

# Ecclesiastes 3:18-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-3/ecclesiastes-318-22/>

*Humans and beasts both return to dust. So how is it we are any better off than the animals? Our purpose and contentment come from accepting reality and trusting in God.*

Solomon said to himself concerning the sons of men. He speaks to himself, being self-aware in his contemplation. The phrase *sons of men* is a poetic term that refers to the human race. Expanding the notion of God as judge, Solomon now says to himself: *God has surely tested them*, speaking of the *sons of men*. The Hebrew word translated *tested* carries the notion of a thing being purified. The exercise Solomon observes God using to purify humanity is to demonstrate to them that *they are but beasts*. This seems a bit odd. Solomon explains further: *For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of the beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other.*

It seems death is intended to be our instructor, our teacher. Humans and animals both live and die. Thus, *there is no advantage for man over beast*, for both end up dying. Based on human reason and experience alone, we are actually worse off, because God has placed “eternity in our hearts” ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). We don’t want life to just end. The beasts are oblivious. Although it appears we are smarter, wiser, and have more authority (indeed, this may be empirically true), the reality is that these perceived advantages are vaporous (see notes on [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)). Intelligence and authority are not as advantageous as they appear. *All go to the same place in the end. All come from the dust and all return to the dust.*

Can we reason our way to knowing there is more? Solomon says no. He states: *Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?* The word for *breath* here is “ruwach,” which can also be translated “wind” or “spirit.” It is likely that Solomon is asking “How can we really know that our spirit goes up to heaven, while the beast’s spirit stays on the earth?” The implied answer is “We can’t.” We can chase the wind, but we can’t catch it. We know there is a spirit in all beings, but we can’t observe it. So how can we know where it goes? We can only know by faith.

Concluding chapter 3, Solomon again uses the phrase *there is nothing better* to talk positively about our *activities*. We can *fear God*. We can trust Him, that His purposes are good toward us, even when we can't grasp them. That is our *lot*. Our part in the grand play of life. He contends that we are to *be happy in our activities*. This is the opportunity we are granted, the great gift of God.

*For that is the lot* of humanity, to trust God, fear Him, and enjoy the gift that is life. *Lot* means our portion, our part. Solomon seems to be suggesting that we accept that our limited perspective can only see a vaporous reality. But by faith we can go beyond our limitations and enjoy life. In order to enjoy life, we first must adopt a proper perspective on reality. That true reality begins and ends with faith in God.

*For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?* We cannot see the future. We are limited, frail, imperfect beings. Complete certainty eludes us. Time plays tricks on our perspective and tempts us to dangerous assumptions. But we have a *lot*, an assigned role within the vapor. We are given the chance to fear God and *be happy in our activities*. This is made possible when we exercise faith to accept reality based on God's word, and live that reality in our daily existence.

#### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. <sup>21</sup> Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth? <sup>22</sup> 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?**