

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 (בְּקָרְבָּה, miqreh)—'happening' or 'fate,' used repeatedly to emphasize the common destiny. **They have all one breath** (רֹוחׁ אֶחָד, ruach echad)—the same animating life-force, from ruach meaning 'spirit,' 'wind,' or 'breath.' **No preeminence** (מִוְתָּר, 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** (הַכָּל הַבָּל, 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	וּמִלְכָּה	הַ	בְּנֵי	מִן	פָּאֵד	מִן	וּמִלְכָּה	הַ
H3588	For that which befalleth		the sons		of men		For that which befalleth	
	H4745		H1121		H120		H4745	
בְּבָהָמָה	וּמִלְכָּה	הַ	אַפָּد	מִן	לֹא	מִזְתָּה	הַ	זֶה
above a beast	For that which befalleth		even one thing		H0	so dieth	the other	
H929	H4745		H259			H4194	H2088	
וְ	מִזְתָּה	הַ	אַפָּד	לֹא	לְ	רְ	וְ	וְ
H3651	so dieth	the other	breath	even one thing	H3605	hath no preeminence		
	H4194	H2088	H7307	H259		H4195		
מִן	בְּ	לְ	כִּי	אַל	בְּ	כִּי	בְּ	כִּי
מִן	בְּ	לְ	אַל	אַל	בְּ	אַל	בְּ	אַל
מִן	בְּ	לְ	אַל	אַל	בְּ	אַל	בְּ	אַל
of men	above a beast						for all is vanity	
H120	H4480	H929	H369	H3588	H3605		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.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org