

112. There is a limited profit (reward) that is available to one who labors under the sun. What is it? Cf. 5:18
113. What will happen to that which the sinner collects and gathers?
114. Does joy result from pursuing joy?
115. Jesus taught us that we will find joy if we pursue what?
116. What subject comes under discussion in chapter three?
117. What basic question is once again raised?
118. Give three ways one can find a share of profit even under the sun.

B. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS THAT WE WORK UNDER THE RULE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE 3:1-22

1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence. 3:1-8

TEXT 3:1-8

- 1 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.
- 4 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.
- 6 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.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

61. Give evidence that God's creation is orderly. (v. 1)
62. Compare translations of the first line of verse two. What variations do you find?
63. What might have to die in order for a particular generation to be healed? (v. 3)
64. What experience usually occasions mourning?
65. Look up the term "dance" in a Bible concordance. After reading several of the references, how would you describe dancing as it is pictured in the Bible? Would you equate it with the modern dance?
66. If the first part of verse five is figurative, and the second line is speaking to the same subject, what single idea is under consideration?
67. List some dreams from your own life that you have searched for and found. List others you have given up as lost. (v. 6)
68. When is silence "golden?" When is it "yellow?"
69. List some things the Christian "hates" and therefore should wage war against.
70. List the objects of each of the twenty-six infinitives.
71. List the objects of the four prepositions "for." (vs. 1, 8)

PARAPHRASE 3:1-8

To everything there is a season, and a time to every delight under heaven. There is a time for all things to be born, and everything in due season will die; man can take advantage of the seasons and plant when he should, but the time will come when that which has been planted will have to be uprooted. Self-discipline and social justice require the destruction of evil, but a time will come when both the people and their land will be healed; so there is also a time to wreck, and tear down that which is beyond repair, and there is a time to build anew. Many events of life will sadden the heart and cause one to weep, just as other events make the heart merry and result in

laughter; since death comes to all, there will be seasons of mourning. On occasion, joy shall also overwhelm one and find expression through dancing. There is an appropriate time for making love, and just as appropriately there is a time to refrain; there is a time when an embrace is proper, and also a time when wisdom leads one to refrain from embracing. Fortunes are sometimes gained because one knows the times for searching, but it is also true that they are often kept because good judgment is exercised in refraining from excess; even our present possessions are retained with discretion, and we find wisdom in discarding or sharing with others that which is no longer of value to oneself. There is a time when clothing should be discarded, and a time when it should be mended and used again; the same kind of judgment is in order with the control of the tongue: silence is often golden. On the other hand, words fitly spoken have great power and should be said. Love encompasses all that is holy and good, and there is a time when it should be demonstrated to your fellow man; hate is reserved for that which is evil, and yet there is a time when it should also be exercised—there is a time for war, and a time for peace.

DIAGRAM "B"
 THE EVENTS OF ONE GENERATION
 UNDER HEAVEN



COMMENT 3:1-8

In this section the reader is confronted with seven parallel passages demonstrating the theme that God, the Creator, is in control of His world. More than this, it illustrates the various activities which take place in the lifetime of one generation. The Preacher has observed that one generation passes away while another generation moves in to take its place (1:4). Here he gives a detailed account of the activities of each generation from birth to death.

Parallelisms were popular with the writers of the Old Testament. One is tempted to be carried away with the poetic beauty of the passage and possibly miss the message which it contains. This popular passage from Ecclesiastes has made its way into the forms of art, poetry and song in our present generation. It should be emphasized once again, however, that the theme discussed in chapter two is still under consideration. Some have written that this is an unrelated insertion of material without appropriate relationship to the context of the discussion, but a cursory reading of the two chapters together would dispense with such an argument. The lesson is that God controls through orderly laws and principles. Man may run contrary to God's appointed times and seasons, but if he does, he will experience frustration and failure. The "good man" of the preceding chapter attempts to live in harmony with God's order, while the "sinner" has little regard for it.

