

# Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary

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THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES					
The Search for Significance					
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All is Vanity	Vanity of Doing	Vanity of Having	Vanity of Being	Using Life Well	Source of True Living
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Subject	Sermons		Summary		
Fickleness of Life Versus Fear of the Lord					
Place: "Under the Sun"					
Decades of Searching (in the days of King Solomon) circa 936BC					
King Solomon Author					

Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is a wise person? Who knows the solution to a problem? A person's wisdom brightens his appearance, and softens his harsh countenance.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:1 τ ς ο δεν σοφο ς κα τ ς ο δεν λ σιν ματος σοφ α νθρ που φωτιε πρ σωπον α το κα ναιδ ς προσ π α το μισηθ σετ αι

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who knows the wise? and who knows the interpretation of a saying? A man's wisdom will lighten his countenance; but a man of shameless countenance will be hated.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:1 How wonderful to be wise, to analyze and interpret things. Wisdom lights up a person's face, softening its harshness.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is as the wise? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? The wisdom of man causeth his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who compares with the sage? Who else knows how to explain things? Wisdom lights up the face, enlivening a grim expression.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? Wisdom makes one's face shine, and the hardness of one's countenance is changed.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man, and who knows the explanation of things? A man's wisdom illumines his face, but an impudent look is resented.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is really wise? Who knows how to explain things? Wisdom makes one's face shine, and it changes one's grim look.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man? and to whom is the sense of anything clear? A man's wisdom makes his face shining, and his hard face will be changed.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his countenance is changed.

- as the: Ec 2:13,14 1Co 2:13-16
- who knoweth: Ge 40:8 41:15,16,38,39 Job 33:23 Pr 1:6 Da 2:28-30,47 4:18,19 2Pe 1:20
- a man's: Ex 34:29,30 Pr 4:8,9 17:24 24:5 Mt 17:2 Ac 6:15
- and the: De 28:50 Ac 4:13,29 Eph 6:19
- boldness: Heb. strength, 2Ti 4:17

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.

Numbers 6:25 **The LORD make His face shine on you**, And be gracious to you;

Psalms 67:1 God be gracious to us and bless us, And **cause His face to shine upon us**– Selah.

Daniel 2:21-23 "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. 22 "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. 23 "To You, O God of my

fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter."

Psalm 34:5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces will never be ashamed.

James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Proverbs 24:21-22 My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change, 22 For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?

Proverbs 14:35 The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully.

Proverbs 16:14 The fury of a king is like messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it.

Proverbs 20:2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

## THE FACE OF WISDOM LIGHT ON THE COUNTENANCE

Ecclesiastes 8:1 is a transitional verse—it both reflects on the preceding reflections on wisdom's rarity (Ec 7:23–29) and introduces a new theme of wisdom and authority, especially concerning how to live wisely under imperfect rulers (Ec 8:2–9). Solomon begins by exalting the rare and beautiful quality of true wisdom—its rarity (v.1a) and its transformative power (v.1b). This verse is difficult to interpret, but I think **Glenn** gives help in this regard.

**Donald Glenn** notes that "The key to interpreting this chapter properly is seeing how its two parts are related. The chapter begins with a question and a statement that magnify the value of wisdom (Ec 8:1) and closes with an acknowledgment of wisdom's limitations (Ec 8:17). Wisdom enables a wise man to avoid the king's wrath (Ec 8:2-9), but not even a wise man can figure out the enigmas in God's distribution of justice (Ec 8:10-17). The background for this section is the recognition of the absolute authority of the king (cf. Prov. 24:21-22) and the need for proper decorum to avert his wrath (cf. Prov. 14:35; 16:14; 20:2). (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 278](#))

**Michael Eaton** adds that "This verse belongs more to what precedes than to what follows, for it forms a fitting conclusion to proverbs which have appealed for wisdom in relation to suffering and sin; it is reminiscent of a similar final challenge at the end of Hosea (Hos 14:9). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Who is like the wise man - NET** = "Who is a wise person?" This is the first of two rhetorical questions both expecting a negative answer (cf Ec 8:7) which emphasizes the rarity. **Like the wise** refers not just to intelligent, but those wise in living, morally discerning, and walking in the fear of the Lord. This opening phrase marvels at the rarity of men with true wisdom.

**Donald Glenn** points out that "A **wise man** is able to practice proper decorum. In two rhetorical questions Solomon affirmed that only a wise man can size up situations properly and act accordingly." (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 278](#))

**And who knows (yada) the interpretation of a matter?** This is a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer (cf Ec 8:7). **knows (yada)** speaks of intimate knowledge. **Interpretation** (pēšer) means explanation or meaning. This word (pēšer) is rare in the OT and used prominently in its Aramaic form (pēšhar) in Daniel to describe interpreting dreams and riddles. The implication is that the **wise man** can discern and interpret life's complexities. He sees beneath the surface to understand God's purposes or the deeper meaning behind events.

**NET NOTE - interpretation** - Or "the explanation." The noun פִּשְׁרָא (pēšer) denotes "solution; explanation; interpretation; meaning" (HALOT 982–83 s.v. פִּשְׁרָא; BDB 833 s.v. פִּשְׁרָא). The Hebrew term is an Aramaic loanword from פִּשְׁרָא (pishra', "diagnosis; meaning; solution"). The Aramaic noun פִּשְׁרָא (pēšhar, "interpretation of a dream or prophecy") and verb פִּשְׁרָא (pēšhar, "to interpret a dream or prophecy") reflect a later meaning not present in Ecclesiastes, but current at the time of Daniel ("dream and **interpretation** [peshar] in Da 2:5-6, Da 2:7; Da 4:3, 15, 16; Da 5:12, 15, 16; 7:16) and Qumran.

**INTERPRETATION - PESHER** A hapax legomenon, pfisher is found in Ecc. 8:1. This masculine noun occurs in the second of two queries, "Who is as the wise man?" and "Who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" It refers to the intention and meaning of something, how it should be understood and acted on. The noun is derived from peshar, "to interpret." Wise men were often found in court settings. There, discretion was always in order, especially since the king's countenance was subject to change (Ecc. 8:1).

*A wise person possesses the ability to interpret a matter  
and its resulting calm assurance produces a radiant countenance*  
-- William Barrick

A man's wisdom ([chokmah](#); [Lxx](#) - [sophia](#)) illumines him and causes his stern face to beam - NET = "softens his harsh countenance." This implies that such a wise man does exist, albeit rare. And because of this, some people feel the better answer to the rhetorical questions in Ec 8:1a is that wisdom is rare (one out of 1000 in Ec 7:28). True wisdom brings inner light, which shines outward. It changes how a person appears and reacts to the world. **His face** is symbolic of his countenance, mood, demeanor. The **stern face** which has a hard, harsh, or severe expression is transformed by **wisdom**. This verse celebrates the power of godly wisdom. Wisdom grants insight into life's riddles (cf. Pr 2:6–9). It transforms the inner person (Ps. 34:5). **Wisdom** radiates outward, making even one's appearance reflect God's peace (cf. Nu 6:25). **Wisdom** is not just intellect. It's moral light, emotional balance, and spiritual beauty. It also subtly contrasts the rare wise person with the many confused or hardened ones (cf. Ec 7:28–29). **Wisdom** speaks of appearance versus essence for wisdom changes not just what you know, but who you are.

**Philip Ryken** - The man who has the wisdom to solve such vexing problems is rare indeed. Yet some individuals do have the gift of interpretation. To give just one notable example, consider the life and ministry of the prophet Daniel. When he was a young man, Daniel was carried off to captivity in Babylon, where he was trained at the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Only Daniel (with a few of his friends) was wise enough not to eat the meat that the Babylonians offered to their gods. The Bible says further that "in every matter of wisdom and understanding" Daniel knew ten times as much as any of the scholars or magicians in Babylon (Daniel 1:20). Later on he turned out to be the only man in the entire kingdom who was wise enough to reveal and interpret the king's dream (Daniel 2). Not many people have as much wisdom as Daniel. He is such a glowing example that he matches the description given in the second half of Ecclesiastes 8:1. Wisdom made his face shine. In fact, even the Babylonians could see that his appearance was better than the appearance of their own young men (Daniel 1:15). It is strange but true: godly wisdom makes a difference in the way people look. People who live without God in the world often show the proud demeanor or stern expression that comes from a heart hardened by sin—what the Preacher called "hardness of... face." But the wisdom of the gospel turns the frown of sin into the smile of grace. Thus the Preacher contrasts the face of a hardened sinner with "the wise man who is visibly gracious in his demeanor, and whose gentleness is obvious in his facial expression." In saying this, he is not just telling us to "put on a happy face." Instead, he is saying what the psalmist said, that people who look to the Lord "are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed" (Psalm 34:5; cf. Exodus 34:29-35; Proverbs 15:13). This is more than a metaphor. True wisdom brings a joy to life that changes everything, including people's appearance. (See [Ecclesiastes \(Redesign\): Why Everything Matters](#))

**NET NOTE** - **stern face to beam** - Literally "the strength of his face is changed." The expression [עֹז פָּנָיו](#) ('oz panayv, "strength of his face") is an idiom for "boldness; impudence" (BDB 739 s.v. 4 רַץ) or "hard face" = harsh countenance (HALOT 805 s.v. I 1 רַץ.c).

