

THE DILEMMA DECLARED: NOTHING FROM NOTHING LEAVES NOTHING (1:1-11)

EVERYTHING IS VANITY AND THAT LEAVES NOTHING (1:2)

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”

The preacher proclaims that all is vanity. Notice the superlative “vanity of vanities.” Like “King of Kings” or “Lord of Lords” these are literary devices to signify any extreme. Every material thing in the universe is extreme vanity or empty. The word vanity (Heb. *hebel*) referred to a vapor, the wind, or one’s breath. To say that all is vanity seems like a rather radical statement, but when studied out in the light of Scripture it has profound implications. All material things are vanity in that they will be destroyed and cease to occupy time and space (2 Pet. 3:10-14). Furthermore, all material things are vanity and have no spiritual value; they will not help a person gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 16:26).

THERE IS NO PROFIT IN LABOR AND THAT LEAVES WITH NOTHING (1:3)

“What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?”

Solomon says that, in the end, there is no profit for our labors under the sun. The word “profit” comes from the Hebrew word *yitron* which is found only in the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:3, 2:11, 2:13, 3:9, 5:9, 5:16, 7:12, 10:10, 10:11). It refers to that which is “left over,” like a person who receives a paycheck and pays all their bills and has nothing left over to show for their work. When we come to the end of our lives under the sun, there is no material possession that is left over to carry into the next life. All men will cry out like Job, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return thither” (Job 1:21).

LIFE IS AN ENDLESS CYCLE OF EVENTS THAT LEAVES MAN WITH NOTHING (4-11)

The Endless Cycle Is Seen in Generations (1:4)

“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.”

Generations of people come and go and for the most part are forgotten, but we are quite aware of the same earth that has been around since the beginning of time.

The Endless Cycle Is Seen in Nature (1:5-7)

- *“The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose” (5).* The sun rises in the east travels the same path each day and sets in the west.
- *“The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits” (6).* The wind blows around in circles
- *“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.”* This verse supports the hydrological cycle. The

reason the sea is not full because the water in it evaporates into the clouds and waters the land and flows back to the sea. This cycle is repeated over and over.

The Endless Cycle Is Seen in Human Life (1:8)

- *“All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: Like nature, man is trapped in an endless cycle of tiresome events from which he cannot be released.*
- *“the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”* The eyes and ears are not satisfied because there is always a desire to see and hear more.

The Endless Cycle in Seen in History (1:9-10)

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath already been of old time, which was before us.” Qoheleth is not saying there are no new inventions but that every generation is stuck in the perpetual cycle of working, resting eating, playing traveling and dying. Even the new inventions are new ways of doing the same old things; they are just better and faster ways of working, resting, eating playing and traveling.

The Endless Cycle Is Seen in Man’s Inability to Do Anything Lasting (1:11)

“There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.” Except for recorded history, nobody remembers what those from the past have done, and nobody will remember what we have done.

WISDOM FOR EVERY GENERATION

- Give your life to something meaningful (Ps. 90:12) and eternal (Ps. 90:17).
- Pass a godly heritage down to future generations (Ps. 128).
- Learn how to be content with the things God has given you (Phil. 4:11-12).
- Spend time getting to know the Word of God, it is eternal (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:24-25).