



7



Ecclesiastes



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Introduction

*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
Futile! Futile! Absolutely futile! Everything is futile! (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2).
Absolutely futile! laments the Preacher, Everything is futile! (Ecclesiastes 12:8).*

These verses at the beginning and end of the book put a fence around it, indicating that this is the main concern of the writer. Futile is the key word in Ecclesiastes occurring 34 times.

Futile defined

Futile (*hebel*) is the key word in Ecclesiastes occurring 34 times. The literal, concrete sense means the wind, man's transitory breath, evanescent vapour (1:14). Metaphorically, it can mean "fleeting" or "transitory", "obscure," "dark," "difficult to understand," "enigmatic" (1:10), and "like striving after the wind", an effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it (e.g., 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). (Net Bible notes).

Futile extent

The references to 'futile' sandwiched in between the two verses above are proof of the proposition in 1:2, and 12:8. These references are listed in two tables below, classified into Work & Wealth, and Wisdom & Life respectively.

Work

Solomon laments that all the effort that he had expended to secure his achievements, to outdo the other person, and his pleasure seeking, never brought satisfaction but only unhappiness. All day long his work produced pain and frustration, not enabling him to relax at night. He concluded that all of this was futile, like chasing the wind, and there was nothing to be gained from it.

Verse	Futile texts - Work & Wealth
Work 1:14	Everything man has accomplished is <i>futile</i> —like chasing the wind!
2:1	I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it is worthwhile." But I found that it also is <i>futile</i> .
2:11	Yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it, I concluded: "All these achievements and possessions are ultimately (<i>futile</i>) — like chasing the wind! There is nothing gained from them on earth."
2:23	For all day long his work produces pain and frustration, and even at night his mind cannot relax. This also is <i>futile</i> !
4:4	Then I considered all the skilful work that is done: Surely it is nothing more than competition between one person and another. This also is <i>futile</i> —like chasing the wind.
4:7	I saw <i>futility</i> under the sun: the case of solitary individuals, without sons or brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil, and their eyes are never satisfied with riches. "For whom am I toiling," they ask, "and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is <i>futility</i> and an unhappy business.
Wealth 5:10	The one who loves money will never be satisfied with money, he who loves wealth will never be satisfied with his income. This also is <i>futile</i> .
6:2, 4	There is an evil that I have seen under the sun: those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is <i>futility</i> ; it is a grievous ill. A man may beget a hundred children, and live many years; but however many are the days of his years, if he does not enjoy life's good things, or has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. For it comes into <i>futility</i> and finds rest rather than he.
6:9	It is better to be content with what the eyes can see than for one's heart always to crave more. This continual longing is <i>futile</i> —like chasing the wind.

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Wealth

Wealth and money lovers will never be satisfied. Indeed, those to whom God gives wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, He does not enable them to enjoy them, but a stranger does. So, Solomon concludes, it is better to be content with what the eyes can see than for one's heart always to crave more. This continual longing is futile-like chasing the wind.

Wisdom

Solomon lamented that there was no benefit to him, the wisest man of all, because he would fare no better in the end than the most foolish man who may succeed him, who walks in darkness. Such benefits are ultimately futile—like chasing the wind.

To those who please God He gives wisdom, knowledge, and the sinner's amassed wealth For the wicked this is futile—like chasing the wind, just like a lot of talking and dreaming. The best goal is to fear God.

Verse	Futile texts - Wisdom & Life
Wisdom 2:15	“The fate of the fool will happen even to me! Then what did I gain by becoming so excessively wise?” So I lamented to myself, “The benefits of wisdom are ultimately <i>futile</i> .”
2:17	So I loathed life because what happens on earth seems awful to me; for all the benefits of wisdom are <i>futile</i> —like chasing the wind.
2:19	Who knows if he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master over all the fruit of my labor for which I worked so wisely on earth. This also is <i>futile</i> !
2:21	For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; however, he must hand over the fruit of his labor as an inheritance to someone else who did not work for it. This also is <i>futile</i> , and an awful injustice!
2:26	For to the one who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy, but to the sinner, he gives the task of amassing wealth —only to give it to the one who pleases God. This task of the wicked is <i>futile</i> —like chasing the wind!
6:11	Often, much talk means much <i>futility</i> . How does it benefit a man?
7:6	For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This kind of folly also is <i>futile</i> .
5:7	Just as there is <i>futility</i> in many dreams, so also in many words. Therefore, fear God.
Life 3:19	For the fate of humans and the fate of animals are the same: As one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath. There is no advantage for humans over animals, for both are <i>futile</i> .
7:15	During the days of my <i>futility</i> I have seen both of these things: Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds.
4:16	There is no end to all the people nor to the past generations, yet future generations will not rejoice in him. This also is <i>futile</i> and like chasing the wind.
8:10	I have seen the wicked approaching and entering the temple, and as they left the holy temple, they boasted in the city that they had done so. This also is <i>futility</i> .
9:9	Enjoy life with your beloved wife during all the days of your <i>futile</i> life that God has given you on earth; for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work on earth.
11:8	So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many—all that is about to come is <i>futility</i> .
11:10	Banish emotional stress from your mind. and put away pain from your body; for youth and the prime of life are <i>futile</i> .

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Life

Humans and animals both die, so there is no advantage for humans for both are futile. Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds. This also is futile. Even the wicked approach and enter the temple, and as they leave they boast that they had done so. This also is futility.

A man should enjoy life with his beloved wife during all the days of his futile life that God gives him for that is his reward in life and in his burdensome work. So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many—all that is about to come is futility. Even youth and the prime of life are futile so live stress and pain free.

Postscript Conclusion

Personal work and achievements, seeking youth and the prime of life, wisdom, pleasure, wealth and money produced pain and frustration not satisfaction, relaxation, enjoyment and happiness. All of this was futile, like chasing the wind. To those who please God and fear Him He gives wisdom, knowledge, wealth and a wife as a reward in life.

Solomon has heard every argument and reached the following conclusion.

Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment including every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13-14).

Fearing God is holding Him in reverential awe, motivating man to keep His commandments. ‘The whole duty of man’ applies to all mankind, as that which gives to man for the first time his true and full worth (Keil and Delitsch, Commentary on Ecclesiastes, Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