**Bob Utley** on **illumines** - This VERB (BDB 21; KB 24; *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) is often used of God's face (e.g., Nu. 6:25; Ps. 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3,7,19; 89:15; 119:135; Dan. 9:17), but only here of a human face.

**William Barrick** - **Ecclesiastes 8 Wisdom Has Its Limits.** By application, the Preacher found the explanation for apparent inequalities in divine providence (Eccl 6:1–8:15). The topic of wisdom brackets Eccl 8 with two declarations about "**the wise man**" (Eccl 8:1, 17). Eccl 8:1 speaks again to the rarity of the truly wise person (Eccl 7:27–28); Eccl 8:17 announces the frustration of the wise person who says, "I know," but cannot comprehend all the work of God "under the sun." Wisdom has its benefits (Eccl 8:1b), but it also has its limits (Eccl 8:17).

**Wisdom in Situations beyond a Person's Control**(Eccl 8:1–9) Eccl 8:1 serves as a transition between Eccl 7 and Eccl 8. Whether it concludes Eccl 7 or commences chapter 8, the verse serves as a "hinge"<sup>1</sup> between the two. **Rhetorical questions** like those in the first half of Ec 8:1 normally receive a negative answer. The questions anticipate "**no one knows**" (Eccl 8:7) and the reference to those who think they know, but have not come to a full comprehension of all that God does (Eccl 8:17). ([C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes, Anchor Bible 18C, 290](#)) However, in the second half of the verse Solomon answers by indicating that such individuals do exist—despite their rarity (cf. Ec 7:28).

A **wise** person possesses the ability to interpret a matter and its resulting calm assurance produces a radiant countenance (Eccl 8:1b). Similar terminology occurs in the Aaronic blessing: "The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you" (Nu 6:25; cp. Ps 4:6). The context indicates that the shining **face** refers to God's favor, grace, and mercy (cf. Ps 67:1). Proverbs 16:15 applies the metaphor to human beings ("In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain"). Ecclesiastes 8:1 concludes with the statement that a person's wisdom "**causes his stern face to beam**" (literally, "the strength of his face changes"). Wisdom softens one's face as a reflection of the softened heart (cp. Prov 15:13). In other words, that individual becomes more gracious, merciful, and forgiving. (Eaton sees this as referring to the wise man, but Garrett sees it as referring to the king in the next verse)

In Eccl 7:15–29 Solomon had exhorted his readers to be forgiving of those who have spoken ill of them (Eccl 7:21). Now, in

Eccl 8:1, he offers a fuller explanation of what transpires in the exhibition of that forgiving spirit. Since Eccl 7, 8 depict wisdom as something desirable and positive, Longman's view of Eccl 8:1 "as a sarcastic exclamation of frustration" finds no objective basis in the text itself (though Eccl 7:23, 24 seem to conclude that wisdom is unattainable). (Barrick - [Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

1 Cp. Daniel J. Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 351.

**"Shining with Wisdom"** Wisdom isn't about being clever—it's about living with clarity, humility, and holy understanding. When you walk with God's wisdom: Your burdens lighten, Your heart finds calm, And even your face shows peace others can't explain. God's wisdom makes radiant what sin and sorrow had hardened. Solomon says it: the wise beam with light—because they see the world through the eyes of God. True wisdom is rare and invaluable. It enables understanding where others only see confusion. Righteous living brings visible change. The inner life radiates outward, especially in times of pressure. Wise people are a gift to the world. They are like lighthouses—calm, radiant, and deeply grounded. Let God soften your face. Ask Him to replace a harsh, anxious, or proud countenance with His peace. Be a light-bringer. In a world of confusion and complaint, let your wisdom shine with quiet confidence. Have you ever seen this joy in the face of an older, wiser believer? Is God making your own face shine, transforming you from glory to glory (see 2Co 3:18+)? Or to change the metaphor who do you "smell like?" Paul wrote

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and (GOD DOES THIS) manifests through us the **sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place** 15 **For we are a fragrance of Christ** to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And **who is adequate for these things?** (Answer? 2Co 3:5-6+) (2Co 2:14-16+)

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#### Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - THE RADIANT FACE

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance. Ecclesiastes 8:1

The face is the mirror of the soul. According to Exodus 34:29, Moses' face was radiant when he came down from Mount Sinai because he had seen the Lord. In Proverbs 15:13 Solomon also tells us that "a happy heart makes the face cheerful." Look at a person's face and you can discover a great deal about his or her walk with God.

Wisdom changes a person's face, making it beautiful to behold, according to Ecclesiastes 8:1. When I came to the church I now pastor, the Spurnys were one of the first families to befriend us. I don't know why that happened, but somehow we just became good friends. Every Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Spurny would come by, shake my hand, and Mrs. Spurny would smile at me. They taught me a little Czechoslovakian (a very little), and each week Mrs. Spurny would smile as I struggled to say a few words in her native tongue. For several years before her death she struggled with cancer. Shortly before she died my associate pastor and I visited her at home. She looked so frail, so weak that we knew the end was not far away. Cancer had done its awful work. Despite her illness, she was as gracious as ever. As we sat at her kitchen table, my associate pastor read Psalm 34.

When he read verse 5, he stopped for a moment. "Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." For some reason I had never noticed that particular verse. But when he read it, I looked at Mrs. Spurny. Her face was radiant. Although the cancer was taking her life, it had not destroyed her spirit. She said to us, "I'm not afraid to die. I'm ready to meet the Lord."

In heaven there is no more cancer, no more sickness, no more Alzheimer's disease, no more AIDS. In heaven there is only the radiance and joy of seeing Jesus Christ face-to-face.

That's the bottom line, isn't it? It is possible to face even the worst that life has to offer, and to face it with hope and optimism because the promises of God go beyond the grave.

Lord God, may the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- Whose face comes to mind when you think of being radiant with the joy of the Lord? What do others see when they look at you?
- Take a quick look in the mirror. What do you see?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 24:5; Daniel 2:28-30; and Acts 6:8-15.

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:2 Obey the king's command, because you took an oath before God to be loyal to him.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:2 σι μα βασιλ ως φ λαξον κα περ λ του ρκου θεο μ σπουδ σ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:2 Observe the commandment of the king, and that because of the word of the oath of God.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:2 Keep the king's command because of your oath made before God.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:2 I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:2 Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:2 Obey the king since you vowed to God that you would.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:2 I pray thee, the commandment of a king keep, even for the sake of the oath of God.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:2 Obey the king's command and, because of the divine promise,

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:2 Keep the king's command because of your sacred oath.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:2 Observe the precept of the king, and in view of your oath to God,

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:2 I advise you to obey the king's commands because of the oath you took in God's presence.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:2 I say to you, Keep the king's law, from respect for the oath of God.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:2 Keep the king's command, and because of your sacred oath be not dismayed;

ASV Ecclesiastes 8:2 I counsel thee, Keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of God.

- **I say:** Pr 24:21 Ro 13:1-4 Titus 3:1 1Pe 2:13-17
- **Because of the oath :** 1Ki 2:43 1Ch 29:24 Eze 17:13-20 Ro 13:5

#### **Related Passages:**

Romans 13:1-4 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Romans 13:5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

Proverbs 24:21 My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change

### **WISDOM AND THE THRONE**

Ecclesiastes 8 continues Solomon's practical application of wisdom in a world of imperfect human authority. After praising the brightness and discernment of the wise (v.1), Solomon moves into a discussion of how wisdom functions in the presence of rulers who possess absolute authority. This section (vv.2–9) addresses: How to behave under royal authority, when and how to act wisely in unjust systems, and the limits of human control over life and government. The doctrine presented here is the same doctrine as that given by Paul in Romans 13:1–5. Human government is God's ordained means of rectifying most current disorders.