Certain qualities mark the comparisons. (1) The list is rather extended. This may serve the purpose of demonstrating that the many sides of life are under God's control, or it may have been Solomon's intention to show the various activities of man from the time of his birth until the time of his death. (2) Nothing evil is included in the list. Some of the activities are difficult to interpret as to exact meanings, but nothing needs to be placed in the category of immoral behaviour. This is very clear. The contrary is actually true. Since the second line of the couplet partially explains the first line, the meaning of each line interprets the meaning of the other. The meaning of the

event must be in harmony with the parts of the comparison. Nothing in any of the descriptions suggests evil activities. Hate, kill, rend and war are all extreme in nature, but are approved by God under qualifying circumstances. (3) Some events are inevitable. It is obvious that no one has control over the time of his death (8:8). We are also subjected to a "time" to give birth, to weep and to heal. These circumstances of life are beyond our control. God controls them in the sense that His laws are active in His world. It is improper to read predestination into the passage. (4) Some events can be experienced at one's own discretion. Man controls such activities as loving and refraining from love, deciding what to keep and what to cast away. Even in these areas, however, there are times and seasons within God's order when good judgment dictates policy. (5) Sometimes one works contrary to the seasons. One may keep silent when he should be speaking. He may laugh when he should be mourning. The wise man interprets the times and adjusts his activities accordingly.

Jeremiah stated this truth when he said, "I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon himself had written, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). He has also written that he sees the activities of life as coming from the hand of the Lord (2:24).

v. 1 The arrangement of man's activities as he lives out his life is now under consideration (cf. introductory remarks for this section). This verse is not intended to suggest that all things are predetermined or that man has no choice in arranging certain times or events. If this were true, the distinction between the "good man" and the "sinner" would be inappropriate. In addition, there would be little meaning given to admonition and rebuke found throughout the book. (5:1ff; 11:1ff; 12:1ff are but examples.) This verse acknowledges what has previously been taught: there is nothing new under the sun, and God seeks that which is past (1:9; 3:15). The events peculiar to every generation are set forth. No intention

is made for chronological order or arrangement. Each generation may experience different events at varying times, but generally speaking each generation will experience all the events.

v. 2 The Hebrew word rendered "be born" is passive and would best be translated "give birth." This idea is more in harmony with the parallel "time to plant" and therefore comes close to the original idea. The purpose is to illustrate the beginning and end of a thing. Everything else happens between these two events. While "birth" represents the animal kingdom and "plant" represents the vegetable kingdom, the intention is not to be comprehensive of all things, but rather representative of *beginnings* and *ends*.

v. 3 Both Deuteronomy 32:39 and Hosea 6:1 suggest that it is God's prerogative to tear, wound, smite and kill, even as it is His prerogative to heal, to bind up, and to make alive. Man is also involved in these activities as he exacts judgment and pursues justice. The term "kill" here will not allow cutting but does allow capital punishment. Both the execution of criminals, and killing necessitated by the need to protect the innocent, would be allowed. Killing which results from war would probably be excluded as it is specifically mentioned in verse eight. The verse suggests the necessity of judgment and appropriate punishment if there is to be a time of healing and building up.

In the spiritual relationship the principle is also valid. Paul's rather lengthy discourse on this subject in I Corinthians chapter five clearly illustrates the necessity of tearing down before there can be a season of restoration.

v. 4 One doesn't live long before he experiences both laughter and weeping. These human emotions are common to all men in every age. Mourning suggests a deeper sorrow than weeping, while dancing may be thought of as the sheer physical display of inner joy. Jesus spoke to both of these activities when he said, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you,

and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn' " (Matthew 11:16, 17). Dancing in the Bible times should not be confused with the modern-day dance. Biblical dancing was the unrehearsed, spontaneous exuberance resulting from a great physical victory, or some festive occasion.

v. 5 An attempt to escape or skirt the obvious has led to far-fetched and varied conclusions concerning the first part of this verse. Since the verses are couplets, and each line parallels the other, then the clear statements of "a time to embrace," and "a time to refrain from embracing," would suggest that "a time to cast away stones," and "a time to gather stones together," is a euphemistic description of sexual love. The fidelity of a monogamous union finds proper expression and fulfillment in such acts of love. God has placed natural desires within both men and women which result not only in the propagation of the race, but also in the holy mystery of oneness that exists between husband and wife. Such an interpretation as this does not appear to meet with any difficulty. This makes the first part of the couplet harmonious with the second part. It speaks to a vital and major part of life's experience which is not discussed elsewhere in this section. Finally, the absurdity of most interpretations necessitates a clearly defined and logical explanation of the verse.

Some of the more popular but unacceptable interpretations of gathering and casting stones are listed: (1) building or demolishing houses, walls, cisterns and similar works made from stones; (2) marring an enemy's field by casting stones upon it (II Kings 3:19, 25); (3) stoning as a form of capital punishment; (4) clearing land or vineyards of stones (Isaiah 5:2).

v. 6 "Easy come, easy go," is an idiom which may speak to part of the lesson of this verse. The first section appears to refer to that which man acquires either through his own ingenuity or by his good fortune. In like manner he may find his possessions slipping away from him in a manner beyond his control. The latter part of the couplet suggests that man sometimes decides what he keeps and what he chooses to discard. Earthly wisdom enables one to take advantage of both

situations. He will take advantage of the opportunities offered through God's providence, and he will also exercise discretion in the wise use of that which he has gathered or collected.

