

Ecclesiastes 3

Straight Jacket or Security Blanket?

BEST KNOWN Chapter of Ecclesiastes > Esp vs. 1-8 BEAUTIFUL POEM
Put to Music by PETE SEEGER – ‘*Turn, Turn, Turn*’ – popular FOLK SONG

1960’s Sung by The Byrds > as anti-Vietnam War, Pro-Peace song
"a time for war and a time for peace" The Byrds added "I swear it's not too late."

CHRISTIAN Chorus from v. 11 ‘*In His Time*’ > He makes all things Beautiful!

SURPRISE! > Popular SONGS may have MISSED POINT of Passage
Importance of CONTEXT to UNDERSTAND and RIGHTLY APPLY Scripture

Ch 2: Looked for Meaning in PLEASURE, WISDOM, and WORK > Not Found
From ch 2 – The Searcher’s LIFE to ch 3 his WORLD-VIEW

KEY: Looks in VAIN for MEANING > Try’s EVERYTHING, Comes up EMPTY

1. An Experience of Life

a. Control Impt. SEARCH in Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Lit: PROPER TIME!

v. 1 ...a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...

14 Couplets > 28 Events > Clusters of 7 > Whole Range of HUMAN ACTIVITY

vs. 2-8 born and die...plant and uproot...kill and heal...tear down and build...
weep and laugh...mourn and dance...scatter stones and gather them...embrace and
refrain... search and give up...keep and throw away...tear and mend...be silent and
speak... love and hate...war and peace

MERISM > Fixed POLES: COVERS EVERY Activity in BETWEEN: Born & Die

Entire Cycle of Life: from Birth to Death

Human Activities: plant and uproot...kill (WAR or DEATH PENALTY of Gov't, NOT MURDER) and heal...tear down and build...

Emotions: weep and laugh...mourn and dance

Work and Warmth: scatter stones & gather them (clear field and make wall? Or Weapons of WAR hurled on Catapult?) ...embrace and refrain

Possessions: search and give up...keep and throw away

Mourning? : tear and mend (sign of lament)...be silent and speak

Closure: love and hate...war and peace

BEAUTY of Poem OBSCURES the BLEAK message

Everything is FRUSTRATINGLY Out of the CONTROL of Human Beings
FUTILITY > World GOES ON without OUR CONTROL or CHANGE

Popular Tract: "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life" *Really?*

Life is the INTERVAL Between DELIVERY ROOM and the CEMETARY

Is it ALL Beautiful? v. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time.

ECHO of CREATION Story > God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

BEAUTIFUL = APPROPRIATE, FITTING, SENSIBLE, MEANINGFUL

ie. The WORLD WORKS > because GOD is the MAKER of ALL

v. 1 There is a time for everything

v. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time.

vs. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

NIV > REVERE lit. = FEAR > God wants men to FEAR HIM

FEAR of God one of MOST PIOUS Statements in Bible > here NEGATIVE

Qohelet's FEAR of God leads to being AFRAID – NOT ADORATION

b. Conflict

BEFORE we are Told EVERYTHING IS BEAUTIFUL....(vs. 11)

vs. 9,10 What does the worker gain from *his toil*? I have seen *the burden* God has laid on men.

IF RIGHT AFTER Time Poem: Then ALL Things = INTRINSICALLY Beautiful
But vs. 9 & 10 SHADE Meaning of BEAUTIFUL includes TOIL and BURDEN

For Koheleth the whole range of life is beyond human control, though by nature we have to share in these activities. Our toil is basically profitless because God has so planned and controlled the events in our lives that all our efforts make almost no significant change.
David Allan Hubbard

We live with EVER-PRESENT LIMITS to HUMAN FREEDOM

Every Moment we FACE Possibility of DISASTER

At Times > you cry your eyes out / Other Times > laugh your head off

Began Study of Ecclesiastes > MEANINGLESSNESS of Life > repeated **40** times
Heb *hebel*' = **meaningless**, Fleeting, empty, vanity, futility, Puff of Air: NOTHING

