

Psalms 34:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?

Analysis

What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? David poses rhetorical question introducing instruction on fear of LORD. This question assumes universal human desires—long, good life—then teaches how to achieve it (vv. 13-14), connecting godliness with well-being.

What man is he that desireth life uses interrogative to engage hearers. What man (ish) asks universally—who among you? Desireth (chaphets) means delights in, takes pleasure in, wants. Life (chayim) means existence, vitality, thriving. Who desires life? Everyone. This is self-evident human longing—to live, not merely exist; to flourish, not merely survive. Question draws hearers in by naming what they want.

And loveth many days continues describing universal desires. Loveth ('ahab) means to love, delight in, choose. Many days (yamim—days, long time) means longevity, extended life. Ancient world valued long life as blessing (Deuteronomy 5:16, 30:20, Proverbs 3:2,16). Short life was curse; long life was reward. Who loves many days? Everyone. Combined with desiring life, this establishes David's audience includes all humanity—because all want long, good lives.

That he may see good adds purpose clause. See (ra'ah) means to experience, observe, enjoy. Good (tov) means benefit, prosperity, welfare, happiness. Not merely surviving many days but experiencing good throughout them. Quality of life matters, not merely quantity. Who wants to experience good in long life? Every

person. David has universal audience because he speaks to universal longings.

Having established that all desire long, good life, David teaches how to attain it (vv. 13-14). Not through self-seeking or wickedness but through fearing God—controlling tongue, departing from evil, pursuing peace. Proverbs develops this theme: Fear of LORD prolongs days (Proverbs 10:27); Length of days is in her [wisdom's] right hand (Proverbs 3:16). Jesus promised: I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). True life comes from fearing God, not pursuing selfish ambitions.

Historical Context

Long life as covenant blessing pervades Old Testament. Fifth commandment: Honor father and mother, that your days may be long (Exodus 20:12). Deuteronomy promises long life in land for covenant obedience (Deuteronomy 4:40, 5:33, 6:2, 11:9, 22:7). Wisdom literature connects righteousness with longevity (Proverbs 3:2,16, 9:11, 10:27).

Yet righteous sometimes died young (Abel, Uriah, Zechariah, Jesus' disciples). Resolution: promise applies generally (righteousness typically produces long life) and eschatologically (eternal life for righteous). Proverbs give patterns, not guarantees; wisdom works generally, not universally. Ultimate fulfillment comes in new creation where those fearing God live forever, seeing good eternally.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do universal human desires (long life, seeing good) provide evangelistic entry point for teaching fear of LORD?

2. What is relationship between godliness and longevity, between righteousness and well-being?
3. How do you balance Proverbs' promises of long life with reality that some righteous die young?
4. In what ways does desiring life and loving many days reflect being made in God's image?
5. How does Jesus' promise of abundant life fulfill David's question about seeing good in long life?

Interlinear Text

מִי	הָאִישׁ	הַחֹפֵּץ	חַיִּים	אֶהֱבֵם	יָמִים
H4310	What man	is he that desireth	life	and loveth	many days
	H376	H2655	H2416	H157	H3117
לִרְאֹת	טוֹב:				
that he may see	good				
H7200	H2896				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 30:20 (Love): That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Deuteronomy 6:2 (Parallel theme): That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

Psalms 91:16 (Parallel theme): With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Psalms 4:6 (Good): There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

Ecclesiastes 3:13 (Good): And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Job 7:7 (Good): O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good.

Psalms 21:4 (Parallel theme): He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (Parallel theme): Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 (Good): I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

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