Benevolent acts could be under consideration. They are part of the Preacher's message (11:1-6), and Solomon had written, "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered" (Proverbs 11:24, 25). This principle is also taught in many of the New Testament books. An example is found in II Corinthians 9:6-15.

v. 7 Since the tearing of garments was commonly associated with mourning among the Jews, it is easy to see such an application of this verse. Also, the tear was to be mended after an appropriate period of mourning depending upon the nearness of the relationship of the deceased person. However, mourning and weeping have previously been included in the listing of events, and it isn't likely that such would be the intention in this verse. What then is the category of activities to which he speaks? Once again the second comparison offers a clue. Wisdom dictates the practical value, or lack of it, of many things possessed in life. We finally give up on certain garments while others are mended or patched. Clothing was of great value (II Kings 5:5; II Chronicles 9:24). In like manner, wisdom is manifested in the ability to know when to keep silent and when to speak. There were occasions when Jesus chose to remain silent (Mark 14:60, 61; 15:4, 5). There were other times when His words were like "apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). How penetrating is James' sermon on the control of the tongue (James 3). (Cf. Proverbs 17:28; 15:23) Solomon is speaking to a vast area of life in which the daily events are of major significance.

v. 8 Unlike verse five, "love" here has as the opposite "hate," and the comparison is "peace." It is unlike the conjugal love of the former verse and should be understood as more comprehensive of the affairs of men. In times of peace, all of man's activities should be expressions of love, as he moves about

in his relationship with his family and his fellow man. However, when war is necessary, there should be foundational issues which require the hatred of just men. The seriousness of war speaks to the issue of life and man's ability to distinguish between that which is to be loved and thus defended, and that which should be destroyed because it is the recipient of man's justifiable hatred.

The infinitives represent a more personal, individual activity, while the preposition "for" speaks in each instance to general categories which involved multitudes at the same time.

We have refrained from giving the couplets an unwarranted spiritual or Christian interpretation, as this would be out of character with the purpose of the book. We have also withstood the temptation, to which many others have yielded, to see God's activities with Israel or the church in each of the events. The greater context of the passage assures that God's laws are in effect in God's world. He is very much in control. However, the emphasis is undoubtedly on the activities of men. Solomon is giving us an overview of the total life of one generation. He stated it clearly in the beginning that there is a time for everything and every event under heaven (v. 1). His objective, at this point in his book, is to bring man to see that there is nothing better than to resign himself to the work and pleasures of the day, recognizing that this is a gift to man from the hand of God. It is not the activity of God but of man that is foremost in his mind. His very next question substantiates this contention: "What profit is there *to the worker* from that in which he toils?"

FACT QUESTIONS 3:1-8

119. What kind of an "account" is Solomon picturing?
120. What themes are under consideration?
121. Explain what will happen to man if he elects to live contrary to God's appointed times and seasons.
122. Define the "good man."

123. Define the "sinner."
124. Give two reasons why this list of the activities of each generation is rather long.
125. Name four "extreme" activities of men that are listed.
126. Give at least one example of an inevitable event that man experiences.
127. Explain why verse one should not be interpreted as teaching predestined times and events.
128. State the purpose of verse two.
129. What kind of killing would be included by the context of verse three.
130. Distinguish between weeping and mourning.
131. Explain what is meant by "an euphemistic description."
132. Give an example of such a description and explain its meaning.
133. What will earthly wisdom enable a man to do? (v. 6)
134. In what way is the term "love" in verse eight to be thought as different from the same term in verse five?
135. What is Solomon's overall "objective" at this point? How does verse nine substantiate your answer?

2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat. 3:9-22

TEXT 3:9-22

- 9 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.
- 14 I know that everything God does will remain forever, there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take away from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.
- 15 That which has been already, and that which shall 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.
- 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.
- 18 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 come from dust and all return to dust.
- 21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?
- 22 And 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?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

72. Explain why 2:24, 3:1-8 and 3:12 could be an answer to the question raised in verse nine.
73. What has God given the sons of men? (Cf. v. 10)
74. Even though God has placed the desire in men to know the ways of God, will they discover it? (Cf. v. 11)
75. What is the “gift” from God? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)

76. Explain what is meant by "God seeks what has passed by. (Cf. v. 15)
77. What stands in the place of justice and righteousness?
78. Both the righteous and the wicked will come before God for what reason?
79. What similarities exist between men and beasts? (Cf. vs. 19, 20)
80. What difference between men and beasts is suggested? (Cf. v. 21)
81. Does Solomon know that man's spirit will go upward when he dies? (Cf. 12:7)
82. What is man's lot? (Cf. v. 22)
83. Can man see into the future? Give evidence for your answer from the text.