THEME VERSE: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."
Ecclesiastes 1.2

Who, in his right mind, would choose a time to weep and mourn and die, and so he is pointing to the fact that the great events that characterize the stages of our lives, are out of our control.
J. Ligon Duncan

CONTEXT > Qohelet STRUGGLES to UNDERSTAND it ALL

v. 10 I have seen the burden...

v. 12 I know that there is nothing... v. 14 I know that everything God does...

v. 16 And I saw something else under the sun...

v. 17 I thought in my heart... > DEBATING, WRESTLING, WONDERING

v. 18 I also thought...v. 22 So I saw that there is nothing better...

STRUGGLE of OUR HUMANITY > Cog in Wheels of God's Machine?

Is God's Control a **STRAIGHT-JACKET** or a **SECURITY BLANKET**?

v. 11 He has also set eternity in the hearts of men....

Whole Chapter > All about FINITE Time > THEN comes Word "Eternity"

We are TEMPORAL, Defined by Limits of TIME > ALSO ETERNAL

The FIRST WORDS Children Learn: 'Why'?? / 'When'?? / 'What for'??

CURIOSITY > Sign of IMAGE of God > Evidence of ETERNITY

Normally Animal NOT RESTLESS when PHYSICAL NEEDS are Met
Stomach Full – Warm & Comfortable - Sleeps SOUNDLY and PEACEFULLY

PEOPLE – even FED & WARM – RESTLESS, LOOKING, WONDERING

Something Beyond Watches, Calendars, Day Timers, & History Books

The human being has eternity in his heart – the Creator has made him a thinking being....but the Creator will not let the creature be his equal. As surely as God put eternity into the human heart...he has also put a veil on the human heart, so that the finite mind is unable to reach beyond time into eternity to see as God does. John Jarick

Find a hard-core ATHEIST when his Mother, Child, Spouse has Died

Laugh at and Mock CRYING ATHEIST they'll be ANGRY, HURT, OFFENDED

Makes NO Sense > ONLY a MORAL Universe > Justify Hurt Feelings

Only w/ MORAL ORDER, Transcendent God THEN IS Meaning, Good and Bad

c. Contribution? **‘Contribute to your Destiny’** > MAKE PLANS and DECIDE

Enough DILLIGENCE and DISCERNMENT you’ll SHAPE your DESTINY

BASIC PREMISE of Modern Society > YOU can Make THINGS BETTER
 SELF & FAMILY: Hard Work – Education – Diligent – ATTEND CHURCH!

POLITICAL CANDIDATES PROMISE “Change” > We all WANT IT
 NO Agreement on WHAT will Change, HOW, WHEN, and by WHOM!

One American PRESIDENT quoted Eccles 3 POEM in Speech he Wrote
 INTENDED words to Speak about OPPORTUNITIES > NOW is OUR Time

SPEECH written for November 22, 1963 > NEVER Delivered
 President John Kennedy DIED on the WAY to giving THAT SPEECH

FULFILLED True MEANING of Words > We DO NOT KNOW the TIMES
 ULTIMATE DECISIONS and PLANS NOT OURS to MAKE

Cannot KNOW ANY Part of God’s Plan BEGINNING, END, or IN BETWEEN

Did NOT FIX Time to ENTER WORLD / & will not CHOOSE when to LEAVE

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 19:21

See also – Ecclesiastes 8.7, 9.11, 10.14

2. An Analysis of Life

a. Right Answer

v. 15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

BELIEF in DIVINE JUSTICE > God will RIGHT Human WRONGS > We HOPE!

v. 17 I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed."

Qohelet GOOD Boy > Believed what PARENTS said "God will make it RIGHT!"
Grown MAN NOW WONDERS if there is TRUTH behind this PLATITUDE

Qohelet is a doubting wisdom teacher who struggles with the religious traditions of Israel, specifically, with how their teachings square with human experience.

Tremper Longman III

b. Wrong Experience > There is NO PLACE of JUSTICE on Earth / Under Sun

v. 16 And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment - wickedness was there, in the place of justice - wickedness was there.