**I say, "Keep** ([shamar](#); Lxx - [phulasso](#) - [aorist imperative](#)) **the command of the king** - **NET** = "Obey the king's command." Command of the king is literally "mouth of the king," a Hebrew idiom meaning "command of the king." Solomon exhorts the reader to obey the



command of the ruling authority, even when the system is flawed. Solomon urges submission to authority as part of wise living under God's providence. Ecclesiastes 8:2 is not about absolute loyalty, but about honoring God's order in a fallen world with wise, godly discretion.

**Michael Eaton** on **command of king** (literally "mouth of the king") - The mouth of the king is not simply his commands (as in most translations), but more generally 'what he says' (cf. Prov. 13:3). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Philip G Ryken** - The general principle here is submission to the governing authorities—something the Bible also teaches in other places. Jesus told his disciples to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Luke 20:25). Paul told every person to "be subject to the governing authorities"—what William Tyndale famously called "the powers that be" (Romans 13:1). Martin Luther called this the duty of "political obedience." Every Christian is called to be a law abiding citizen and to respond to any godly request the government makes for help. This includes everything from paying our full taxes to answering the president's call to volunteer service. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters - Page 184](#))

**Because of the oath (shebua) before God - NET** = "because you took an oath before God to be loyal to him." This verse is unclear as to whether it refers to an oath man makes or to an oath God makes. You see this difference in the way the versions are translated above, some saying the "oath before God" and others "the oath of God." If it is the former, it speaks of a man making a vow to obey the king.

**Michael Eaton** - The latter part of the verse gives the reason for the command: ... and that on account of the oath of God (cf. AV, RV; RSV receives comment below). Evidently it was a custom for the king's subjects to take an oath of loyalty. 2 Chronicles 36:13 and Ezekiel 17:13 have been cited as throwing some light on the matter, but here the oath is one taken more generally among the populace (cf. 1 Chr. 29:24; Josephus, Antiquities 15.10.4; 17.2.4). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**ESV Study Bible** - The Preacher is reminding the king's counselor that he is obligated to help restrain the king from making foolish decisions on account of his "oath to God" (esv footnote), i.e., his taking an oath of service to the king in God's name (cf. Ex. 22:11; 2 Sam. 21:7; 1 Kings 2:43). (See [ESV Study Bible - Page 401](#))

As noted above there is some disagreement on interpretation of the oath - This phrase may mean (1) Because of your personal oath to God – i.e., a citizen's vow of loyalty to a king made in God's presence. (2) Because of God's oath – i.e., the divine sanction of the king's rule (cf. Romans 13:1–2). (3) Because obedience honors your covenant with God – a general call to submit to authority as an act of piety.

Ryken for example writes that "The "oath of God" may be a divine rather than a human promise—the promise that God had made when he put his king on the throne. Remember that the rightful kings of Israel were the recipients of a royal promise. God had sworn to King David that one of his sons would sit on Israel's throne forever. This is the covenant that God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 and that David himself repeated in Psalm 110: "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'" (v. 1). The people of God were obliged to obey their earthly king because he was anointed by Almighty God. To obey the king, therefore, was to give honor to God...What the Preacher gives us in Ecclesiastes 8 is practical wisdom for when we are under an earthly authority that is not entirely righteous and we might not be certain what to do. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters - Page 185](#))

*With God as witness, subjects make their oath of allegiance to their sovereign....  
Solomon exhorts people to be faithful in their sworn allegiance to their king.*

**William Barrick** - Some commentators question Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes in view of instruction regarding kings in Eccl 8:2–9.6 The verses seem to present kings in a negative light. Would King Solomon speak in such a manner? However, who better to expound on practical politics in the royal court than a king? His advice resounds with credibility gained from firsthand experience on the throne and with other sovereigns. Fredericks declares that a royal perspective pervades Ecclesiastes, but that both exilic and post-exilic periods of Israel's history provide very little opportunity for applying wise instruction regarding the monarchy's operations. "There was no monarchy!"<sup>7</sup> Thus, Solomonic authorship contributes to the authenticity of these instructions and observations.

**Being Wise in a King's Throne Room** (Eccl 8:2–6) First, the writer of Ecclesiastes advises his readers to submit to the king (Eccl 8:2). Does Solomon refer to a human monarch or to the divine King? Leupold believes that verses 1–8 speak of "the heavenly Monarch, . . . more aptly than it does to an earthly ruler."<sup>8</sup> While this interpretation nullifies one argument often used against Solomonic authorship,<sup>9</sup> it does not do justice to the text. Parallels with Proverbs also connect wisdom with behavior in a king's presence. Opening the instruction with "I say" (literally, "I"—no verb<sup>10</sup>) echoes Eccl 6:3 and Eccl 8:14. Submission to royal authority finds its basis in "the oath of God" (literal translation). The phrase contains some grammatical ambiguity, since the genitive can mean an oath that God takes or gives (ESV),<sup>11</sup> an oath characterized by God ("sacred oath," NRSV), or an oath taken to God (NKJV) or before God (NASB, NIV). The last offers the most likely meaning. With God as witness, subjects

make their oath of allegiance to their sovereign (cp. Exod 22:11; 2 Sam 21:7; 1 Kgs 2:43; 1 Chron 29:24). Solomon exhorts people to be faithful in their sworn allegiance to their king. (Barrick - [Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

4 Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 117. On the other hand, Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary 14 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 326 fns 183 and 184, considers "**his face**" a reference to the king, mentioned in the following verse.

5 Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 208. Even Longman notes that such an interpretation is "hypothetical because it is the context, rather than anything explicit in the text, that signals the sarcastic tone" (ibid. 209).

6 Ibid., 6, 209.

7 Daniel C. Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," in *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, by Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* 16 (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 32.

8 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 180.

9 Leupold, however, dates the book to the Persian period; ibid., 11, 183.

10 An alternate translation: "As for me, the rule is 'Keep the king's command.'" Cp. 1 Sam 12:14, "[do] not rebel against the command of the LORD" (literally, "the mouth of the LORD").

11 Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 185, believes that the oath refers to God's promise to David that his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel.

**Submission for the Sake of the Lord** - Living in a world of broken systems, unfair rulers, and imperfect governments can stir rebellion in our hearts. But Solomon gives a surprising piece of wisdom: Obey the king—not for his sake, but for God's. Why? Because God is sovereign over rulers. He holds kings accountable. Your obedience, when done with integrity and wisdom, reflects your reverence for God, not blind allegiance to men. Even in unjust systems, your faithfulness shines as a quiet testimony to God's ultimate rule. Wisdom honors lawful authority—not because rulers are perfect, but because God is sovereign. Discernment is key. There are times to obey, and times to respectfully resist (cf. Daniel, Acts). Pray for those in authority. (1 Timothy 2:1–2) – because God uses rulers, even unbelieving ones, for His purposes.

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#### Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - OBEY THE KING!

Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. Ecclesiastes 8:2-5

Verses 2-5 offer practical, commonsense advice about loyalty and allegiance. Specifically, the oath in verse 2 refers to a vow of allegiance to obey a king. But it has many modern applications for those of us who have no king to obey. It certainly applies to employees who pick up a paycheck every two weeks. Whose signature is at the bottom? Who is paying your salary? You owe that person—or that company—your loyalty.

What if you feel that you can't obey his or her orders? Then quit and find a job compatible with your values. If you want to criticize, leave the company and then criticize to your heart's content. But don't sit in the "peanut gallery," making cheap comments about your superiors. That's just plain wrong. It's also stupid and will probably cost you your job eventually.

Does this mean we should never complain? No, not at all. But it does mean that we must recognize that "the authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). An authority is anyone who has the right to do something. If your job gives you the right to make certain decisions, then when you are on the job, you are an "authority." Seen in another light, an authority is anyone who has the right to make decisions that directly affect your life. In the broadest sense, all of us live in two relationships at once. We both have authority in certain areas and we are under authority in other areas. You may be a husband and thus the head of your home, but at work you are under the authority of your boss. You may be a teacher and thus the authority in your classroom, but you are under the authority of your principal, who is also under the authority of the school board. You may work in an office where certain people report to you while at the same time you report to someone over you. You are thus "in authority" and "under authority" at the same time.

You cannot be a leader until you know how to obey, and you cannot obey until you submit yourself to the authorities over you. This won't always be easy or convenient, and sometimes it can be very costly indeed. Solomon's advice is quite clear. Obey the king! Learn to obey, because someday you may be the one giving the orders.



