

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8

Ecclesiastes 8:1 "Who [is] as the wise [man]? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed."

God had given Solomon wisdom beyond all of his fellowmen. We find that interpretation, as well as wisdom, is a gift from God.

Joseph was given the ability by God to interpret dreams. Daniel was gifted to interpret dreams, as well. Moses' head shone so brightly when he came down from the mountain after communicating with God, that he had to cover his head so as not to blind the people.

I believe God put the first 5 books of the Bible in Moses' mind while he was on the mountain. This great wisdom caused his head to shine. Most of Genesis occurred long before Moses' lifetime. He had to receive it from somewhere. The type of wisdom and understanding, spoken of here, would cause the facial features to change. Look what happened to Stephen's face.

Acts 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Ecclesiastes 8:2 "I [counsel thee] to keep the king's commandment, and [that] in regard of the oath of God."

It appears, from this, the king's commandments had been given with an oath to God. It is best to keep them, if you value your life.

Romans 13:1-4 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:" "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to [execute] wrath upon him that doeth evil."

"The oath of God": This refers to Israel's promises to serve King Solomon (1 Chronicle 29:24).

Ecclesiastes 8:3 "Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him."

Wise behavior before kings is counseled because each subject took the oath of God or oath of loyalty to the king before God (verse 2); and because the king had the power to do his own will (as in verses 3-4).

The king is the ruler of the land. He is the authority God has put in power. This is saying, do not try to get away from the rule of the king. Do not shirk your duty.

Ecclesiastes 8:4 "Where the word of a king [is, there is] power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?"

This is explaining that there is no rule over the king, except God. The king has the last say over his people. The word of the king is the law of the land. No one can question the king. He, who questioned the king, would be severely punished.

The only time anyone should disobey the rule of the land, is when it is direct opposition to the law of God. The Egyptian midwives feared God, and did not kill the boy babies. God saved their lives, because they were obedient to Him.

Ecclesiastes 8:5 "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment."

A wise man knows when to apply the proper course of action for the best outcome, whether in an earthly sense before the king (8:2), or an eternal sense before God (verses 12-13).

A large part of being wise is to know both time and judgment, the latter word being a reference to the procedure for a matter.

When you keep the commandments of the king, you will not be punished. The wise man sees beyond the immediate happening, and knows there is a God in heaven who will someday judge the whole earth, including the king. Speaking of the wise man's heart is speaking of the moral aspect of his life. Even though he does not like the commandment of the king, the wise man will keep them, if they are not opposed to God's law.

1 Peter 3:13-14 "And who [is] he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy [are ye]: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;"

Ecclesiastes 8:6 "Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man [is] great upon him."

This is giving reasons why a person should obey the king in the land. Everything, and everyone, has an appointed time. Generally speaking an evil king will not be king very long.

God sees the misery of His people, like He did the children of Israel in Egypt. God will not allow the misery to go on forever.

Ecclesiastes 8:7 "For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?"

God has appointed a time for everything but man knows neither the time nor the outcome. These uncertainties can increase his misery.

Only the wise can discern this time since man does not naturally know what will transpire next. We do not know exactly when the end of our lives on earth will be. We do not even know exactly when the coming of the Lord shall be either.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you." "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

Ecclesiastes 8:8 "[There is] no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither [hath he] power in the day of death: and [there is] no discharge in [that] war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it."

Spirit, in this sense, is speaking of the spirit of man, which is actually his life. That is that breath of life within us.

Humankind is severely limited as:

- (1) No one can restrain the spirit (or possibly the wind);
- (2) No one can predict or control the day of his death;
- (3) No one can obtain release in time of war;
- (4) No one can be released from extensive wickedness, since it becomes like a master ruling over him.

These 4 statements of impossibility powerfully demonstrate Solomon's argument that man is sorely limited in his dominion over life. How much more significant this makes the virtue of wisdom!