PARAPHRASE 3:9-22

When man shares in all the events of life, and toils throughout the short time he has to live here under the sun, what profit does he have to hold in his hand? I have been around. I have seen the work that God has assigned to the sons of men to occupy them as they toil and labor during their lifetimes. Also, I clearly understand that God makes every thing right for an appropriate time. There is indeed a specific time and season for every affair under heaven. God has placed in the minds of men the desire to know and the ability to wonder concerning all the events, but men are unable to discover or find out the work of God from the beginning even to the end. I know that among men there is nothing better than to find pleasure and joy in one's lifetime. However, God does have a gift for men. It is not to understand the mysterious ways of God, but it is to be happy and find pleasure in living and see good in all of one's labor. One other thing I willingly admit: whatever God does will endure, nothing can be added and nothing can be subtracted. God works in this consistent way because of His very nature, and in order that men may stand

in awe of Him. In addition, consider this! God will see to it that history repeats itself. That which was, now is; and that which is to be, has already been. (Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?")

Let us look more closely under the sun. We shall discover disturbing things. I saw in the place where justice should be found that wickedness was there. I saw in the place where there should have been a just man, that there was an evildoer. I said to myself, "Beware, evildoer! God will judge between you and the righteous man." And I also understand that there is a time when God will judge every delight of man and every deed. I said to myself, "God lets things happen so he can purify the sons of men. In God's time, the true issues will be clearly seen, and men's real attitudes will be revealed. God permits men to see, that in themselves, they are only animals." Man really has no advantage over the animals. They both are subject to chance. They both suffer the same event: death comes to both. Both have the same breath. They are both subject to futility. Both go to the same place. Both come from the ground, and both are returning to the ground. Who among you can say that you know the spirit of man which ascends on high, or the spirit of the beast, which goes downward to the earth?

I am now more convinced than ever that man can do nothing better than rejoice in his works, do good in his lifetime, and make the most of each day. This is man's lot. No man can see what will occur in the future. Who can enable man to see what even tomorrow will bring?

COMMENT 3:9-22

v. 9 In this verse, we see a return to the original question of the book (1:3). It is not necessarily introducing the material which is to follow, although this basic proposition is still under consideration, but it reflects on everything that has been stated previously. For the use of "profit" or "advantage," see the comments on 1:3. That in "which he toils" refers to all of

man's activities which are mentioned in 3:1-8.

v. 10 Solomon's personal experience was very comprehensive. One need only review the details of his life, as referred to in chapters one and two, to be convinced that he is correct in saying that he has viewed the activities of men. He has called attention to the major areas of men's interests, and demonstrated how each generation finds itself engaged in the same activities. He calls it an evil (grievous, sorry) task (1:13; 2:26), that has occupied men in each generation. He declares that God has given the task to the sons of men, and in the next verse he explains what he means by saying that God gave it.

v. 11 The song writer picked up the theme of this verse with the words, "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Solomon declares that God made everything beautiful (appropriate) in its time. To say God set "eternity" in the heart, is another way of saying that God gave men the "task" of occupying themselves. The meaning of the Hebrew word is widely debated. The context leads one to believe that it is speaking to a desire that God has placed in the heart to search out and to know. Hengstenberg writes that the word is never used except for "unmeasured time." Some translate the word "world" while others prefer the idea of a "sense of the infinite." One translation (The Anchor Bible) uses the term "enigma" to convey the idea intended. Every man does have the desire to explore the meaning of all the events of life, but it is not within him to discover the answers. A sense of awe does come to the mind when one thinks of the Creator (the Infinite One), but this only compounds his frustrations. An awareness of the differences that exist between men and the rest of God's created beings only intensifies the desire to probe and discover more and more. Yet, it is clearly stated that man will not find out the work which God has done. For additional study on man's desire to know and discover, study the following passages from Ecclesiastes: 7:23, 24, 29; 8:7, 17; 9:1; 11:5.

