

The Doctrine of Vanity

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

Image taken from:
http://www.4catholiceducator.com/graphics/Ecclesiastes1_2.jpg

This doctrine was taken directly from **Psalm 62** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

Eccles. 4:7–8 Again, I saw **vanity** under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is **vanity** and an unhappy business. These are the words of Solomon, who

both accumulated an incredible amount of riches and pursued many human endeavors in his search for happiness.

Psalm 62:9 Those of low estate are but a **breath**; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a **breath**. (ESV)

Preface: We are going to look at a particular word and a particular aspect of that word: the concept of vanity or emptiness in this life.



- 1) The word vanity is the masculine noun hebel (לִבָּה) [pronounced *HEH^B-vel*], which means, *vapor, breath, unsubstantial, emptiness, empty, vanity, meaningless, vacuous; vain, vainly; idols*. Strong's #1892 BDB #210. It is found over 70 times in the Bible. It is an unusual word, as it is found a couple of times in Job, but never in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus or Numbers (books which should have come out of the same era, roughly).
- 2) First uses of the word *vanity* in Deuteronomy and Job:
 - (1) The first occurrence of this word is in Deu 32:21 *They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.* The context of vv. 16 and 17 suggest that the translation of *idols* is apt; and the idea is, there is nothing in an idol. An idol is just made up; often the work of someone's hands. But what they are worshiping or sacrificing to is *empty, meaningless, a nothing*.
 - (2) The actual first occurrence of this word (as I believe the book of Job to have occurred around the time of Abraham) is in Job 7:16, where Job despairs of his life: *I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.* This appears to be the root meaning of the word *vanity*.
 - (3) Job uses this word again in Job 9:28–29 *I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain?* No matter what he says to his friends, they have judged him as being guilty. He wonders why does he even bother to defend himself; he is laboring in vain.
 - (4) He uses the word again in Job 21:34 *How then will you comfort me with emptiness? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.* What his friends said revealed no true empathy by which he could be comforted.
 - (5) Elihu uses this word against Job in Job 35:16 *Job opens his mouth in emptiness; he multiplies words without knowledge.*
- 3) This word is used in the sense that man's life on this earth is quite short, all things considered.
 - (1) Psalm 39:5 *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah (ESV)*
 - (2) Before God, man's life appears to be nothing: Psalm 39:11 *When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath! Selah (ESV)*
 - (3) Those who are against God are but a mere breath. Psalm 62:9 *Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. (ESV)*
 - (4) Man's thoughts are like a breath—extremely transitory. Psalm 94:11 *the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath. (ESV)*
 - (5) See also Psalm 78:33 144:4 for similar passages.
- 4) This same words is used in the plural on several occasions to refer to idols (which are mere nothings). 2Kings 16:13, 26 Psalm 31:6 Isa. 57:13 Jer. 8:19 10:8 14:22 Jonah 2:8. Idolatry is empty and vain. Jer 10:14 *Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. (ESV)* See also Jer. 10:3 51:17–18 Zech. 12:2



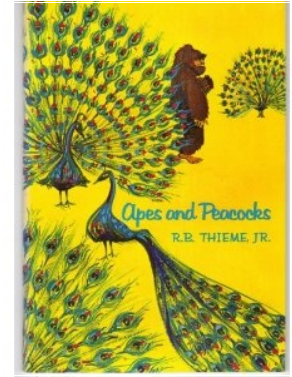
This is one of the pictures I recall from my house as a youth. The title is *All is Vanity*. Image from [WordPress](#).

- 5) This word *vanity* can be used in such a way as to refer to the wrong way of doing a thing. Prov. 13:11 **Wealth gotten by *vanity* [translated elsewhere, *fraud, injustice*] shall be taken away, but he who gathers by hand shall increase.** (MKVJ) The idea here is, man, as a vain creature, acts in vanity; i.e., under the control of the sin nature. Getting wealth illegitimately is also associated with vanity in Prov. 21:6
- 6) Vanity can be used in the sense of superficial, vacuous and self-serving. Prov. 31:30 **Charm is deceitful, and beauty is *vain*, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.** (ESV) Or this may be interpreted as being quite transitory: Prov. 31:30 **Charm is deceptive, and beauty *evaporates*, but a woman who has the fear of the LORD should be praised.** (God's Word™)
- 7) The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks of all life as being vanity: Eccles. 1:2 **Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, *vanity of vanities!* All is *vanity*.** (ESV) (see Eccles. 12:8 as well). He continues in that same vein where all that he has done or worked for is empty or vain. Eccles. 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26 3:19 4:4, 16 5:10 6:2, 4, 9, 11 7:6 Although all of these are making points, let's look at Eccles. 4:7–8 **Again, I saw *vanity* under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is *vanity* and an unhappy business.** Many of the passages deal with the emptiness of accumulation of great wealth (which is something that Solomon did).
- 8) Solomon also observed that there were times when the righteous man seemed to get the short end of the stick, and he saw that as vain. Eccles. 7:15 **In my *vain* life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.** (ESV) In a similar vein, see also Eccles. 8:10, 14
- 9) Solomon referred to life in general as being a thing of vanity, which he applies to the unbeliever. Eccles. 9:9 **Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your *vain* life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.** (ESV) A similar sentiment is expressed in Eccles. 11:8, 10. The idea is, apart from salvation and Bible doctrine, one's life is nothing but vanity. Eccles. 12:7–8 **and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is *vanity*.** (ESV) See also Eccles. 6:12
- 10) This word is used to dissuade Israel from calling upon Egypt for help in Isa. 30:7
- 11) Wandering away from God caused Israel to enter into great vanity. Jer. 2:5
- 12) Nations will eventually come to Israel, who represents the gospel of Jesus Christ, and admit that their national interests were lies and vanity. Jer. 16:19
- 13) There is a tipping point for a nation, where they look in vain for help, but there is no help coming. Lam. 4:17

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

— Ecclesiastes 2:11 (KJV)

Many years ago, R. B. Thieme, Jr. did a book study of this called *Apes and Peacocks*, which is no longer in print. However, this book was taken from his exegesis of the book of Ecclesiastes can be ordered without cost from R. B. Thieme, Jr. **Ministries**.



Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines

Doctrines