Lord of all things, I pray for the grace to obey. Quell the rebel spirit within my heart. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Who are the "kings" in authority over you? In what ways are you in authority over others?
- Where do you sense the rebel spirit in your own heart?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 1 Chronicles 29:23-25; Proverbs 14:29; and 1 Peter 3:12-15.

**Ecclesiastes 8:3 "Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases."**

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:3 "Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

NET Ecclesiastes 8:3 Do not rush out of the king's presence in haste— do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he can do whatever he pleases.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:3 π ροσ που α το πορε σ μ σ τ ς ν λ γ πονηρ τι π ν ν θελ σ ποι σει

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:3 Be not hasty; thou shalt go forth out of his presence: stand not in an evil matter; for he will do whatsoever he shall please,

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:3 Do not be in a hurry; leave his presence, and don't persist in a bad cause, since he will do whatever he wants.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:3 Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:3 Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:3 Don't try to avoid doing your duty, and don't stand with those who plot evil, for the king can do whatever he wants.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:3 Be not troubled at his presence, thou mayest go, stand not in an evil thing, for all that he pleaseth he doth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:3 be in no hurry to depart from it; do not be obstinate in a bad cause, since the king will do as he likes in any case.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:3 Do not be terrified; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:3 be not hasty to withdraw from the king; do not join in with a base plot, for he does whatever he pleases,

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:3 Don't be in a hurry to leave the king's service. Don't take part in something evil, because he can do whatever he pleases.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:3 Be not quick to go from before him. Be not fixed in an evil design, because he does whatever is pleasing to him.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:3 go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases.

- **Do not be in a hurry.** Ec 10:4 Pr 14:29
- **Do not join:** 1Ki 1:50-52 2:21-24 Isa 48:4 Jer 44:16,17 Ac 5:8,9
- **for:** Pr 16:14,15 30:31 Da 4:35 5:19

**WISDOM BEFORE KINGS  
DANGER OF HASTINESS**

**Do not be in a hurry to leave him** (jussive sense = like a command) - We have all seen enough television scenes where the subject usually carefully backs out of the room from the king's presence. A Biblical example of the danger of entering the presence of a king was Esther who knew she was putting her life in danger going into the king's presence, prompting her to declare "thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16+).

**Michael Eaton** - Do not be in a hurry to leave him. 'To go from someone's presence' elsewhere signifies disaffection or disloyalty (cf. Hos. 11:2). Thus the Preacher warns against a capricious desertion of one's post (cf. 10:4) and against persistence in any disloyalty (RV persist is better than NASV join in or RSV delay). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Solomon provides pragmatic wisdom for dealing with authority: Wisdom requires patience, even in unjust or tense settings. Don't let your frustration lead to rebellion. God has placed authority—even flawed authority—for a time. This verse resembles the wisdom of Joseph (Genesis 41), Daniel (Daniel 1–6), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2), who handled powerful kings with both respect and godly courage. Solomon is not commending blind obedience but warning against rash disrespect and ungodly rebellion.

**Do not join** (jussive sense = like a command) **in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases**- NLT = "and don't stand with those who plot evil," Don't align yourself with wicked plans. The king has absolute power (or acts as if he does). He is not easily thwarted, so rashness or rebellion is both dangerous and foolish.

**R. N. Whybray** captures Solomon's attitude toward political authority "on the one hand he counsels obedience and submission to it on the grounds of prudence, while on the other he does not hide the fact that he regards it as brutal and tyrannical." (Online [New Century Bible Commentary - Ecclesiastes](#))

**ESV Study Bible** - In a fallen world, there are foolish kings who issue imprudent commands, but that does not mean that a counselor is free to disassociate himself completely from his master. At the same time, however, he ought not to exercise such unthinking obedience to the king that he becomes implicated in an evil cause. (See [ESV Study Bible - Page 402](#))

*People also must beware of getting involved in any matter that the king might find displeasing.  
In other words, they should not engage in a "bad cause"*

**William Barrick** - Eccl 8:3 continues the exhortation to allegiance and submission. Subjects should not hastily depart from the king's presence. One should wait to be dismissed by the king himself. A person should demonstrate that their business does not transcend the king's and that their time is at his pleasure. Indeed, if one makes an untimely exit, he or she might lose an opportunity to influence the king. (Borrow Garrett [Ecclesiastes](#)) People also must beware of getting involved in any matter that the king might find displeasing. In other words, they should not engage in a "bad cause" (NIV, HCSB). The king will punish any appearance of evil, lack of submission, rebellion, or improprieties as he sees fit (cf. Prov 14:35; 24:21–22). (Eccl 8:5b ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#)))

**Philip G Ryken** - When people are under the rule of ungodly authority, it is tempting to rebel in an unrighteous way. Instead the Preacher tells us to fight evil with godliness. A good example is the stand that Daniel's friends took against King Nebuchadnezzar when he commanded all of his subjects to worship him. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (to use their proper Hebrew names) peacefully refused to worship anyone except God alone (see Daniel 3:1-30+). Another notable example is [Helmuth von Moltke](#)—the man mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Although he resisted Hitler at every turn, von Moltke refused to resort to violence, for fear that this would make him little better than a Nazi. This is not to say that there is never a time to fight against tyranny, including by the rightful use of force, if this is a calling that we have been given by God. But Ecclesiastes cautions us not to respond to evil with evil. (See [Ecclesiastes \(Redesign\): Why Everything Matters](#))

**"Don't React, Reflect"** Powerful people can stir up strong emotions—especially when they are unjust. Solomon warns: Don't storm out. Don't join the mob. Instead, wait. Pray. Choose your battles carefully. There is a time to speak truth—but it must be timed with wisdom, not reaction. God can open the hearts of kings—but He often uses humble, careful servants, not angry rebels. When suffering oppression from others in authority, do not let the desire for revenge turn your heart to ungodliness.

**Ecclesiastes 8:4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"**

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:4 Where the word of a king is, there is power; And who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

NET Ecclesiastes 8:4 Surely the king's authority is absolute; no one can say to him, "What are you doing?"

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:4 καθ' ὡς βασιλεὺς ἔξουσι ζῶν καὶ τὸς ῥε αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσιν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:4 even as a king having power: and who will say to him, What doest thou?

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:4 For the king's word is authoritative, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:4 For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:4 Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:4 His command is backed by great power. No one can resist or question it.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:4 Where the word of a king is power is, and who saith to him, 'What dost thou?'

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:4 Since the word of a king is sovereign, what is the point of saying, 'Why do that?'

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:4 For the word of the king is powerful, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:4 because his word is sovereign, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:4 Since a king's word has such power, no one can ask him what he is doing.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:4 The word of a king has authority; and who may say to him, What is this you are doing?

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:4 For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

- the word: 1Ki 2:25,29-34,46 Pr 19:12, Pr 20:2, Pr 30:31 Da 3:15 Lu 12:4,5 Ro 13:1-4
- **What:** Job 33:12,13 34:18,19 Ro 9:20

#### Related Passages:

Daniel 3:15 "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

Luke 12:4; 5 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. 5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Romans 13:1-4 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Proverbs 19:12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass.

Proverbs 20:2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

Proverbs 30:31 The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king when his army is with him.

### WHEN KINGS SPEAK WHO DARES CHALLENGE?

**Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"**- Another rhetorical question calling for a negative answer. **NET** = "Surely the king's authority is absolute; **no one** can say to him, "What are you doing?" The point is not to glorify tyranny, but to warn readers about the real risks of defying powerful rulers and to urge wisdom, restraint, and timing in all things. The king's decree is law and is binding and enforceable. His word has legal and executive power, especially in ancient Near Eastern monarchies. In Solomon's political context, questioning the king could be seen as insubordination and/or bring severe consequences. Therefore, wise people refrain from reckless criticism of the authorities.

**William Barrick** - Eccl 8:4 warns about arguing with the king or demanding an explanation for his decisions. The rhetorical question ("who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'" ) demands a negative response, "No one" (cp. Job 9:12; Isa 45:9). God, king, and potter

exercise similar power over their subjects. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**Derek Kidner** says there are times when "wisdom has to fold its wings and take the form of discretion, content to keep its possessor out of trouble." (Borrow [The Message of Ecclesiastes](#))

**Ecclesiastes 8:5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.**

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,

NET Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever obeys his command will not experience harm, and a wise person knows the proper time and procedure.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:5 φυλ σσων ντολ ν ο γν σεται μα πονηρ ν κα καιρ ν κρ σεως γιν σκει καρδ α σοφο

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:5 He that keeps the commandment shall not know an evil thing: and the heart of the wise knows the time of judgement.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:5 The one who keeps a command will not experience anything harmful, and a wise heart knows the right time and procedure.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:5 Those who obey him will not be punished. Those who are wise will find a time and a way to do what is right,

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoso is keeping a command knoweth no evil thing, and time and judgment the heart of the wise knoweth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:5 One who obeys the command will come to no harm; the heart of the sage knows the right moment and verdict,

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:5 "He who keeps the commandment experiences no evil, and the wise man's heart knows times and judgments;

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever obeys his commands will avoid trouble. The mind of a wise person will know the right time and the right way to act.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever keeps the law will come to no evil: and a wise man's heart has knowledge of time and of decision.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:5 He who obeys a command will meet no harm, and the mind of a wise man will know the time and way.

