**Ecclesiastes**

**Chapter 3**

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**Ecc 3:1-3**

*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven-- (2) A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. (3) A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up.*

Everything is under the sovereignty of God. There was a time when He created the world and the heavens out of nothing. He set the time for it all to exist and when it will end. He established when all the nations would exist and end. He does not reveal His time scale to man and it cannot be changed. He has determined a time for the establishment of the church, for the reign and ruin of antichrist, for the time when Christ would come to establish the means for the salvation of His people, for the time of His second coming and for the creation of the new heavens and earth. God has set a time for every event that will occur under his sovereignty in the world. Note how in all the verses above, there opposites are given for each topic (give birth and die, plant and uproot, etc.). Man sets a time for every purpose but God may supersede them by His counsel.

* Pro 16:9 *The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.*
* Pro 19:21 *Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.*

God has also fixed a time when any person is born and a time when he will die. These two events are together here to show the certainty of death in that dying begins at birth.

Job 14:1-5 *"Man, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil. (2) "Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain. (3) "You also open Your eyes on him And bring him into judgment with Yourself. (4) "Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one! (5) "Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.*

Similarly, God has fixed a time different for different plants when they are to be planted and when they are to be uprooted. This is also applicable to kingdoms and states. God brought Israel out of Egypt and planted them in the land of Canaan, plucked up and carried captive to Babylon, and plucked up by the Romans:

* Jer 1:10 *"See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant."*
* Psa 80:8 *You removed a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it.*

There is similarly a time to kill and a time to heal. The book is not stating the ethics of warfare but just stating that there are times for killing and then for healing. There is a time allotted by God to tear down and a time to build up as the walls of Jerusalem were torn down by Nebuchadnezzar and then Nehemiah and Zerubbabel built them up again.

**Ecc 3:4-5**

*A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. (5) A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.*

God has established many times to weep and then to laugh. The Jews wept when they were in Babylon and they laughed when the captivity was overturned. People weep when they are hit with illnesses and losses and then they laugh when good times return. People weep when the church is corrupted with false doctrines and then laugh when such are brought down. The disciples wept when Jesus was taken away and then laughed when He returned.

* Mat 9:15 *And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*
* Joh 16:19 *Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'?*
* Luk 6:21 *"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*

People mourn at funerals and then dance at festivals. Spiritually God sometimes turns the mourning of His people into dancing: Psa 30:11 *You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,*

There is a time allotted by God for casting sway stones and a time to gather them. The people would clear fields of stones so they could plant crops and then gather them to build walls or fences around the fields. This may apply to the rejection of the Gentiles for a long time and then gathering them as part of the church. It may also apply to the casting away of the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah and then the gathering of them by conversion. There is a time for embracing and a time to shun perhaps as to a time when someone falsely proclaims Christ as their savior so we embrace them and then later the falseness is revealed so the embrace ceases.

**Ecc 3:6-8**

*A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. (7) A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. (8) A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace.*

There will be times when one searches for something and a time to quit the search. We are reminded of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. When one determines something has been lost they will search diligently for it but there will come a time when the loss is declared as done. There may be a time to keep riches and then if one determines that they have become idols it is time to throw them away. There may be a time when garments are torn as a sign of distress: Isa 37:1 *And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD.* When the distress is removed the garment can be sewn together signifying a renewal. Certain events call for a person to be silent such as:

Amos 5:12-13 *For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate. (13) Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.*

There will be times to speak as to when one must publically state his profession of faith in Christ: Mat 10:32 *"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.*

There will be times when one can love a person and then times when one must hate a sinner. Such a change can be seen in:

2Sam 13:15 *Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go away!"*

When one is converted to faith in Christ there will then be a time when he hates the things that he loved before the conversion. Finally there will be a time for war and a time for peace. Presently the church is in a time of war with Satan and there will not be peace until the second coming of Jesus Christ when Satan is totally defeated.

**Ecc 3:9-13**

*What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? (10) I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. (11) He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (12) I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; (13) moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God.*

Verse nine follows verses 1-8 and must be interpreted in their light. Since God has ordained all these times for everything to occur how can man profit from such efforts? Death is certain and it nullifies all that people do.