Death is as precarious and uncontrollable as the wind.

Jesus dismissed His spirit from His body, and told it to go to the Father, when He said:

Luke 23:46 "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."

We do not have control over our spirit to tell it such. Our spirit leaves our body at the command of God. We do not know what hour, or day, we will die to this earth. At the time of death of our physical body, there seems to be a separation of those who belong to Jesus, and those who do not.

We do know that Jesus went into hell, and preached, and brought out the captives with Him.

1 Peter 3:19 "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;"

Ephesians 4:8 "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

Ecclesiastes 8:9 "All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: [there is] a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt."

The master must consider the possibility of being hurt, when he rules his people too harshly. In the days of slaves, they were very valuable to their master, as long as they could work. If he caused injury to them, they were of no value to him anymore.

Solomon has viewed the actions of those around him, and discovered it is much better to take care of your servants. A contented servant will get much more done for his master.

Ecclesiastes 8:10 "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this [is] also vanity."

This refers to the temple at Jerusalem. Lessons that should be gained from the death of the hypocritically wicked are quickly forgotten.

The word forgotten is read "praised" in some manuscripts. The statement then means that Solomon has observed that the wicked received an honorable burial and praise after their death. This observation is reinforced by the fact that the fortunes of the righteous and the wicked are often reversed: The righteous sometimes get what the wicked deserve and the wicked often get what the righteous deserve as we'll see (in verse 14).

Solomon is seeing the apparent injustices in this life. The wicked, possibly, should not be buried, but treated like the animals they were. We saw this happen in the case of wicked Jezebel.

2 Kings 9:10 "And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and [there shall be] none to bury [her]. And he opened the door, and fled."

In this particular case, the wicked were given a place of burial with the righteous. It also appears, they had pretended to be righteous, because they came and went from the place of the holy.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

The gracious delay of God's retribution leads to further disobedience. This delay, in actuality, in no way diminishes the certainty of final judgment.

Much judgment does not take place on the earth. Some, who appear to be living the way God would have them to live, will find judgment from God to be harsh.

Matthew 7:22-23 "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?"
"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Those living sinful lives, who are not punished immediately, cause others to go the way of sin too. They think it is easy to cover up their sins. You may get away with your sin on this earth and no one knows, but be sure, God knows.

Ecclesiastes 8:12 "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his [days] be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:"

There is no real advantage for the wicked, although at times it might seem so. Temporal patience does not eliminate eternal judgment.

Solomon never counsels his readers to forget God and cast their lot with the wicked; because he knows by faith that it will go well with the righteous who fear God, and ultimately it will not go well for the wicked.

It is really of no concern to us how God deals with the sinner. The one thing we must do, is live the very best we can ourselves. God is not willing that even one should perish.

Perhaps, He is waiting, giving ample time for Him to repent. Our concern is not his sins, or how God deals with him. Our concern is our own sins. If we live right, God will bless us.

Psalms 37:18 "The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever."

Those who live for God will inherit eternal life.

Matthew 25:34 "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:"

Ecclesiastes 8:13 "But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong [his] days, [which are] as a shadow; because he feareth not before God."

Solomon knew that God had not promised long life to the wicked. It troubled Solomon that he saw seeming contradictions to this. (In verse 13), Solomon is stating, that many times the wicked's life was shortened. He believed this to be the correct solution to evil.

Isaiah 57:21 "[There is] no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Those who live for God have hope of the resurrection. Those who do not, have a fearful awaiting of the judgment, and then the lake of fire.

Matthew 13:49-50 "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just," "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Ecclesiastes 8:14 "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just [men], unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked [men], to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also [is] vanity."

Temporally speaking, God generally rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. Solomon regards the exceptions to this principle as enigmatic and discouraging (see Psalm 73).

