

## THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

### "Do Men Die Like Beasts?"

Ecclesiastes 3:14-22

#### Introduction

1. In one sense, this book is terribly melancholy in its contents. It broods over the futility of life. Yet, it investigates, from a human vantage point, the worthlessness of life without God. What the natural man craves for will never be satisfied. His heart is made for God. It will only find peace when it is at rest with HIM.

2. Already Solomon has investigated a number of futile human endeavors. These include: human history (1:3-11), education (1:12-18), pleasure (2:1-11), wisdom and employment (2:12-26), and the philosophy of fatalism (3:1-13).

3. Now, with the best of resources, Solomon urges another dead end experience. It is true his knowledge is somewhat limited (v. 11), but he moves into three other areas of human experience to find futility. Here they are:

#### 1. God's IMMUTABILITY vv. 14, 15.

a. In His arrangements v. 14. What is said in this verse is true of all events, both physical and spiritual. God Himself is entirely unconditioned, but He conditions all else. It stands that fundamental issues, casual relationships, and the standards of God's government of the universe always remain the same. This unchangeableness of God and His works is patent. No creature has the power to alter these events. There is no way to add to them nor to take away from them. The reason for all of this is that men might fear before Him. Incidentally, this is a good argument for the eternal security of the believer.

b. In His judgments v. 15. There may be apparent changes in the universe, but the testimony given here is that what seems to be new is in fact something which has already been. God's government does not change. It will not be changed. Furthermore, it is affirmed that God requires the past. The verb means to follow, hunt, or press. It is as if God pursues relentlessly what has been driven into the past so that He may bring it back into the present. His government will not allow things driven into the past to stay there. They will surface again for Him. You can't get rid of the past.

#### 2. God's JUSTICE vv. 16-20.

The connection with the previous verses becomes evident. God does not allow items to remain hidden. Ultimately,

there is an accounting. But here Solomon sees things in distress. The rule of right and objective judgment is in fact the place where wickedness actually bends justice and is contrary to righteousness. The same Hebrew word is rendered wickedness and iniquity here (v. 16). Now what about the future? Will this miscarriage of justice be rectified in some future life? Note the solutions to this question given:

a. Solution #1 v. 17. The suggestion of this verse is that there is a time when items will be rectified. It does not happen at once, but it will take place. There is a time lapse, but there is a definite time for everything. A time is fixed.

b. Solution #2 vv. 11-20. This is a further explanation of the reason for the matter expressed in the previous verse. God allows this time so he might "manifest" (the Hebrew means to winnow, separate, or sift) without breaking in upon one's freedom. He nevertheless makes it possible to demonstrate the distinction between the good and the bad. In this, men see themselves to be but brute beasts. Indeed, for both man and beast there is the same death. This is an external phenomenon and does not relate itself to the opening chapters of the Bible nor to the fact that there is a freedom with man which the beast does not know. But this whole thing carries with it a shadow--vanity! The bleak picture is enforced (v. 20) with the thought that every corporeal thing ends up in a grave! In a sense, this is some sort of reply to the problem of justice and wickedness, i.e. there is no afterlife where rectitude is established.

### 3. God's CREATION v. 21.

The Hebrew constructions of this verse show indisputably that there is a wide gap between man and beast. The Hebrew letter "lamedh" shows that the "spirit of man" belongs to him as the "spirit of the beast" belongs to him. Each goes its own direction! There is a subtle suggestion here that there is a final judgment for the man. The beast does not entertain such a future. But even in this there is some uncertainty left by Solomon. He is not sure of himself. This is evident by the final verse of the chapter.

Conclusion Solomon finds himself back where he left off (3: 12, 13). The good life is to enjoy what one can of the present life. The after life has no fixity for man, hence it is something unknown. He might just as well give attendance to what he has and get the best deal he can now. Human strategy apart from God stops short of the abundant life in Christ (John 10:10). To a true child of God, there is more coming.