Gen 3:17-19 *Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. (18) "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; (19) By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."*

Solomon has observed the many actions of man from all the times given by God in the previous verses. Not only has God ordained all those events to occur in the world he has also made each appropriate in its time. The word translated “appropriate” can also be translated as “beautiful”. There is certainly a beauty in them that can only be appreciated from God’s perspective. Some things are done by Him and others are done by secondary causes. A major event in time was when Jesus came into the world:

Gal 4:4-5 *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

God has also set eternity into the mind of man so that he yearns for the time when he will be taken out of the toil and troubles of the world. The desire to understand our place in the universe is part of our contemplations but we cannot know the individual plans of God and how they fit into our part of His plans. The plans of God are outside of our understanding so we have a sense of alienation and bewilderment in time:

Deu 29:29 *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

But we can take comfort in:

Rom 8:28 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

We need to learn to be satisfied with the revelations we have so that we can live life here to the fullest to please God. We can then learn to rejoice in the events and do good from God’s perspective: Gal 6:9 *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.*

**Ecc 3:14-16**

*I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. (15) That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by. (16) Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.*

There is also a huge comfort in knowing that all God does will remain forever. He is sovereign over all things and since He is omniscient there is nothing that can be added or taken away from all that He has done. The natural response of humanity to God’s revealed nature is fear for He alone is the Creator of all. Humans are altogether contingent beings so our only response to Him is reverence. The covenant of grace continues forever and so its blessings are sure. The pardon, justification, adoption, and salvation are never reversed but will be forever fixed.

Heb 12:28-29 *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; (29) for our God is a consuming fire.*

The mind of God is infinite so that He has planned all that has been and all that will be so the past and future are fixed in His mind and will never change. What has been decreed in His eternal mind is already accomplished and what is future has already been decreed and so is fixed. From our perspective God seeks what has passed by in His mind. God will demand justice from those who have shed blood and so He will seek recompense from what people have done against His justice. The teacher states that in the courts of justice on earth He sees wickedness and where there should be righteousness that is wickedness. But he tells us that such is temporary and God will reverse such events so that His righteousness will be fulfilled. This brings us great peace as we can rest in knowing this ultimate judgment will occur.

**Ecc 3:17**

*I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.*

He knows that God has set a time when there will be perfect judgment for the righteous and the wicked. This is an eschatological statement that is repeated elsewhere:

* Acts 17:30-32 *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, (31) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (32) Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."*
* 1Co 4:5 *Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.*
* Mat 12:36-37 *"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. (37) "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*
* 2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
* 1Co 3:10-15 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. (11) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*
* Rom 14:10-12 *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." (12) So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.*

**Ecc 3:18-22**

*I said to myself concerning the sons of men, "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts." (19) For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. (20) All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. (21) Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth? (22) I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?*

Now he carefully considered the state of people with their sinful and polluted state and their standing before God. He says that surely God has brought testing upon them so that they can clearly see their spiritual state and that they are in a beastly state. He says that God has then separated them as chaff from wheat as will be done on the Day of Judgment. These people are no different from beasts and need to see such their state:

Jude 1:10-11 *But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. (11) Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*

All will die and just because they see themselves as above the beasts does not reflect their reality before God. The flood in the time of Noah took away men and beasts so that they both perished in it. Several of the plagues of Egypt were inflicted on both and both depend upon God for their health and safety. They all have the same breath that keeps them living so man has no preeminence above a beast. Their understanding of their exalted state is just vanity.

All will go to the dust from which they came. There is a difference between man and beast in that man has a rational and immortal soul that will go upward to God to be judged by Him and properly disposed until the day of the resurrection of the body. When the beast dies his soul goes down to the earth and is resolved to be no more. He asks who can know this fact about the difference apart from divine revelation. He says that his observation is that man should be happy in his activities since such is his state. Who can let him know who will succeed him? For example, nobody can bring David to see what Solomon did. He shall never return after death to see what has happened to his possessions and his descendants. Therefore it is best for him to enjoy his existence. We should carefully consider our days:

Psa 90:10-12 *As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. (11) Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? (12) So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.*

In biblical Christianity death is consistently described as a curse and an enemy:

* 1Co 15:26 *The last enemy that will be abolished is death.*
* 1Co 15:54-57 *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (55) "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; (57) but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The resurrection of Christ has conquered death and opened the way for the resurrection that depends upon the power of God. Humans are truly mortal so neither possessions nor accomplishments are eternal so we should properly use and enjoy them while we live. Also since we are dependent and contingent our hope of eternal life must be founded in God and not ourselves. For the Christian this means that immortality is in the risen Christ:

1Co 15:12-19 *Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; (14) and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. (15) Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. (16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; (17) and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*