

# Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-3/ecclesiastes-31-8/>

*Solomon's poem about the paradoxes of life shows God's timing and sovereignty in all things. It invites us into a perspective of balance and trust in the Lord of All.*

The poem in Chapter 1 stems from Solomon's observations. This poem begins with a faith statement. The cycles of time are *appointed*.

Based on reason alone, Solomon concluded that the cycles of nature through time are *vanity*. Trying to grab vapor. Now that Solomon has realized the futility of discovering purpose in life through reason, experience, accomplishment, and pleasure-seeking, he returns to observing the cycles of life through faith. The cycles of life are *appointed* by God. God set it up this way. Our purpose is embedded within His purpose.

And God's appointment is exhaustive. It applies to *everything*. There is not a single thing that is random. All things are *appointed*. Further, every single thing has *an appointed time*. Not only are all things *appointed*, the *time* of all things is *appointed*. Trying to explain all the cycles of life and nature in Chapters 1-2 through reason and experience led to a conclusion that life is just on random repeat, for no apparent reason. But with faith in God as the foundation for understanding, now all the cycles are part of an intricate and specific plan. *For every event under heaven*.

*Every event under heaven has an appointed time*. That means every little thing matters. It is all part of a grand design. The use of the phrase *under heaven* instead of "under the sun" is suggestive of divine perspective. Things may appear vaporous to our limited perspective, but they are in perfect order from His. The cycles of life are going to happen. They won't wait on us. It is for us to accept or deny. Part of our opportunity is to recognize the many things we don't control. Things that are *appointed*.

We already know from Solomon one vitally important thing we do control—our perspective. As we contemplate God's sovereignty over the cycles of life, we are choosing whether to look at these things from a self-centric perspective or a faith-based perspective. A major takeaway from Ecclesiastes is that we can't really control much of life, but the difference between enjoying and

hating life stems directly from how we choose to see it. The perspective we choose on how to look at life determines whether we are fulfilled or frustrated.

In this poem, Solomon declares that in God's wise plan everything is appropriately timed ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). The poem is composed of pairs of events in human experience, *birth vs. death*, *kill vs. heal*, etc. All of these times in life are appropriately appointed by God. The word translated in verse 11 as *appropriate* is translated as "beautiful" in other passages ([Genesis 12:11](#) for example). God created these cycles with beauty and completeness. Presumably this means that even the intrusion of death will not thwart God's ultimate purpose. In fact, death is the last foe to be vanquished ([1 Cor 15:55](#); [Rev 20:14](#)). Perhaps the death of death will be one of the most beautiful and fitting completions of the cycle of life.

All of the 14 pairings are seemingly opposites—*tear down and build*; *mourn and dance*, *keep and throw away*, etc. But they are all *appointed* parts of God's order.

God has *appointed a time to give birth and a time to die*. Each of our lives will have a beginning and an end. We didn't choose when to be born. We didn't choose our parents. God chose. It is *appointed*. Our choice is whether to receive with gratitude the gift of life and enjoy living it based on faith, or pursue and demand answers from our experience.

There is also a *time to die*. Death was not an original part of creation. But humanity chose to know good and evil firsthand, and death was a consequence of that choice. So we are stuck with it for now, until death is vanquished as the final foe ([Rev 20:14](#)). Interestingly, in that sense, death was born in the Garden of Eden, and death will die in the Lake of Fire at the end of the age.

We can get a bit of a perspective of how God might look at deciding *birth* and death by looking at how a garden is tended. The gardener decides the best *time to plant* as well as the proper *time to uproot what is planted*. When the harvest is over and all the fruit is picked, it is time to *uproot what is planted*, plow it under to fertilize the ground, and get ready for the next planting season. Perhaps God decides the time of our death based on when we have exhausted the benefits we can gain from living life on this earth.

God has also appointed *a time to kill and a time to heal*. Jesus healed many people during His first advent. When He returns again, He will be the source of death for many ([Revelation 19:11-15](#)). God destroyed the earth with a flood

when it filled with violence ([Genesis 6:11](#)). God destroyed the earth at that time ([2 Peter 3:5-6](#)) and birthed a new earth, the earth we now dwell upon. This earth will also meet a death, being destroyed with fire ([2 Peter 3:7](#)). After the flood, God granted moral authority for humans to take life in exchange for life as the foundation for human government ([Genesis 9:5-6](#)). He inaugurated killing as a means to prevent the earth from again filling with violence. In that sense, killing led to healing.

