:** Life is like a wisp of breath on a cold morning. Life has beauty, but it is brief, elusive and unexplainable.

**Purpose:** To show the value of human wisdom and how to use it; to give skill to enjoy life within its limitations.

**Titles:** *Koheleth* (Hebrew); *Ecclesiastes* (Greek); both mean, *A teacher calling people together in order to teach them.*

**Scripture background:** 1 Kings 3:12-13; 6; 8; 10:23; 11:4-11

**OUTLINE**

- I. **Studies** about Life 1:1 - 2:16
  - from nature – life is filled with brief and endless cycles
  - from experience – life brings satisfaction, but it does not last
  - from reasoning – life has good and valuable things, but even they do not last
- II. **Observations** about Life 2:17 - 12:8
- III. **Conclusions** about Life 12:9-14

**DEFINITIONS for this book** Culture determines the interpretation of picture language. This is Middle-East culture.

**Burden** means *a task that requires effort* used 8 times in book

**Evil, heavy, grievous** means *sorrow or frustration* one Hebrew word used 31 times

**Wisdom** means **human wisdom**: ability to use gifts and talents, use common sense and understand the world around us.

It is a gift from God to be developed thru what we can see and observe and  
thru what we can prove thru science, logic and reason.

It also has limitations: it cannot explain the spiritual such as the greatness of God or life after death.

There are 2 exceptions when *wisdom* means godly wisdom - 12:9, 11

**Hate** means *to not like something as much as before.*

**Under the sun** (used 29 times); **Under heaven** (used 3 times) Both mean *our life here on earth.*

**Chasing the wind** means *our inability to "capture" life and keep it.*

**Vanity, meaningless, useless, futile, empty:** not one of these words or any of our translations is accurate.

The Hebrew word is *breath/vapor*; the wisp of breath on a cold morning

Solomon uses this picture to convey 4 ideas about life: there is beauty in life, but it is brief, elusive and unexplainable.

**EXPLANATIONS**

**Studies about Life** from experience 2:1-11

- He tries pleasure, wine, projects/goals, beauty of nature, possessions, music and sex to find worth and purpose in life.
- He enjoys what he accomplishes and experiences, but the enjoyment is brief and elusive. vs. 11

**Observations about life** because it is brief and elusive. 2:17 - 7:29

- 2:17 his summary uses 5 Middle East phrases that involve picture language. It means:  
*Life is not a wonderful as I thought it would be. I enjoyed myself in lots of activities, but the enjoyment did not last. Just when I thought I had a handle on life, it eluded me.*
- As we get older, work no longer controls our life with the same intensity. 2:18-22
- There is a time for everything, so take each day as it comes in order to enjoy the good things. 3:1-22  
In our life here on earth, there will also be heartache, problems and trouble.  
Using human wisdom, we can see that when death comes for us and for animals, 3:19-21  
the life breath leaves the body and the body is put in the ground to return to dust  
Human wisdom cannot say with certainty...if there is a difference between the breath of animals and humans  
...if the spirits/breaths go to the same place or different places  
Human wisdom cannot speak with certainty about life **after** death; it can only speak about life **before** death.
- Many things can ruin our enjoyment of life. chapter 4  
injustice 1-3; wrong motives 4-6; no family/friends 7-12; leaders who let us down 13-16
- Playing games with God to get yourself out of trouble will only give you more trouble. chpt. 5
- Wealth does not guarantee enjoyment of life. chapters 5-6
- We learn more from times of difficulty than from times of happiness. 7:1-14
- Learn to have balance in life: when to say *no* and when to say *yes* to yourself. 7:16-18



**EXPLANATIONS** continued

**Observations about life** because it is unexplainable. chapters 8-11:6

There are so many questions that cannot be answered; there is so much we do not know.

**Observations about life** because it is uncertain and brief 11:7 - 12:7

- There are times of pleasure and times of darkness. The only way to enjoy life is to accept its limitations.
- Youth and strength are wonderful.  
Respond to God while you have them so you can use the best of your life and energy for Him.  
Enjoy your strength and youth for they will not last.

**Observations about life** in Middle-East picture language - it describes what happens as one gets older 12:1-7

**vs. 1** We experience more sadness and grief as well as limitations in our health.  
The days and years do not bring the same pleasure.

**vs. 2** As literal darkness and clouds take away light, so pain and grief take away the enjoyment of life.  
When we are young we go thru difficult times, but always expect things to get better just as we expect the sun to come out after the rain. But as we get older, instead of sun, we find clouds returning after the rain - depression after our tears. We know that sometimes and in some situations things will not get better in this life.

**vs. 3** The hands and arms tremble, the strong stoop, we have less teeth to chew with and cataracts make things look dim.

**vs. 4** Older people cannot go out as much to hear the sounds of daily life.

They get up with the birds because they can't sleep, but do not enjoy the songs of the birds because they can't hear.

**vs. 5** An older person does not have as much balance and quickness; almond blossoms picture white hair.

Grasshoppers or locust cannot move on a cold morning. They have to sit in the sun and get warmed up before they can move. So it is in old age when joints are stiff and sore on a cold morning. Certain kinds of food are no longer desirable, either because they can't be chewed or can't be digested; mental and physical challenges are not as exciting - it is easier to let someone else do it; sexual desire may diminish. Eventually the person dies.

**vs. 6** Three pictures from Solomon's day that give instruction to those who are getting older.

*Respond to God before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken.*

In those days a wooden bowl was overlaid with gold and made into an oil lamp. It hung from the ceiling, held up by a silver cord or chain. If the chain broke, the golden bowl-lamp fell to the marble floor, was ruined and the light went out. So our lives which are valuable like silver or gold can experience catastrophe and life is ended.

*Respond to God before the pitcher is shattered at the well.*

The pitcher was made of clay and therefore fragile; just a small blow against the stones could shatter it.  
So our bodies, made of clay, are fragile and often it is only a small incident that can shatter our life.

*Respond to God before the wheel is broken at the well.*

The pulley-wheel lowered a bucket into a deep well so that water could be raised. But if the pulley broke down, there was no more water. So when our physical system breaks down, there is no more life.

These pictures show that life with beauty and value is fragile. Disaster can strike quickly and unexpectedly.

**vs. 7** *our body made of dust returns to the ground. Our spirit returns to God because He is the One who gave it.*

This is godly wisdom speaking with certainty to those in God's family.

**Conclusions about life** 12:9-14 Because Solomon is qualified, his words should be like goads that move us to action.

- Fear God: Know God so well that you are in awe of Him and afraid of His consequences if you disobey.
- Obey God so you do not lose your godly wisdom.
- Be assured there will be final justice.

**APPLICATION**

Life is ...unexplainable so we stop trying to play God. We do not have all the answers.

...brief so we enjoy to the fullest each day for what it brings.

...elusive and not completely satisfying, so we look forward to eternity.

**3:11** *God has put a part of Himself - eternity - within us*

We are made for eternity.

This is why the things of time - of this earth - can never satisfy or fulfill completely.

God wants us to be homesick for living with **Him** in His presence.