Sees INJUSTICE in place you'd MOST EXPECT JUSTICE > COURT of LAW

INNOCENT are GUILTY > GUILTY declared INNOCENT

INJUSTICE > Makes us MAD > Higher the Level > GREATER the RAGE
Sense of OUTRAGE when we're TREATED UNFAIRLY > It ain't right!

COURTS > Expect Grievances Redressed, Wrongs Righted, Justice Administered

c. Uncertain Evidence > EVERY BREATHING CREATURE DIES

DEATH Pulls CARPET OUT on his OWN ARGUMENT for JUSTICE

vs. 19-21 Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

SIMILARITY with ANIMALS > BOTH Man AND Animals return to DUST

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

NO VISIBLE Difference between MAN and BEAST > NO BREATH of God Seen

SURE about DUST > NOT SO SURE about DIVINE BREATH

DEATH raises QUESTION MARK over belief in DIVINE JUSTICE

GOOD DIE YOUNG – EVIL seem to NEVER DIE

NO Justice NOW > NOT SURE if there is JUSTICE in the FUTURE

At least a TENSION if not BLATANT CONTRADICTION

No Justice UNDER THE SUN > Beyond the Sun?? NOT SURE

FRUSTRATED with the UNKNOWABILITY of it ALL

But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

Psalm 49.12

"We've all got the same air in our lungs," the Teacher observes. "So what finally is the difference when a man dies as opposed to a deer? On the one side of the highway is a carcass of road kill, on the other side a fatal car wreck. Both the deceased critter and the deceased driver have lost their breath. So what's the difference?"

Scott Hoezee

3. An Escape from Life

a. Best we can Do

vs. 12,13 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil

IF World BEYOND is UNKNOWABLE, then MAKE the MOST of the PRESENT

NO Certainty of JUSTICE NOW, or in FUTURE > ENJOY the NOW

STATEMENT of RESIGNATION: Not ENTHUSIASM > Have a Beer, FORGET!

Qohelet often has CARPE DIEM Formula > SEIZE THE DAY! It's ALL You Got!

b. Blessed > Element of UNKNOWN even in PRESENT

v. 13 ...find satisfaction in all his toil - *this is the gift of God*

Even the power to follow his advice is a divine gift. James Crenshaw

SATISFACTION Cannot be ASSUMED, MAY NOT COME >> Some Never Find

Over 40 yrs > MICK JAGGER singing "I CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION"
Almost Like SOLOMON: No LIMIT to BUCKS & BABES, maybe NOT BRAINS

HUMAN cannot make thing ANY BETTER

IF Cannot FIND Sensual Pleasure Amidst FRUSTRATION > Endure Reality

c. But.... Even EARTHLY Satisfaction, LEAVES w/ UNANSWERED Questions

v. 22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. *For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*

LAST Phrase: 3 Chs. PONDERING, SEARCHING, REASONING Under SUN
UNIQUE Book of Scripture > RAISES QUESTIONS, Desperate for ANSWER

We DANCE to TUNE NOT of OUR MAKING, Don't Know Quest or Answers

For a Dancer Jackson Browne > FUNERAL SONG for a FRIEND > Hope & Hopelessness!

Keep a fire burning in your eye
 Pay attention to the open sky
 You never know what will be coming down
 I don't remember losing track of you
 You were always dancing in and out of view
 I must have thought you'd always be around
 Always keeping things real by playing the
 clown
 Now you're nowhere to be found

I don't know what happens when people die
 Can't seem to grasp it as hard as I try
 Its' like a song I can hear playing right in
 my ear
 That I can't sing
 I can't help listening
 And I can't help feeling stupid standing
 round
 Crying as they ease you down
 cause I know that you'd rather we were
 dancing
 Dancing our sorrow away
 (right on dancing)
 No matter what fate chooses to play
 (there's nothing you can do about it anyway)

Just do the steps that you've been shown
 By everyone you've ever known
 Until the dance becomes your very own
 No matter how close to yours
 Another's steps have grown
 In the end there is one dance you'll do alone