- **keeps:** Ec 8:2 Ex 1:17,20,21 Ps 119:6 Ho 5:11 Lu 20:25 Ac 4:19 5:29 Ro 13:5-7 1Pe 3:13,14
- **wise:** Ec 2:14 10:2 1Ch 12:32 Pr 17:24 Lu 12:56,57 1Co 2:14,15 Php 1:9,10 Col 1:9 Heb 5:14

## **WISDOM IN THE COURT RIGHT TIME, RIGHT WAY**

**He who keeps** ([shamar](#); Lxx - [phulasso](#) - present tense - continually) **a royal command experiences** ([yada](#); Lxx = [ginosko](#) - Literally "knows") **no trouble** - **NET** = "Whoever obeys his command will not experience harm" Finally, an encouraging word about kings and those in authority! Those who wisely observe commands will avoid legal consequences, punishment, or calamity. The word

**experiences** ([yada](#); [Lxx](#) = [ginosko](#) - Literally "knows") means he does not experience or suffer harm.

**William Barrick** - Obedience to royal decrees keeps one out of trouble with the king (Eccl 8:5a; cf. Prov 16:14; 19:12; 20:2). A citizen must employ the correct process at the proper time to present any disagreement or grievance (Eccl 8:5b) ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**For a wise heart knows the proper time** ([et/eth](#); [Lxx](#) - [kairos](#)) **and procedure** - He has just alluded to a person saying "What are you doing" (addressing the king). Here he says a wise person knows best course of action and when to apply it. Wisdom enables not just obedience, but discernment about when and how to act. Wisdom enables a person to discern both the right time and the right way to act—not just whether to act, but when and how. Daniel obeyed laws unless they contradicted God's commands (Da 6:10). Esther waited for the right time to appeal to the king, risking her life with wisdom and prayer (Esther 5:1–8).

**John MacArthur** - A wise man knows when to apply the proper course of action for the best outcome, whether in an earthly sense before the king (Ec 8:2) or an eternal sense before God (cf. Ec 12:13, 14). (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**NET NOTE on time** - The term עֵת ('et, "time") connotes "a proper, suitable time for an event; the right moment" (HALOT 900 s.v. עֵת 6; BDB 773 s.v. 2 עֵת.b); e.g., "it was the time for rain" (Ezra 10:13); "a time of judgment for the nations" (Ezek 30:3); "there is an appropriate time for every occasion" (Eccl 3:1); "the time when mountain goats are born" (Job 39:1); "the rain in its season" (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24); "the time for the harvest" (Hos 2:11; Ps 1:3); "food in its season" (Ps 104:27).

**"Timing, Tact, and Trust"** Obedience alone is not wisdom. True wisdom also sees when to act and how to act. Many disasters—relational, political, or spiritual—stem from actions taken at the wrong time or in the wrong way. The wise heart is not just courageous—it is careful. It listens, prays, and waits for the Lord's prompting. In a culture of instant reaction and impulsive rebellion, the person who discerns time and procedure is an instrument of peace and stability.

**Ecclesiastes 8:6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him.**

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, for the oppression of the king is severe upon his victim.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:6 τι παντ πρ γματι σιν καιρ ς κα κρ σις τι γν σις το νθρ που πολλ π α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:6 For to every thing there is time and judgement; for the knowledge of a man is great to him.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:6 For every activity there is a right time and procedure, even though man's troubles are heavy on him.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:6 For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:6 for there is a time and a way for everything, even when a person is in trouble.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:6 For to every delight there is a time and a judgment, for the misfortune of man is great upon him.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:6 for there is a right moment and verdict for everything; but misfortune lies heavy upon anyone

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:6 For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:6 for there is a time and a judgment for everything."-- Yet it is a great affliction for man

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:6 There is a right time and a right way to act in every situation. Yet, a terrible human tragedy hangs over people.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:6 For every purpose there is a time and a decision, because the sorrow of man is great in him.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:6 For every matter has its time and way, although man's trouble lies heavy upon him.

- **there is time:** Ec 3:1,11,17 7:13,14
- **though a man's trouble:** Ec 11:9,10 12:1 Isa 3:11-14 22:12-14 Lu 13:25 17:26-30 19:42-44 Heb 3:7-11

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:17 I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.

### THE TENSION OF TIME AND TROUBLE

**For** (because - term of explanation) **there is a proper time** ([et/eth](#); Lxx - [kairos](#)) **and procedure for every delight** (or matter) - In context Solomon is explaining how to live under the authority of a king. In other words, **because** there is a **proper time** and method for every matter, even when life is burdensome or difficult. the wise person obeys and discerns carefully. Even though life is burdensome, there is a divinely ordered time and way for everything—and wisdom recognizes this.

**Though a man's trouble is heavy upon him** - literally, "though the trouble of that person is plentiful [abundant] upon him" **NET** = "for the oppression of the king is severe upon his victim." The NET Bible translation emphasizes the harsh consequences of opposing royal power, which supports the idea that wise timing and method are crucial, especially when dealing with authority. One could combine the NET and NASB, paraphrasing this as "*There is a proper time and way to act, because whether it's hardship in life or the weight of a king's authority, wisdom is needed to act wisely under pressure.*"

**Smith** - "the evil of man is heavy upon him." A person has enough troubles without deliberately adding to them by open revolt against the king (8:6).

*No matter how many troubles the royal subject experiences due to the king's decrees, he or she must not rush the matter or commit an error in approaching the king improperly for much needed relief.*

**William Barrick** - The mention of a **proper time** (Eccl 8:5) brings attention to other issues involving timing (Eccl 8:6–8). **There is a proper time . . . for every delight**" (Eccl 8:6) closely reproduces "**a time for every matter**" in Eccl 3:1. In contexts dealing with time, translators tend to render "delight" as "matter" (Eccl 3:1, 17). In contexts speaking of being pleased, they translate it as "delight" (Eccl 5:3). Since Eccl 8:6 is close to Eccl 3:1 in wording, it would seem more appropriate to translate it as "**matter**": "**For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter.**" It fits the context better, because the topic concerns how to live under the authority of a king. The final clause of Eccl 8:6 further clarifies the intent: "**though a man's trouble is heavy upon him**" (literally, "though the trouble of that person is plentiful [abundant] upon him"). The phrasing echoes Genesis 6:5 ("the wickedness of man was great"). This might imply that an individual's trouble stems, at least originally, from his own sinfulness (see Eccl 7:29). No matter how many troubles the royal subject experiences due to the king's decrees, he or she must not rush the matter or commit an error in approaching the king improperly for much needed relief.<sup>13</sup> ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**Michael Eaton** notes there is disagreement on how this is interpreted - The explanatory phrase, **for the calamity of man is great upon him**, has been taken to refer to (i) a burdensome punishment which rests upon man; (ii) man's inherent weakness or evil: 'A wise courtier will find an opportunity to execute his designs, because human weakness is widespread, and an opening is sure to appear' (Gordis); (iii) Jones's explanation, that 'Man has enough trouble already without asking for further difficulty through open defiance of the king. He should wait and his time will come'. Taken within the total context of Ecclesiastes the '**calamity**' must be human frustration, perplexity and strain at the oppressive ('great upon man') burden of life. Hence (RSV although is better translated 'Because' or 'For', as in RV) the need to mark well the 'times' and 'procedures' of wise action.

*If the Preacher is still thinking about kings and governments, he is saying that there is a time to obey the king and a time to leave his presence, or even to start a righteous rebellion*

**Philip G. Ryken** - The wise person has a sense of God's timing. This is in keeping with what the Preacher said earlier, that there is



"a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). If the Preacher is still thinking about kings and governments, he is saying that there is a time to obey the king and a time to leave his presence, or even to start a righteous rebellion. We can apply the same principle to other situations that involve authority. There is a time to submit and a time to stand against oppression. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters - Page 187](#))

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## Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - ONE THING I KNOW

For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. Ecclesiastes 8:6-8

Several weeks ago a friend received the news that his cancer is inoperable. The situation isn't hopeless, but that word inoperable somehow takes one's breath away. We live in a world of such amazing medical technology that we're surprised to hear that there are still some things the doctors can't cure with surgery. What do you do in a moment like that? My friend is taking some pills as a form of chemotherapy. Perhaps the medicine will push back the cancer completely or buy him some time. Who knows? The doctors didn't make any promises, and even if they did, doctors aren't infallible. Another friend told me yesterday about his physician who always talks in percentages. But of course. What else does a doctor have but percentages and estimates based on past experience?

