

chasing the wind

The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

Chapter 3 The Time of Your Life

PRIMERS

Ever noticed how life – like every year – seems to have its times and seasons?
Ever sensed that your plans and strategies have been trumped by a higher design?

Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been? "I have been to London to visit the queen"
Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you there? "I frightened a little mouse right under her chair."

1. WHAT'S GOING ON IN CHAPTER 3?

Solomon continues to try and make sense of life. Great strides are made in Chapter 3 as Solomon looks at life with a deeper understanding of God's sovereign timing and our need to find enjoyment and fulfillment in God, whatever our life's circumstances.

2. NOTES ON CHAPTER 3

- ¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
- ² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- ³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- ⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- ⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- ⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- ⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
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.

- Vs. 1: In every human life there are God-appointed times or seasons. Seizing these times of our lives brings fulfillment and growth. Ignoring or running away from these times can leave us full of emptiness, regret, resentment. See Ps 31:15; Prov 19:21; and Eph 5:15. Not circumstances but God's good purposes determine constancy and meaning in life.
- Vss. 2-8: Each set of opposites, 14 in all, presents two very different human activities. To pursue one when the other is appropriate (that is, God-appointed) is the cause of many hassles and disasters in our lives. Here are the 14:
 - Vs. 2: "be born...die": These are both determined by God, perhaps Solomon's main point.
 - Vs. 2: "plant...uproot": As with planting and harvesting a crop or pruning a tree, in life there is a right time for beginnings and endings, staying put and moving on.
 - Vs. 3: "kill...heal": "To kill" here is not the Hebrew word for "murder" as in Ex 20:13, but the word for killing as in battle or capital punishment. There are times we must "put to death" what needs to die." Other times we are meant to heal and restore.
 - Vs. 3: "tear down...build": Knowing when to demolish and when to build is crucial.

- Vs. 4: “weep...laugh”: Under God’s appointed seasons, we may need to cry in sorrow and pain or to laugh out loud in joy. These two opposites are not always mutually exclusive.
- Vs. 4: “mourn...dance”: Like weeping and laughing, these two seasons can be very close in time – as in a funeral one week and a wedding or baptism the next.
- Vs. 5: “scatter stones...gather them”: Scattering stones on a field made the field of an enemy useless (2 Kgs 3:19-25). Gathering stones was for getting a field ready for planting (Is 5:1-2), also for building walls and winepresses. Sometimes we are meant to prevent, stall, and hinder. Other times we are meant to prepare and poise for action.
- Vs. 5: “embrace...refrain” Knowing when to embrace and affirm and when to refrain and even shun calls for discernment, whether we talk ideas or relationships.
- Vs. 6: “search...give up”: Seeking, searching in life is crucial, but spend a whole life searching and much of life will be missed. Knowing when to give up a project, a dream, a yearning, or a relationship weighs heavily where fulfillment is concerned.
- Vs. 6: “keep...throw away”: Closets and desk drawers come to mind as does holding too tightly to what must be discarded as excess baggage in life. Much of our use of time could be discarded, keeping what truly fits our purpose at this time of our lives.
- Vs. 7: “tear...mend”: Sometimes we must separate and divide; at other times we strive to join and unite. “Tearing” may refer to ripping old clothes to make rags.
- Vs. 7: “be silent...speak”: In silence we learn, forego judgment, and shun gossip. But we are called to speak against evil, for good, as witnesses.
- Vs. 8: “love...hate”: Though love permeates the Christian’s life, love itself may call for a time of hatred – hating evil, cancer, perversion, useless loss of life.
- Vs. 8: “war...peace”: Nations and individuals go through God-appointed times of war and peace. God favors peace among nations, but when tyranny tramples God-given rights, nations may need to go to war.
- Vss. 9-14
 - Vss. 9-10: Solomon restates his cynicism almost like a refrain so that he can present new truths:
 - Those new truths are summarized here:
 1. Vs. 11: There is a beauty to life, namely, God’s hand in it at every turn.
 2. Vs. 11: God has put “eternity” in our hearts, a longing for more than life’s turns and changes, a reaching for hope and for heaven.
 3. Vs. 11: Our limited ability to grasp God’s eternal perspective is at the heart of much of life’s struggles and cynicism.
 4. Vss. 12-13: God gives us three priceless gifts: the ability to enjoy life; the ability to “do good” along the way; and the satisfaction we can find in our work when we connect it to God’s eternal and purposeful perspective.
 5. vs. 14: Seeing the eternal dimension to life one earth opens us to enjoying life and revering God.
 - Vs 15: God repeats events and life lessons until we learn what He wants us to learn.
 - Vss. 16-22: A recurring source of cynicism and resentment in life is seeing the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, “truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne.” (James Russell Lowell). In response, Solomon offers these truths:
 - Vs. 17: Ultimate judgment of both the wicked and the righteous belongs to God.
 - Vss. 18-19: When God tests us, one of His goals is to get us to see our mortality. In this sense we are no different from animals. (Balance this with Ps. 8)
 - Vss. 21-22: Apart from God we cannot know that our destiny is eternal. We cannot see our future after death. See Ps. 16:11; 49:15; 73:23-26; Is 26:19.
 - Vs. 22: When we see work as fitting into God’s plans and purposes for our life, it can be a source of tremendous joy.

UNDER THE SUN TRUTHS

1. There is a beauty to the seasons of life, and that beauty is God.
2. One secret to living life to the full is knowing the seasons of life as we live them.
3. God uses repetition of events to teach us.
4. We will never truly enjoy our work until we link it to the eternal purposes of God.