

2.

**INTRODUCTION OF THE BOOK**  
**Every Human Effort is Vanity**  
**Ecclesiastes 1:3-11**

- A. *What advantage [comes] to the man through all the toil at which he toils under the sun (1:3-11)?*
  - 1. *A generation goes and a generation comes, and the earth stays the same through the ages (1:3-8)?*
  - 2. *The sun rises, and the sun sets, then hastens to the place where it rises (1:5).*
  - 3. *The wind goes to the south and turns to the north, going around and around (1:6)*
  - 4. *All floods flow to the sea, but the sea [is] never full; to the place where the floods flow there they continue to flow (1:7)*
  - 5. *All things are [so] boring a man [has] nothing to talk about (1:8a).*
  - 6. *An eye never gets enough seeing; an ear never gets its fill of hearing (1:8b).*
- B. *What has been is what will be, and what was done is what will be done (1:9-10)*
  - a. *And nothing new [is] under the sun (1:9)*
  - b. *Is there a word of which someone says, "See this is new"? It has been already in the ages that were before us (1:10).*
- C. *[People never remember what happened before them] (1:11)*
  - 1. *No memory [remains] of former tunes (1:11a).*
  - 2. *And of that which is yet to be no memory will be among those who will come later (1:11b).*

After presenting the theme that flows through his entire Book, Solomon gave a general explanation of why he contended that everything a person does is as flimsy and as vaporous as the wind. He presented three reasons for making that statement:

**Verses 3-8.** *Man's failure to impact the world.* Solomon's first reason was the failure of people's attempts to make any real impact on the way the world operates. He said all the efforts of men have not changed one aspect of the way the sun rises and sets, the way the wind blows, or the way rivers flow. The way the world operates is so repetitious that people are left with nothing to talk about. Yet the eye keeps on wanting to see, and the ear keeps on wanting to hear. They are searching for something new, but it never comes. No matter how much effort people place in their attempts to make the world a better place, it remains forever the same.

Grandchildren and great grandchildren see the same sun rise and set each day. A thousand years later, gentle winds and violent storms blow without any change from all the works of men in all those

years.. Generation after generation builds bridges and rides boats on the same rivers, but the rivers never cease to flow or change their channels. They may alter their courses a bit, but they still flow through the same areas and empty into the same seas. People forget who their ancestors were, but their eyes see and their ears hear in just the same way as those of their long-forgotten forebears. In essence, people have no power to change the world in a meaningful way.

Solomon had spent his life running a government, developing a land, and constructing buildings and cities, but none of those works had succeeded in making any basic changes in the way the world runs. It made him realize that if all his efforts had failed to make any real difference in the world, no one else could either. Therefore, all of the works of men are empty efforts, going nowhere.

**Verses 9-10.** *Life is only endless repetitions.* Solomon's second reason was that life consists of unending repetitions but never produce any experiences that are truly new (1:9-10). Solomon had lived enough years to see several generations born, grow up, and have children of their own. He

observed that each generation went through the same stages of life. In spite of relatively minor variations, children learned the same lessons, followed the same processes to find their life's work, went through the same labors to provide a home for themselves, experienced the same disappointments and joys in finding a mate, and discovered the same triumphs and joy in giving birth to children and rearing them. Then the grandchildren repeated the whole process over again. Nothing really new or different ever happened.

Solomon was keenly aware that all the great achievements of his life were actions that others had performed before him, and he also knew that someone else was going to have to do it all over again when he was gone. Even his monumental buildings were going to grow old and decay. He could not have known that the day was going to come when his great temple was going to be torn down so completely that not one stone was going to stand on another, but he surely knew that it was going to have to be repaired, remodeled, and rebuilt as it experienced the ravages of time and wear. All that he had done and built only prepared for someone else to have to repeat what he had already done. Even his great record of running a government, making friends, fighting enemies, and dispensing justice had all been done before and would have to be done over again. Life seemed utterly futile, because it was a constant repetition of

what had gone before. It never produced anything really new.

**Verse 11.** *No one remembers what went before.* Solomon's third reason was that all that a man accomplishes is soon forgotten. He knew the generation that was living at that time only vaguely knew about their parents' youths and knew even less about their earlier ancestors. He also knew that the next generation was going to have the same lack of interest in his generation's agonies and victories. He had learned little from experiences of the past, and his descendants were going to learn little from his experiences. Because people learn so little from the past, the same mistakes were going to have to be made over and over again, resulting in the same consequences, the same defeats, and the same rewards. It all seemed so futile to him that he had worked so hard so long to do what he had done only to realize it was not going to last. It was not even going to be remembered.

The three reasons Solomon cited summarized the thoughts he shared throughout the rest of the Book. They are an introduction to and a summary of his whole message. They are a message that every person who is alive today needs to hear and heed. All our effort makes so little difference, we should feel compelled to seek for something that is more than what we are able to do. That something more can only come from God.