

### A Reason for Everything

#### Ecclesiastes 3:14-22

Ecclesiastes 3:14-22 - *"I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. <sup>15</sup> That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past. <sup>16</sup> Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. <sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."*

*<sup>18</sup> I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals."<sup>19</sup> For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath. Man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. <sup>21</sup> Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? <sup>22</sup> So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?"*

#### Background Notes

For our background notes, let's begin with verses 19-21, *"For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?"* A slightly different translation of verse 21 is easier to understand: *"Who knows whether the spirit of the sons of men goes upward, and whether the spirit of the animal goes downward to the earth?"*

It sounds like the Bible is teaching here that men and animals are the same! Right now you may be thinking, "Wait a minute! I thought that the Bible teaches that there's a difference between humans and animals. How can the Bible say here that the fate of people and animals is the same, and that humans have no advantage over animals? How can verse 20 say that humans and animals all go to the same place when they die? Doesn't the Bible teach that people go to heaven or hell depending on their faith, and animals just die, with no life after death?"

Well, what's the answer? The answer is the **context** of verses 19-21 - and indeed the context of the entire book of Ecclesiastes! Solomon was speaking here from the human perspective, of life "under the sun." Without divine revelation, it really does appear that the fate of humans and animals is the same. They all die and return to dust.

How do we know that there's a difference between the death of animals and people? How do we know that there's life after death for humans? How do we know that there's a heaven and a hell? We only know this because we have the Bible - **divine revelation**. Apart from Scripture, we would not know.

So what's the answer to rhetorical question in verse 21: "*Who knows whether the spirit of men goes upward, and whether the spirit of the animal goes downward to the earth?*" The answer is that people who read Scripture and learn what God has revealed know that the death of humans and animals is not the same. But unbelievers - who do not have the divine perspective, and who live their life only "under" the sun - often conclude that the fate of humans and animals is the same.

## Doctrinal Point

### **There is a reason for everything.**

In the first half of this chapter we saw that God is ultimately in sovereign control of everything. In His divine wisdom, He has appointed an appropriate time for everything that takes place in life. We also saw that we should respond in an appointed and appropriate way when these appointed times come our way.

The logical question that we should raise at this point is, "Why has God designed life this way? Why all these appointed times to do this and to do that, and other times not to do this and not to do that? Why is it our responsibility to respond appropriately, when there could be dire consequences if we make the wrong response? There could be serious consequences if we speak at a time when we should be silent, or if we remain silent when we should be speaking out!"

Why has God ordained and designed life to be this way? We don't have all the answers, but we do get some insight in Ecclesiastes 3.

One reason is given in verses 10-11. "*I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*" Because God has set eternity in our hearts, we have an innate desire to know the meaning of life. The appointed events of life should force us to ask questions about the existence of God, and about our relationship with Him. We cannot go through life's appointed times without bringing God into the picture, and asking questions about God. This is true worldwide - not just in so-called "Christian lands." God has designed life in such a way that no one can go through life without raising questions about what life is all about.

In verse 14 there is another reason why God has pre-ordained appointed times, which nothing can change: *“I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”* The word “fear” does not mean dread or terror, but rather reverential awe and respect.

Verse 15 again emphasizes that while events may appear to us to just be cycles of nature and mere repetition of events and time, God is total control of these appointed times. *“That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.”*

What about the matter of injustice in this life? How does this fit in to God’s plan? Verse 16 brings up that question: *“Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.”*

The answer is two-fold:

1. There will be a time of judgment. In the final analysis, no one will get away with evil and wickedness and unrighteous deeds. Verse 17: *“I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.”*

2. God is allowing present unrighteousness to exist as a test. Verse 18: *“I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.”* In other words, will we rise above the level of living and thinking only “under the sun”? Or will we fail the test? Under the sun, without acknowledging God and without acknowledging divine revelation, we are no different than animals. There is no “righteousness” or “unrighteousness” in the animal realm. There are no moral and ethical standards for animals.

So, think it through. You cannot say that some things are right and some things are wrong if you do not allow God into the picture. From the “under the sun” perspective, humans are merely animals. There are no special “moral genes” in human DNA. Without God to set the standards, moral judgments are meaningless.

We don’t have to look very far to see that God is using His appointed times as a test for mankind - including the unrighteousness that He allows at the present time. We fail the test if we make moral judgments (as all people do), but don’t acknowledge God. Moral judgments without moral standards mean nothing - and there is no such thing as “moral standards” without God!

In the second half of Ecclesiastes 3 we learn that there is a reason for everything.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Don't be a fatalist!

What is a "fatalist"? A fatalist is a person who believes that "Fate" - an impersonal force, or power, or principle, or will - predetermines all events, and that these events cannot be changed by human beings. "Fate" is not another name for the God of the Bible, and fatalism does not allow for the God of the Bible in its false doctrine.

If you're not careful when reading Ecclesiastes 3, you might wrongly think or conclude that this chapter, with all its pre-appointed times and predetermined events, is teaching fatalism, but nothing could be further from the truth! It is God - the God of the Bible - who is in sovereign control of all events. **He** is the one who appoints the times!

Verse 15 says, "*That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been...*" That sounds like an impersonal power, or "fate," determines the events of our lives. But that is not the whole verse! The verse concludes with **God in total control**: "*And God requires an account of what is past.*"

God does not allow "fate" to sneak into Ecclesiastes 3. Fatalism is not taught anywhere in the Bible. Don't be a fatalist!

### 2. Take life one day at a time.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus said: "*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*" (Matthew 6:34). In essence, that seems to be Solomon's advice in the last verse of the chapter: "*So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*"

The end of verse 22 says, "*For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*" This does not refer to our future destiny in Heaven, which we know. It refers to what may confront us tomorrow, and in the future days of our earthly life. God has appointed times - but we don't know what a day may bring forth. God knows - but we don't.

So, our response should be: Take life one day at a time. If you take one day at a time, and bring God into the picture, you can be joyful in your daily life and labor. With the Lord in our lives we can do what is good and enjoy life (v12-13).

But what about the hard times that we will inevitably face? Yes, they will come - but don't be anxious about them ahead of time. Leave life's future events in the hands of God. He will provide us with "*grace in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

Take life one day at a time.