No one knows the future except God. We make educated guesses, which are sometimes right and sometimes wrong. The best and brightest among us must bow before the mysteries of the universe. As I look back over the last year, some things have happened that simply baffle the mind. I didn't see them coming, they surprised me when they got here, and I couldn't explain them afterwards. Still we cry out for answers. "Why me? Why now? Why this?" As I read the Book of Job, I am struck by the fact that no matter

how many times he asked God for an explanation, Job never got one. So far as we know, Job never learned the real reason why he lost his children, his flocks, his crops, his health, and his home. In the end Job is humbled under the hand of a God whose ways are so mysterious and whose power so great that no human could ever understand Him, much less argue with Him.

There are some things we know and some things we don't know. I don't know why my friend has cancer. Even though I fervently pray for healing, I leave the future in the hands of a loving God. But there is one thing I know, and my friend knows it too, and Job knew it before either of us. I know that my Redeemer lives (Job 19:25). If you only know one thing, hang on to that truth and you'll be smiling all day long.

Give me a large supply of the Spirit of Christ, that I might submit in every trial and be at peace amid my uncertainties. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you believe that God is in control of everything that happens to you? Would this include both the good and bad experiences of life?
- Can anything happen to you that is not somehow part of God's plan for you?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Isaiah 3:10-14; Luke 17:26-30; and Hebrews 3:7-11.

## Ecclesiastes 8:7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?

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

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:7 For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

NET Ecclesiastes 8:7 Surely no one knows the future, and no one can tell another person what will happen.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:7 τὸ κ σπιν γιν σκων τ τ σ μενον τι καθ ς σται τ ς ναγγελε α τ

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:7 For there is no one that knows what is going to be: for who shall tell him how it shall be?

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:7 Yet no one knows what will happen because who can tell him what will happen?

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:7 Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:7 Indeed, how can people avoid what they don't know is going to happen?

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:7 For he knoweth not that which shall be, for when it shall be who declareth to him?

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:7 who does not know what the outcome will be, no one is going to say how things will turn out.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:7 Indeed, they do not know what is to be, for who can tell them how it will be?

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:7 that he is ignorant of what is to come; for who will make known to him how it will be?

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:7 They don't know what the future will bring. So who can tell them how things will turn out?

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:7 No one is certain what is to be, and who is able to say to him when it will be?

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?

- knows: Ec 6:12 9:12 10:14 Pr 24:22 29:1 Mt 24:44,50 25:6-13 1Th 5:1-3

### Related Passages:

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

Matthew 6:34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

## THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

**If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen** Solomon addresses the limitations of human knowledge. We cannot predict the future or control when events will occur. Even if someone could guess what will happen, no one can say when it will occur. Human foresight is deeply limited.

**ESV Study Bible** has a slightly different interpretation of this verse stating that "It is a risky proposition to offer correction to the king, and one cannot be absolutely certain ahead of time how it will be received (cf. Prov. 13:1). (See [ESV Study Bible - Page 402](#))

*Human wisdom has limits.*

*We can't know future events or their timing with certainty.*

**Philip G. Ryken** - The problem is that it is hard to know what time it is, which often makes it hard to know the wise thing to do. The troubles and frustrations of life are many, as the Preacher never fails to remind us. We do not know what the future will bring. Nor can anyone tell us exactly what will happen in days to come. Will I be able to achieve my ambitions? Will God bless me with the situation I desire in life? Which nations will rise and fall? Will the economy be good or bad? Will the church thrive or only survive? These are only some of the many uncertainties that we have about the future. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters - Page 187](#))

**William Barrick** - **Inability to Control Life's Circumstances** (Eccl 8:7–9) Next, mention of proper timing and the troubles which people face "under the sun" brings up mankind's lack of knowledge about the future (Eccl 8:7). No one knows the future, so no one can explain to someone else what will happen. The identical phrase for "what will happen" appears in Eccl 1:9; 3:22; 10:14. All speak of an unknown future. Only God has the power to declare the future (see Isa 46:10–11). ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**Bob Utley** - This mystery of life (humans do not know why, when, or how problems/ joys come) is a recurrent theme (cf. Eccl. 3:22; 6:12; 9:12; 10:14). Human wisdom cannot find the answer to this mystery, so: enjoy life when you can (cf. Eccl. 9:11) trust (i.e., fear) in God (cf. Eccl. 9:12,13); obey God (cf. Eccl. 8:5; 12:13); This is all we can do (from the sage's OT perspective [cf. Eccl. 6:12]). Thank God there is a New Testament (i.e., Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36)! Thank God for "progressive revelation"

**"Faith in the Fog"** Solomon is not cynical—he's honest. We crave certainty, especially about what's next. But God calls us to walk by faith, not by prediction. You may be praying about a decision, waiting for something to change, or fearing what's ahead. But the

"what" and "when" belong to God. Faith is not knowing what the future holds—but knowing Who holds the future. The wise heart accepts this mystery and leans into God's timing with trust, not anxiety. God alone holds the future. Trust in His providence, not your prediction. Let go of the need for full control. Planning is wise, but obsession over the future is futile. Trust God with your "when." Whether you're waiting on healing, justice, direction, or provision—wait in faith. Practice contentment in the now. Don't let unknowns rob you of today's grace.

**Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the **spirit**, And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:8 Just as no one has power over the **wind** to restrain it, so no one has power over the day of his death. Just as no one can be discharged during the battle, so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:8 ο κ σπιν νθρωπος ξουσι ζων ν πνε ματι το κωλ σαι σ ν τ πνε μα κα ο κ σπιν ξουσ α ν μ ρ το θαν του κα ο κ σπιν ποστολ ν τ πολ μ κα ο διασ σει σ βεια τ ν παρ α τ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:8 There is no man that has power over the **spirit** to retain the spirit; and there is no power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in the day of the battle; neither shall ungodliness save her votary.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one has authority over the **wind** to restrain it, and there is no authority over the day of death; there is no furlough in battle, and wickedness will not allow those who practice it to escape.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power to retain the **spirit**, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:8 None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle. And in the face of death, wickedness will certainly not rescue the wicked.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:8 There is no man ruling over the spirit to restrain the spirit, and there is no authority over the day of death, and there is no discharge in battle, and wickedness delivereth not its possessors.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one can control the wind and stop it from blowing, no one can control the day of death. From war there is no escape, no more can wickedness save the person who commits it.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one has power over the wind to restrain the wind, or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:8 There is no man who is master of the breath of life so as to retain it, and none has mastery of the day of death. There is no exemption from the struggle, nor are the wicked saved by their wickedness.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:8 No one has the power to prevent the spirit of life from leaving. No one has control over the day of his own death. There is no way to avoid the war against death. Wickedness will not save wicked people from dying.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has authority over the wind, to keep the wind; or is ruler over the day of his death. In war no man's time is free, and evil will not keep the sinner safe.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death; there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

- no: Ec 3:21 2Sa 14:14 Job 14:5 34:14 Ps 49:6-9 89:48 Heb 9:27
- power: 1Co 15:43 2Co 13:4

- discharge: De 20:1-8 2Ki 7:15
- neither: Ps 9:17 52:5-7 73:18-28 Pr 14:32 Isa 28:15,18

### Related Passages:

Job 14:5 "Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.

Hebrews 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Psalms 49:7-9 No man can by any means redeem his brother Or give to God a ransom for him— 8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease trying forever— 9 That he should live on eternally, That he should not undergo decay.

Matthew 6:27 "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

## THE LIMITS OF WISDOM

**No man has authority to restrain the wind** ([ruah](#); Lxx- [pneuma](#)) **with the wind** ([ruah](#); Lxx- [pneuma](#)) Not even a king can control the following. Four limitations to all authority are set forth. Humans cannot control the wind or spirit (symbolic of forces beyond us).

**or authority over the day of death**; No one can control or postpone the moment of death. It's outside human jurisdiction—God alone holds that power (see Job 14:5).

