

Ecclesiastes 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men,
that God might manifest them, and that they might see that
they themselves are beasts.

Analysis

That God might manifest them (לִבְרֹם, libram)—literally 'to test them' or 'to clarify them.' Qoheleth confronts humanity's shared mortality with beasts, using brutal realism to strip away pretension. **That they might see that they themselves are beasts** (בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה, behemah hemmah)—the phrase emphasizes identity, forcing acknowledgment of our creaturely status apart from divine revelation.

This verse introduces one of Scripture's most unsettling meditations on mortality 'under the sun' (the Preacher's phrase for life without eternal perspective). The Hebrew behemah refers to domesticated animals, underscoring that without God's breath and purpose, human existence reduces to mere biological processes. Reformed theology sees this as exposing humanity's fallen state apart from grace—we are dust animated by divine mercy, not self-sufficient beings.

Historical Context

Written during Solomon's later reign (c. 935 BC), this reflects ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature's stark realism about death. Unlike Egypt's elaborate afterlife theology, Hebrew thought initially focused on Sheol as the great equalizer, making obedience in this life paramount.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing our creaturely limits before God humble pride and foster dependence on Him?
2. In what ways does modern culture deny the 'beast-like' reality of death, and what Gospel hope addresses this?
3. How should mortality awareness shape priorities differently than secular existentialism suggests?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| אָמַרְתִּי | אֶנִּי | בְּלִבִּי | עַל | דִּבְרַת | בְּנֵי |
| I said | H589 | in mine heart | H5921 | concerning the estate | of the sons |
| H559 | | H3820 | | H1700 | H1121 |
| הָאָדָם | לִבָּךְ | הָאֱלֹהִים | וְלֹא | וְהָאֱלֹהִים | לָהֶם |
| of men | might manifest | that God | them and that they might see | that they | |
| H120 | H1305 | H430 | H7200 | H1992 | |
| הַבְּהֵמָה | לָהֶם | לָהֶם | | | |
| themselves are beasts | that they | that they | | | |
| H929 | H1992 | H1992 | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 73:22 (Parallel theme): So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

Psalms 49:12 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.

Hebrews 9:27 (Parallel theme): And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

2 Peter 2:12 (Parallel theme): But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

Romans 9:23 (Parallel theme): And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

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