

Ecclesiastes 3:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts;
even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the
other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no
preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

Analysis

For that which befalleth (מִקְרָה, miqreh)—'happening' or 'fate,' used repeatedly to emphasize the common destiny. **They have all one breath** (רוּחַ אֶחָד, ruach echad)—the same animating life-force, from ruach meaning 'spirit,' 'wind,' or 'breath.' **No preeminence** (מוֹתָר, motar)—'advantage' or 'profit,' one of Ecclesiastes' key terms questioning earthly gain.

Qoheleth radically levels human and animal existence at the biological plane—both die, both return to dust, both possess ruach as mere breath. This isn't denying the imago Dei but demonstrating that from an earthly, materialistic viewpoint, death erases distinctions. **For all is vanity** (הַכֹּל הָבֵל, hakol havel)—'all is vapor,' the book's signature phrase. Paul later echoes this reality (Romans 8:20-21) while pointing to resurrection hope as the answer to this 'under the sun' futility.

Historical Context

This reflects the Old Testament's limited revelation of afterlife before Christ's resurrection illuminated immortality (2 Timothy 1:10). The Preacher writes from observation alone, creating existential tension resolved only in the Gospel.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the New Testament doctrine of resurrection transform this 'under the sun' despair?
2. What legitimate warning does this verse give against purely materialistic thinking about human worth?
3. How should the reality of shared mortality affect our treatment of animals and creation stewardship?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	וּמִקֵּץ הַ	בְּנֵי	הָאָדָם	וּמִקֵּץ הַ
H3588	For that which befalleth	the sons	of men	For that which befalleth
	H4745	H1121	H120	H4745
הַבְּהֵמָה	וּמִקֵּץ הַ	אֶחָד	לָהֶם	מִן הַ
above a beast	For that which befalleth	even one thing	H0	so dieth the other
H929	H4745	H259		H4194 H2088
מִן הַ	וּמִקֵּץ הַ	אֶחָד	לָכֵן	וּמוֹת רַ
H3651	so dieth the other	breath	even one thing	H3605 hath no preeminence
H4194	H2088	H7307	H259	H4195
הָאָדָם	מִן הַבְּהֵמָה	אֶחָד	כִּי	הַכֹּל
of men	H4480	above a beast	H3588	H3605
H120	H929	H369		for all is vanity
				H1892

Additional Cross-References

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

Psalms 49:20 (Parallel theme): Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.

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