**Danny Akin** - God has allotted a certain number of days for us to live (Gen. 27:2; Job 14:5; Ps. 139:16). We can't go beyond the boundary that he has set, no matter how much bran we eat. Eating right is a good and prudent thing to do. So are regular exercise and good sleep, because they affect the quality of a person's life. The quantity, however, is already determined by God. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary - Ecclesiastes](#))

**and there is no discharge in the time of war** Once war begins, there's no escaping its demands. Soldiers can't leave when they want. Similarly, once life's conflicts (or judgment) come, there is no easy exit.

**and evil will not deliver those who practice it** Wickedness is personified as an ineffective taskmaster that cannot protect those who rely on it. Though it may seem useful for escape, evil always fails in the end.

**Garrett on evil will not deliver** says "no amount of cunning can save one from control by the governing powers." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Solomon reminds us that wisdom is not control but it is living well under God's sovereignty, keeping in mind his mention of Four Uncontrollable Realities:

1. We can't control the wind (or our breath/spirit).
2. We can't escape the day of our death.
3. We can't exempt ourselves from life's battles.
4. We can't count on evil to rescue us.

**William Barrick** - Mankind's apparent helplessness with regard to the future relates to other matters "under the sun" over which no individual has control. In Eccl 8:8, Solomon offers four examples of an individual's lack of control over life: (1) no one can restrain the wind with the wind (cp. Prov 27:16), (2) no one can control the day of his or her death, (3) no soldier can discharge himself in time of war, and (4) wicked deeds can never deliver evil doers. Ambiguity creates difficulty in interpreting and translating the first of these examples. "**Wind**" is the same word ([ruah/ruach](#)) translated "**breath**" (Eccl 3:19, 21) and "**spirit**" (Eccl 7:8; 12:7). If the author's intent was "**spirit**," it would mean that no one can prevent the departure of his or her spirit. (Borrow [Leupold, Ecclesiastes, 189](#), takes this verse as a reference "to keeping back a spirit that is about to depart from the earthly tabernacle of this body.") It would fit with the second example speaking of inability to prevent death. Taking the first two clauses as references to death seems incongruous with a numerical saying proverb in which the reader expects four different items.<sup>16</sup> The final illustration provides an interesting insight. Literally, the text reads, "wickedness will not deliver its masters." Those who practice evil have mastered its character and actions. But even evil's masters remain helpless and subject to God's authority. All four of these illustrations add to verse 7 and expand the picture of human inability to control their circumstances. The realms include the future, climate, death, war, and salvation. All of these are outside mankind's control. Only God controls all of these things. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

13 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 120, identifies the trouble with the general theme of Ecclesiastes—the oppressive burdens of life itself.

**“Living in Light of Limits”** This verse shatters every illusion of control. We can’t hold on to life. We can’t pick our death day. We can’t sidestep every battle. And we can’t game God’s justice with evil schemes. We are not sovereign—God is. And only He can deliver in life and death. So what should we do? Walk humbly. Live dependently. Avoid wickedness. Rest in God’s wisdom, not your own plans. Live with the end in view. Don’t deny death—prepare for it spiritually. Reject shortcuts through evil. They offer no protection in the end. Worship the only One with power over life and death—Jesus Christ

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26+)

**Wind (07307) ruah/ruach** ([click for in depth discussion](#)) means breath, wind, spirit (76x to the Spirit), air; breeze; ; courage; temper; **Ruah/ruach** refers to the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11; Ps 106:33; Isa. 63:10, 11), who inspired the prophets (Nu 11:17, 25; 1Sa 10:6; 19:20), moved the prophets in time and space (Elijah (1 Ki. 18:12 cf Ezekiel in Ezek. 2:2). **Ruah/ruach** can refer to an evil spirit from the Lord (1Sa. 16:15, 16; 1Ki. 22:22, 23). David was inspired to speak as a prophet by the Spirit (2Sa 23:2). The Spirit was present among the returned exiles in Jerusalem (Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6); and will be poured out in the latter days on all flesh, imparting prophecy, dreams, and visions (Joel 2:28). The Spirit of God was grieved by the rebellion of God's people (Isa. 63:10).

**RUAH IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:6; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 1:17; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 3:21; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:6; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:16; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 7:8; Eccl. 7:9; Eccl. 8:8; Eccl. 10:4; Eccl. 11:4; Eccl. 11:5; Eccl. 12:7

**Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:9 While applying my mind to everything that happens in this world, I have seen all this: Sometimes one person dominates other people to their harm.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:9 κα σ ν π ν το το ε δον κα δωκα τ ν καρδ αν μου ε ς π ν πο ημα πεπο ηται π τ ν λιον τ σα ξουσι σατο νθρωπος ν νθρ π το κακ σαι α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:9 So I saw all this, and I applied my heart to every work that has been done under the sun; all the things wherein man has power over man to afflict him.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I have seen, applying my mind to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when one man has authority over another to his harm.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:9 I have thought deeply about all that goes on here under the sun, where people have the power to hurt each other.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I have seen so as to give my heart to every work that hath been done under the sun; a time that man hath ruled over man to his own evil.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:9 I have seen all this to be so, having carefully studied everything taking place under the sun, while one person tyrannises over another to the former's detriment.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other's hurt.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:9 All these things I considered and I applied my mind to every work that is done under the sun, while one man tyrannizes over another to his hurt.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:9 I have seen all of this, and I have carefully considered all that is done under the sun whenever one person has authority to hurt others.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this have I seen, and have given my heart to all the work which is done under the sun: there is a time when man has power over man for his destruction.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:9 All this I observed while applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while man lords it over man to his hurt.

- **this:** Ec 1:14 3:10 4:7,8 7:25
- **there is:** Ec 5:8,13 Ex 14:5-9,28 De 2:30 2Ki 14:10-12 25:7

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.

Proverbs 28:16 A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, But he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.

Isaiah 10:1-2 Woe to those who enact evil statutes And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, 2 So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the poor of My people of their rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans.

Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

## POWER MISUSED SORROW OVER INJUSTICE

**All this I have seen** - Solomon concludes the section that began in verse 2, where Solomon reflects on how to live wisely under human authority. In this verse, he returns to a personal observation, even though wisdom is valuable, those in power often abuse it, causing harm. Solomon is not theorizing—he has witnessed these truths through life experience, possibly during his reign as king.

**NET NOTE on While applying** - The term נָתַן (natan, Qal infinitive absolute from נָתַן, natan, “to give”) is a verbal use of the infinitive absolute, used with vav to indicate an action that took place simultaneous to the main verb (see IBHS 596–97 §35.5.2d). Thus, the clause וְנָתַן אֶת־לִבִּי (vénaton ’et-libbi, “while applying my mind ...”) indicates contemporaneous action to the clause, “All this I have seen” (אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי, ’et-kol-zeh ra’iti). This view is taken by several translations: “All this I have seen, having applied my mind to” (NEB); “All this I observed while applying my mind to” (RSV); “All this I saw, as I applied my mind to” (NIV); “All this I saw, as thoughtfully I pondered” (Moffatt). On the other hand, the LXX vav is taken in a coordinating sense (“and”) and the infinitive absolute as an independent verb: Καὶ συμπᾶν τοῦτο εἶδον, καὶ ὥκαα τὴν καρδίαν μου εἰς (“I saw all this, and I applied my heart to”). This reading is adopted by other English versions: “All this I have seen, and applied my heart” (KJV); “All these things I considered and I applied my mind” (NAB); “All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto” (ASV); “All this I have seen and applied my mind to” (NASB); “All these things I observed; I noted” (NJPS)

This verse is a pivot point: It closes the reflection on authority and human limitation (vv.2–8), And transitions into more meditations on injustice and God’s ultimate judgment (vv.10–14).

**and applied my mind** (heart) **to every deed that has been done under the sun** (an idiom for “what happens in this world” or “on the earth”) **wherein** (“a time which”) **a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt** Solomon deeply considered the conduct of people, especially the use of power. Solomon is analyzing life from a human vantage point, noting patterns of injustice and futility in worldly systems. Human authority is often misused—either oppressing others, or ultimately harming the abuser himself.