The key to this is "upon the earth". Jesus said it best when he said in Matthew:

Matthew 13:30 "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

On this earth, the wicked and the righteous live together side by side. It appears, sometimes, that the evil growth (tares), is as great or greater, than the righteous (wheat). The separation comes at judgment. To the natural eye, this seems unfair.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun."

In no way does Solomon commend unbridled rampant indulgence in sin, which is implied in Christ's account of the man whose barns were full. That man may have justified his sin by quoting this passage (Luke 12:19). His focus here is on the resolve to enjoy life in the face of the injustice which surrounded him (see Eccl. 2:24).

This is clearly a faith position on Solomon's part, since what he observes in life often contradicts it. This puzzling reversal should not deter man from enjoying life under the hand of God.

Under the sun, this might be true, if there was no eternal life. Solomon is saying, to enjoy life to the fullest on this earth. He is saying, be thankful for the blessings of this life and enjoy laughter, food, and drink. This is the reward for the labor of this life. This certainly is true in the physical realm. Notice the recognition that God gave it to him.

1 Timothy 4:4 "For every creature of God [is] good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:"

1 Timothy 6:17 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;"

Ecclesiastes 8:16 "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also [there is that] neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)"

God's work is wonderful, but at times incomprehensible.

We must notice again, that Solomon is looking at the happenings of this earth. He is applying his wisdom, so that he might understand the earthly life. All of this is Solomon trying to find out what this life is all about.

Many women will say, that housework is like the last phrase here. It seems it never ends. They clean house and cook on Monday, and then, it is to do all over again on Tuesday.

It is not uncommon for thinking man to try to understand life and where it leads. Solomon says, you would get no sleep at all, if you waited, until you understood life, to sleep. The questions go on.

Ecclesiastes 8:17 "Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek [it] out, yet he shall not find [it]; yea further; though a wise [man] think to know [it], yet shall he not be able to find [it]."

The inability of man to understand God's work is emphasized by the threefold negation of the verb find out with the work of God as its object each time.

The intelligence of the most intelligent man that ever lived is as nothing compared with God's intelligence. It is impossible to understand everything about God. The intelligence of man does not get him to heaven. God wants us to accept Him on simple faith. There are secrets of God that will not be known, until we get to heaven.

The little understanding that we have, and the little more understanding that Solomon had, are gifts from God. Even at that, mortal man cannot know the depth of God.

Romans 11:33 "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable [are] his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Solomon, like us, will have to wait until he gets to heaven to know more.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8 Questions

1. God had given _____ wisdom above his fellows.
2. _____, as well as wisdom, is a gift from God.

3. _____ head shone, when he came down from the mountain after communicating with God.
4. Where does the author believe Moses got the first 5 books of the Bible?
5. Most of Genesis happened when?
6. Let every soul be subject unto the _____ .
7. The powers that be are _____ of God.
8. What is verse 3 saying?
9. There is no rule over the king, except _____ .
10. The _____ of the _____ is the law of the land.
11. When is the only time a person should disobey the rule of the land?
12. Who were very good examples of the correct time to disobey the king?
13. What does the wise man look ahead and see, when he is under the king?
14. Why will an evil king not be king very long?
15. What is spirit, in verse 8, speaking of?
16. Our spirit leaves our body at the command of _____ .
17. Where did Jesus go, and preach, and bring its captives out with Him?
18. The master must remember what when he is ruling others?
19. In verse 10, Solomon is seeing the apparent _____ in this life.
20. What happened to wicked Jezebel?
21. Whose business is it of how God deals with the sinners?
22. What happens to the blessed of the Father?
23. What hope do the believers have, that the sinners do not have?
24. What happens to the wicked, at the end?
25. What is the key to verse 14?
26. Who are the "wheat"?
27. Who are the "tares"?

28. In verse 15, what did Solomon recommend?
29. What makes the food we eat clean?
30. What charge are the rich given in 1 Timothy 6:17.
31. How do women feel about housework, that fits this lesson?
32. _____ does not get us to heaven.
33. God wants our simple _____.