

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

"Worthlessness of the Earth"

Ecclesiastes 1:4-11

Introduction

1. This is the book which is often labeled as queer. Indeed, there are many items in it which seem inexplicable. The viewpoint is that of man. But it is of man who is fallen and moving in the orbit of his sin nature.

2. The conclusion of such a man is that all is worthless. It is like a soap bubble. The term in the KJV is "vanity" (v. 2). As the lecturer and king of Israel, he has unending resources to provide his contention (2:12). The facts must stand as he states them!

3. Hence, to come to his conclusions, he moves into various areas of human experience. In this section, he seeks to show the non-permanence of people, but he does it by drawing upon nature and experience. This underscores his view that all is vanity. Look:

1. THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE v. 4.

The generations of men continually change. One comes and goes. Then another does the same. This non-permanence aggravates sadness. The toils of life seem so profitless inasmuch as one's stay is so short. Death ends everything. Meanwhile, the earth by comparison goes on. Of course, this is the result of man's observation. The earth has not always been here. The earth in its present condition will not always be here either (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 20:11). But the point is well taken. Men move. The earth appears to remain. Life is a cycle which passes. There is no benefit to it all. It is a bubble.

2. THE MOVEMENT OF NATURE vv. 5-7.

a. The sun v. 5. The movement of the sun is summarized. It "rises" and "goes down" and "hastes" back to its start. Here is a specific natural illustration of an event. But it is an image of man. With all our boasts of progress, man has not gained anything which is solid and abiding. He is like the sun. It moves like a runner through his paces. But with all of its movement, it returns back from whence it started. There is motion, but motion in a circle (Psa. 19:5).

b. Wind v. 6. The prevailing winds of Israel are the north and the south. These are mentioned. They whirl about continually. It is noted that the wind moves in prescribed circuits. Its paths are ordered and rather normal. This is set forth as an additional illustration of man's movements. He is ever moving in the circle of vanity and is unable to move beyond it.

c. Rivers v. 7. There are underground cavities. There is evaporation. There are clouds. The sun cooperates and lifts out of the sea water which is carried by the winds and clouds to the dry land. This condenses into rain and is again fed back into the rivers which dump their water into the sea. The circle is complete. The cycle seems invariable. All returns to the point from which the movement began. So, man moves in the same cycle. He can't get beyond vanity. His misery recurs and abides!

3. THE MOVEMENT OF EXPERIENCE vv. 8-10.

a. Bodily functions v. 8. The mouth, the eye, and the ear all are mentioned here. The word "things" in Hebrew is "words," hence the mouth is employed here. The thought is this: words get wearied out. They are inadequate to express the misery of man. Besides the mouth, there are the eye and the ear. They also are never capable of providing satisfaction to man. Hence, the vanity of the earth is unspeakable and it is unsatisfying. The body of man testifies to this perfectly.

b. Natural functions v. 9. The basic statement is this: there is nothing new at all under the sun. This means there is no new source of happiness which can be devised. Hence, the results of what has been done are everywhere evident in the present order of things. There is just a common round of events and activities which have always been. The future will be like the present! No matter what man's exertions may be, his circle of vanity is there to stay.

c. Experiential functions v. 10. The experience of man is simple. He is unable to report that something is new. Why? Because it has already been done in old times or other ages. Even apparent discoveries are lessened by the fact that they have had some prior expression. Thus, with all the progress, it still stands that men die. So, what's new?!?

Conclusion The final conclusion of Solomon in this section is that former things are soon forgotten. Therefore, items are considered as new. But the future will tell the same sad story. Imperfect records with man make apparently new items, but this is false. In such a world of unsolvable problems, the possession of wisdom is the saddest and most grievous of it all. All is unprogressive, monotonous under the sun. Man's toil leads to a dead end. What a call for the belief in the Bible and the future He has prepared! Come to Christ as your Lord today.