The "beginning and end" of God's work probably refers to the work which God does in relation to one's lifetime. This would be in harmony with the next verse as well as with 3:1-9.

Some do explain it as the work of God that extends from eternity to eternity, but this appears to be out of harmony with the obvious purpose of the Preacher in this section. Because the task is grievous, one should not attribute the task itself to God. It is not God's fault that man does not have success in his investigation.

v. 12, 13 The five-point exercise suggested here is at least a key to deriving some profit from life even if it is very meager. Man is instructed to (1) rejoice, (2) do good, (3) eat, (4) drink, and (5) see good in his labor. This same message is emphasized in 2:3, 24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15; 9:7. This reward is called a "gift" from God. Sometimes it is spoken of as coming from the "hand" of God (2:24; 5:19). God is recognized as the One who provides. Whatever one includes in his enjoyment of life, it should be with the approval of God. Two clear statements undergird this truth. They are: "Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works" (9:7). And, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (11:9).

v. 14, 15 Not only is everything God has made beautiful, good and appropriate, but all that He does is perfect. God is a complete Being, and therefore has complete order in all His creation. When one realizes this, and looks beyond it to see the nature of God, he stands in awe of Him. Each of the admonitions and challenges the Preacher sets forth in the book is based on the true nature of God. For example, he admonishes his audience when they go to the temple to worship God, that they should remember God is in heaven and they are upon the earth (5:1, 2). In other words, they are the "created" beings while God is the "Creator." Men should recognize that God is the perfect, complete and authoritative Governor of His world. Men should learn to "fear" God (12:13).

Because of this, the Christian appreciates the completeness

of God. He says with the author of Hebrews that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever" (13:8). We place our trust in the complete work of Christ (Hebrews 9:28) which was offered but once for our sins. We trust the complete sovereignty of God (Acts 17:24). We abide in His complete wisdom set forth in the act of saving grace. But to the reader of Ecclesiastes in Solomon's day, nothing of the blessings we have in Christ were realized. The context of this passage must be explained in the light of the frustration expressed in verses ten and eleven. As man routinely experiences the events of life, he sees that God's laws are in complete control of the times and the seasons. He learns to respect God because of His consistency and power, but he does not share in the knowledge that belongs only to God.

Some events appear to contradict God's sovereign control and completeness of order in His world. However, the statement, "God seeks what has passed by" assures the reader that any violation of the rules is only temporary, and in due season everything will return to proper order as it has always been.

It is precisely to this problem that the Preacher now speaks. He is primarily concerned through the remaining section of this chapter with one very apparent inequity: wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice. He then draws numerous observations concerning this. In the first section of chapter four, he is concerned about another problem. This time it is the oppression of innocent people with the authority on the side of evil men. He illustrates the violation of God's rules through two more examples. One has to do with an inordinate desire for earthly riches, while the other speaks to the fickleness of the citizens of the land. In each situation, he admits to the futility of the whole affair, and in view of the fact that God works out the times and seasons of justice, he resigns himself to the fact that "nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot" (3:22).

The obvious corruption in both places high and low throughout the world does not disturb the inner peace of the Christian.

He has the advantage over the Preacher in Ecclesiastes for he knows Him who brings peace (John 14:27). He is not limited in his understanding to the message preached through nature, but has the "final word" from God in the person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1).

v. 16 There is little doubt in the Preacher's mind that God's control of His world will eventually set all things right—but this justice must have its appropriate time. In the meantime, life must be faced for what it is. It must be endured as it comes. This leads to some sobering observations. He discusses one such observation here: God's order is being prostituted by the corruption of evil men, and evildoers have control of the authoritative positions. Thus, justice is sacrificed for the sake of wickedness.

v. 17 Since he knows that God's laws will ultimately bear their own fruit, he muses to himself concerning the future state of the evildoers and also the righteous men. The translation in the NASV appears to be saying that both the wicked man and the righteous man will fall into God's judgment. While this is undoubtedly true, the better rendering is that God will judge "between" the wicked man and the righteous man. It is the wicked man who is in hard straights with God. The latter part of the verse speaks to the total concept that God makes everything appropriate in its time. It is in this context that the Preacher says, "for a time for every matter and for every deed is there."

v. 18-20 So intense is the corruption of justice that he is led to conclude that man is no different from animals in many respects. God "has surely tested them" is to be understood that God has given them sufficient opportunity and time to declare their true character. The pressures of both authority and responsibility test a man. Some translate "test" as "purify" which implies that God waits patiently through the various experiences of life until He separates, winnows and proves men. The strength of the original text suffers some loss with the insertion of "but beasts," or especially "but as beasts," as the idea is that "they are beasts." Numerous illustrations

from history could be cited to verify this contention. When man is left to himself, without the benefit of the heavenly wisdom, he proves his beastly nature. When God elects to withhold punishment of sin for a season, the heart of man is set to do evil continually (8:11).

