

Ecclesiastes 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

Analysis

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun—the Hebrew hevel (הֶבֶל, vapor/futility) appears again as the Preacher transitions to another illustration of life's meaninglessness 'under the sun.' The phrase 'I returned' (shavti, שָׁבֶת) indicates shifting observational focus to examine a different manifestation of futility. This brief transitional verse introduces verses 8-12's treatment of isolation versus companionship.

The repetition of 'vanity under the sun' creates thematic continuity throughout the book—whether examining oppression (4:1), achievement (4:4), or isolation (4:7-8), the Preacher finds the same verdict: 'under the sun' (temporal, earthly perspective) everything proves hevel (vapor-like, transient). Only the fear of God and eternal perspective transform earthly existence from meaningless vapor to purposeful stewardship (12:13-14).

Historical Context

This verse functions as a structural marker in Ecclesiastes' literary composition. Ancient Hebrew wisdom literature often used repetitive phrases to signal topic transitions and maintain thematic unity. The recurring 'under the sun' (29 occurrences) and 'vanity' (38 occurrences with various Hebrew terms) create a cumulative effect—no matter which angle the Preacher examines earthly existence, the same fundamental emptiness emerges. This rhetorical strategy builds toward the book's climactic conclusion: fearing God and keeping His

commandments provides the only escape from comprehensive vanity. Early church fathers noted Ecclesiastes' structural sophistication in building its case.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What new areas of 'vanity under the sun' has God been revealing to you through changing circumstances and observations?
2. How does the repetition of 'vanity' throughout Ecclesiastes help you detach from temporal pursuits and prioritize eternal values?

Interlinear Text

Then I returned	H589	and I saw	vanity	under the sun
H7725		H7200	H1892	H8121

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (Parallel theme): So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.