Keep a fire for the human race
 Let your prayers go drifting into space
 You never know what will be coming down
 Perhaps a better world is drawing near
 And just as easily it could all disappear
 Along with whatever meaning you might
 have found
 Don't let the uncertainty turn you around
 (the world keeps turning around and around)
 Go on and make a joyful sound

Into a dancer you have grown
 From a seed somebody else has thrown
 Go on ahead and throw some seeds of your
 own
 And somewhere between the time you arrive
 And the time you go
 May lie a reason you were alive
 But you'll never know

4. An Entrance into Life

v. 11 He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Is TRUTH of God's Time **STRAIGHT-JACKET** or a **SECURITY BLANKET**?

Qohelet admits POWER and PLAN behind EVENTS of LIFE

Cannot SEE HIS FACE > Is God JUST? Are Humans just ERECT ANIMALS?

Cannot SEE BEYOND the SUN > Limited KNOWLEDGE of this HORIZON

Believing European FRIEND > KAZAKH Friend followed Jesus, then QUIT

Euro: ‘Can we at least meet and read a book together?’ / Kazak: YES!

MET regularly and READ Ecclesiastes > Chapter by Chapter

At First KAZAKH Man SAW HIMSELF > Agreed with his FUTILITY, MISERY

Midway thru BOOK > K man ‘That GUY is CRAZY’ – There is Meaning, Hope

KAZAKH returned to FOLLOWING JESUS

HOW to CHANGE ATTITUDE? > from GRUDGE to GLADNESS?

Understand Difference between PROVIDENCE and FATALISM

Heidelberg Catechism (interesting to note: Jackson Browne born in Heidelberg)

Heidelberg Catechism Question 27: What do you understand by the providence of God?

Answer: God's providence is His almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 28: What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

Answer: We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no

creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.

You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.
Augustine

KNOW a HEAVENLY FATHER > not Blind Chance > CONTROLS our LIFE
TRACE His HAND of BLESSING thru LIFE and IN SCRIPTURE
BIGGEST Event on GOD'S CALENDAR > Sending of HIS SON

...when the *time had fully come*, God sent his Son... Galatians 4:4

Biggest RED LETTER DAY in HISTORY > Jesus CAME
Came as MASTER of GOD'S TIME CLOCK > Event

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "*The time has come*," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"
Mark 1:14-15

Qohelet speaks TENTATIVELY and with UNCERTAINTY
Jesus speaks CONFIDENTLY and TRIUMPHANTLY....this WILL HAPPEN!

Jesus: "The man who loves his life *will* lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world *will* keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also *will* be. My Father *will* honor the one who serves me ...Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world *will* be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, *will* draw all men to myself."
John 12:25-33

Far from feeling cramped by his control of our lives, we have the freedom to live today and wait for tomorrow knowing that God's agenda is always true for us.
David Allan Hubbard

You see, at *just the right time*, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.
Romans 5:6

Poem of ch 3 > CHOICES: Love & Hate, War & Peace, Mourning & Dancing

One OTHER > Even MORE IMPORTANT Choice > about JESUS, THE SON
Either RECEIVE Him OR REJECT Him > FOLLOW Him or FORSAKE Him

"In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."
I tell you, *now is the time of God's favor*, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

He is ETERNAL GOD > Knows BEGINNING and END > Sees BEYOND SUN

NOT Controlled by TIME – as we are HIS who CONTROLS Time –

At TIME HE CHOOSES Will Stand HERE Again on Earth – Bring Time to Close

REWARD those WAITING and WATCHING for HIS COMING

One thing to GRUDGINGLY ADMIT > GOD CONTROLS TIME

Quite another to GLADLY AFFIRM > ‘MY Time is in YOUR HANDS’

ONLY by FAITH in GOD can you SAY -

I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands.

Psalm 31.14,15

Ecclesiastes 3

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account. And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment-wickedness was there, in the place of justice-wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." I also thought, "As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?