Note the similarities between men and beasts that are given:

- (1) Both have the same fate: death;
- (2) Both have the same breath;
- (3) Both are subjected to a short life (corruption);
- (4) Both go to the same place (grave);
- (5) Both come from dust;
- (6) Both return to dust;
- (7) One does not have an advantage over the other.

One can clearly see the differences between men and beasts; this is not the issue. It is the Preacher's purpose to convince his audience that once men begin moving in the direction of wickedness and forsake justice and righteousness that they become as beasts.

v. 21 This is a difficult verse to translate because the Hebrew has three possibilities. (1) It may be a question (2:19); (2) It may suggest "maybe"; or (3) It actually affirms through a question (8:1). The correct understanding, therefore, will come through a study of the context, and in this case, a study of the greater context.

There is little doubt that Solomon is writing through inspiration. In addition to such statements as II Timothy 3:16, there is the internal claim of Ecclesiastes 12:11. The difference in the destiny of the "breath" or "spirit" of the beast and the man is clearly taught in 12:7: "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." But, it is not the differences but the similarities that are under consideration. Therefore, it is not a question of debate as to the differences between men and beasts, or of the obvious destinies of each, but what Solomon is saying is this, "Who can understand their spirits?" Or to put it differently, he is saying, "It is difficult to believe that man can behave with

such beast-like characteristics! Who can understand the spirit of either?"

v. 22 This would make the final thought of the chapter a very natural conclusion. The Preacher knows that the spirit of man will return to God who created it. This is not his concern at this point. His question concerns the profit to be gained by the one who has to live out his life in the short span of time and in the difficult days ahead (3:9). He recognizes that life under the sun is a grievous task. He now admits that it is filled with social injustices. He knows that in God's due season he will see how God works to bring about justice and order, but it is far from him to explain the ways of God. He is assured only of God's consistency, and thus on the basis of God's past performance, he concludes that man should not fret over either what he does not know or what he cannot change. In the light of this reasoning he says, "And 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?"

Some see in the twenty-first verse a simple acknowledgment on Solomon's part that some do not take to heart the differences that exist between men and beasts. While this does not satisfy the context, it does offer an idea that is needful. There are many ways in which men and beasts are similar, but there is also a vast way in which they differ. One cannot read the book without recognizing the challenge on every page to rise above the eroding pressures of life and get the most from living. One is challenged to exercise wisdom, worship God correctly, demonstrate benevolence, and remember God. The differences between men and beasts are obvious. Further, sinners would not liken themselves to beasts. It would take a preacher to do that! The man who is under consideration in the closing verse of this section is not the evildoer. He is the "good man." He cannot see the future or the events which shall befall him, but he is convinced that he will trust God and be happy in the activities of the day. This does not mean that the Preacher will not soon be in the valley of despair, looking again at the

activities under the sun, and pointing out the discouraging events of life. However, for the moment, he has his readers on a high plateau, receiving a fresh breath of air before descending once again to the reality of life "under the sun."

FACT QUESTIONS 3:9-22

136. Solomon makes it clear that in this section he is seeking to do what? (Cf. v. 9)
137. What does "which he toils" have reference to? (Cf. v. 9)
138. In what sense can it be said that God gives this "task" to men?
139. What does the term "eternity" mean as it is used here? What do you think the meaning of the word in the context is?
140. What is meant by "the beginning and end?"
141. What five things is man instructed to do if he wants to show a profit? (Cf. vs. 12, 13)
142. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes what enjoyment from the hand of God means with God's approval.
143. What brings man to stand in awe of God?
144. Has God lost control of His world because some events are out of harmony with His expressed will? Discuss.
145. What is the first evil that is apparent to the Preacher? (Cf. v. 16)
146. Will both the wicked man and the righteous man be judged? Discuss.
147. Explain the purpose of the testing of men. (Cf. v. 18)
148. What does "purify" imply?
149. Why does he go to such lengths to show the similarities between men and beasts?
150. Read verse twenty-one from different translations. Give three reasons why the verse is difficult to translate.
151. Is the debate here over the eternal nature of man's spirit? Discuss.
152. Write out your own paraphrase of verse twenty-two.
153. List the reasons Solomon came to this conclusion.