There is a *time to tear down and a time to build up*. We have all likely seen a new building that is built. If we live long enough, we will eventually see the end of that building's usefulness and see it torn down. It is common in military training *to tear down* a recruit's identity as an individual acting on their own then *build* them back up as a soldier proud to play their part in the military unit. Paul admonishes believers to *tear down* "fortresses," thereby "destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" ([2 Corinthians 10:4](#)). Peter exhorts his followers that they are "being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 2:5](#)).

There is a *time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance*. Part of being a good friend is to grieve when other people grieve and rejoice when they rejoice. Jesus wept when He saw the grief others experienced over the death of His friend Lazarus. Jesus wept even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, when there would be great rejoicing ([John 11:35](#)).

Solomon notes that there is a *time to throw stones and a time to gather stones*. Perhaps he had in mind the famous episode of his father David, who gathered stones to face Goliath, then threw a stone to defeat him ([1 Samuel:17:40-50](#)).

Next Solomon reflects that there is a *time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away*. These realities can all be observed through practical applications. Those who have experienced moving to a new house have had to sort through all their things and decide what to *keep* and what to *throw away*. Every lost person should be searched for, but the search can't last forever. There is a time and place for shows of affection. But in some situations, affection is inappropriate. Sometimes we *embrace* other people to show support or love, other times we *shun embracing* when we are resolving a conflict, or are giving someone space, or are refusing to let someone manipulate us with physical affection. Life is full of holding on and letting go.

There is a *time to tear apart and a time to sew together*. The tailor must first rip the pants to adjust the hem, and sew it back *together*. There is a *time to be silent and a time to speak*. Solomon is quite articulate about this in the book of Proverbs. [James 1:19](#) tells us, “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.” There is a clear connection to righteous living in knowing when to listen and when to speak.

Solomon also notes there is a *time to love and a time to hate*. This might be confusing, since Jesus tells us that if we hate someone in our heart, it is the same in God’s sight as if we murdered them ([Matt 5:21-22](#)). But God hates evil, and admonishes us to “hate evil” and “love good” ([Psalm 97:10](#); [Proverbs 8:13](#)). This is the preamble to establishing “justice in the gate,” which is to say justice within the community’s governance ([Amos 5:15](#)).

Finally, there is a *time for war and a time for peace*. The Bible is clear that there are just and unjust reasons for war, and that the only moral use of violence is to deter the earth from filling with violence ([Genesis 9:5-6](#)). The proper end to war is peace. Jesus will execute war on the nations at the end of the age, bringing all the earth to justice, and then initiate a new age of peace ([Revelation 19:11-21](#); [Revelation 20:1-6](#)).

God has *appointed* the cycles of life. They have a rhythm. A place. But here Solomon celebrates the order and certainty of the cycles. They are *appointed* by God. That gives them meaning and purpose. This is a stark contrast to observing the cycles from a perspective of human reason and experience, where they just look like a person running on a treadmill. It is a mystery, a vapor, to our reason but it is the beautiful paradox of God’s eternal kingdom. Trust in Him transcends our uncertainty.

The comprehensive nature of *everything* having been *appointed* means that even bad things have a place in God’s plan. God designed creation without death. But God introduced the possibility of death when He gave humans freedom. A choice. He told Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and added a consequence, that if they ate, they would die. Adam and Eve chose death. So death is now a part of what is *appointed*. We also know that God has *appointed* death to be cast into the lake of fire and be no more ([Revelation 20:14](#)).

Every human activity is an invitation by God. An invitation to be grateful. This is a foundation to enjoy life. An invitation to trust God’s sovereign hand. All things are *appointed*. This is a foundation to live a life of meaning and purpose. God has granted each of us the freedom to act upon His creation,

and impact human history. When we do this by faith and obedience, we are an active participant with God.

This message of Solomon could not be more encouraging: God is over all. We can trust that all things are purposeful. Including us, and our opportunity to choose and act in this life.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup>There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—**

- <sup>2</sup> A time to give birth and a time to die;  
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.**
- <sup>3</sup> A time to kill and a time to heal;  
A time to tear down and a time to build up**
- <sup>4</sup> A time to weep and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn and a time to dance.**
- <sup>5</sup> A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.**
- <sup>6</sup> A time to search and a time to give up as lost;  
A time to keep and a time to throw away.**
- <sup>7</sup> A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;  
A time to be silent and a time to speak.**
- <sup>8</sup> A time to love and a time to hate;  
A time for war and a time for peace.**