**NET NOTE** on **exercised authority** - The verb שָׁלַט (shalat) denotes “to domineer; to dominate; to lord it over” (HALOT 1522 s.v. שָׁלַט; BDB 1020 s.v. שָׁלַט). The English versions have: “rule over” (KJV, YLT, Douay), “have power over” (NEB, ASV), “lord it over” (RSV, NIV), “have authority over” (NJPS), “exercise authority over” (NASB, NRSV); “have mastery over” (MLB); “tyrannize” (NAB)....**TO HIS OWN HURT** - Heb “a man exercises power over [another] man to his harm” [or “to his own harm”]. The 3rd person masculine singular singular pronominal suffix לוֹ (lo, “to his”) may refer to the antecedent אָדָם (’adam, “man” or “men”), being understood either in a singular sense (so NEB, RSV, NRSV, NAB, ASV, NASB) or in a collective sense (Moffatt, NJPS, NIV margin). However, the antecedent might be הָאָדָם (ha’adam, “[one] man” = the king) with the suffix functioning reflexively: “to his own harm” (KJV, ASV margin, YLT, Douay, NIV).

**William Barrick** - Solomon concludes this first section of Eccl 8 by referring to his pursuit of wisdom regarding life **under the sun**” (Eccl 8: 9). He has given his mind to every deed performed in this life by which people might exercise authority over someone else for ill. This is the same issue he addresses in Eccl 7:20, 29+. Fallen humanity perverts the right ways of God. Men and women are sinners. They tend to use authority to perform evil against their fellow man. Fallen humanity cannot change, cannot deliver, cannot contravene the decrees of God, and cannot avoid **death**. The “wherein” of some translations (NASB) actually reads “a time which” (HCSB, NKJV) or “while” (NRSV). It is the same word occurring 29 times in Eccl 3 as well as Eccl 8:5 and Eccl 8:6. The duration of life **“under the sun”** constitutes a person’s “time” when he might utilize exercise authority.

**Swindoll** summarizes five characteristics of a wise leader from Eccl 8:1–8:

1. a clear mind (Eccl 8:1a), a cheerful disposition (Eccl 8:1b),
2. a discreet mouth (Eccl 8:2–4),
3. keen judgment (Eccl 8:5–7),
4. and a humble spirit (Eccl 8:8).<sup>17</sup>

What about your spiritual journey? Is Solomon the only person to face his wisdom’s limitations? Does God expect only Solomon to model godly wisdom? ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

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#### **Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **PRAYING FOR YOUR ENEMIES**

All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. Ecclesiastes 8:9-10

I suppose one of the hardest commands in the Bible to obey is the command of Jesus that we should pray for our enemies. It is hard because prayer is the last thing we want to do for our enemies. Mostly, there are a lot of things we would like to do to our enemies.

I found some unexpected help in this area from the Book of Jeremiah. The background is this: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had attacked Jerusalem and sent many of the people into exile. It was a humiliating experience for the people of God.

Not all of the Jews were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was one of those who were left behind. He records a letter he sent from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon in order to encourage them. His words contain this message from the Lord: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). God’s Word is very simple: I put you in Babylon for a purpose. Although I know you are humiliated, discouraged, and angry, do not despair. And pray for the prosperity of Babylon.

Read that last phrase of verse 7 very carefully: “If it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Many who read these words find themselves caught in a bad situation at work, or at school, or at home. Someone has hurt you deeply, and it’s all you can do not to strike back. With all your energy, you barely hold back the bitterness. And some of it sloshes over the top now and then. You couldn’t pray for your enemies if your life depended on it. But God says to do it anyway. That’s the whole point of Jeremiah 29.

Every time we are faced with people who mistreat us, we have three options: 1. We can hate them with total hatred; that accomplishes nothing. 2. We can struggle to hold back our anger; that will emotionally exhaust us. 3. We can pray for God to bless them; that opens the door for God to bless us as well.

So here’s a new reason to pray for your enemies. Your blessing depends on their prosperity.

Father, thank You for making my enemies a channel of blessing to me. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Who are your "enemies"?
- Have you prayed for those enemies recently? Did you pray for them or against them?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Genesis 39:1-5; Matthew 5:43-48; and Romans 12:17-21.

**Ecclesiastes 8:10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were **forgotten** in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:10 Not only that, but I have seen the wicked approaching and entering the temple, and as they left the holy temple, they **boasted** in the city that they had done so. This also is an enigma.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:10 κα τ τε ε δον σεβε ς ε ς τ φους ε σαχθ ντας κα κ τ που γ ου πορε θησαν κα π ν θησαν ν τ π λει πι ο τως πο ησαν κα γε το το μαται της

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:10 And then I saw the ungodly carried into the tombs, and that out of the holy place: and they departed, and were **praised** in the city, because they had done thus: this also is vanity.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:10 In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from the holy place, and they were **praised** in the city where they did so. This too is futile.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were **praised** in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then too, I saw the wicked buried--those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive **praise** in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:10 I have seen wicked people buried with honor. Yet they were the very ones who frequented the Temple and are now **praised** in the same city where they committed their crimes! This, too, is meaningless.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:10 And so I have seen the wicked buried, and they went in, even from the Holy Place they go, and they are **forgotten** in the city whether they had so done. This also is vanity.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:10 And again, I have observed the wicked carried to their graves, and people leaving the holy place and, once out in the city, **forgetting** how the wicked used to behave; how futile this is too!

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were **praised** in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:10 Meanwhile I saw wicked men approach and enter; and as they left the sacred place, they were **praised** in the city for what they had done. This also is vanity.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw wicked people given an honorable burial. They used to go in and out of the holy place. They were **praised** in the city for doing such things. Even this is pointless.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:10 And then I saw evil men put to rest, taken even from the holy place; and they went about and were **praised** in the town because of what they had done. This again is to no purpose.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were **praised** in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

- **so**: 2Ki 9:34,35 Job 21:18,32,33 Lu 16:22
- **place**: Ps 122:1-5 Ac 6:13
- **they**: Ec 2:16 9:5 Ps 31:12 Pr 10:7 Jer 17:13 Heb 10:38

## THE FUNERAL OF THE HYPOCRITICAL WICKED

**So then I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place**(the Temple), **and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus.** - Note there is a major difference in translations (see above) with some translating it as "**forgotten**" (NAS, KJV) and most translating it as "**praised**" (ESV, RSV, NIV, NLT, etc) (See [Technical Note below](#)). Wicked people died not in disgrace, but rather receive respectable funerals as though they had lived honorably and many versions say they were praised in the city! These were religious hypocrites who frequented the temple, appearing pious, but living wickedly and yet they were buried with honor, as though their sin had no consequence.

**In the city where they did thus** - **ESV** - "were praised in the city where they had done such things." However the ESV does have a marginal note which says "Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Vulgate; most Hebrew manuscripts forgotten." These hypocrites were publicly known in the city, yet they were either honored despite their actions or (if you favor the NAS translation) they were quickly forgotten, both of which are disturbing reversals of expected justice.

I like the comment by **Philip G Ryken** - Sometimes kind words are spoken at the funerals of evil people, but we can only interpret Ecclesiastes this way if we amend the text. It is much more likely that we should read the verse the way it reads in most manuscripts, which is also the way it is translated in the note for the English Standard Version: the wicked "were forgotten in the city." Solomon said something similar in the book of Proverbs: "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot" (Pr 10:7). This is part of the perspective that death brings. Although wicked people are prominent in the city, and sometimes even in the church, when they are dead they will be forgotten. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

**Daniel Akin** - Sometimes the pain caused by an unjust ruler is intensified by the fact that people remember him in a way that ignores his heinous actions. "The wicked are praised in life and eulogized in death in the very cities where they practiced their injustices (8:10). It is one thing to observe the terms of the ancient maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* ("Say nothing but what is good of the dead"), but quite another to canonize an utter reprobate as if he were as pure as the driven snow! Injustice at this level also tests faith and tempts us to think that there may be no justice in the universe after all (Keddie, 109)." (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary - Ecclesiastes](#))

**This too is futility** ([hebel](#); [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) It is frustratingly unjust that wicked people appear religious, receive honor in death, and are either celebrated or ignored. Solomon calls this [hebel](#) a distortion of what should be.

**John MacArthur** on **futility** - Lessons that should be gained from the death of the hypocritically wicked are quickly forgotten.

**Barrick - Being Wise in God's Throne Room** (Eccl 8:10–17) Some commentators consider Eccl 8:10 the most difficult in Ecclesiastes.<sup>18</sup> Solomon speaks again of what he has seen (Eccl 8:9, 10). He observed wicked people being buried (cp. Eccl 7:1, 2). Those same wicked individuals dared to enter the "**holy place**" (probably the Temple)<sup>19</sup> where they mingled with believers. They did not live up to the impressions they conveyed in the holy place. What good did it do them? They are dead, buried, and forgotten.<sup>20</sup> Their works, whether evil or good, appear to count as nothing. This is the ultimate meaning of "evil will not deliver those who practice it" (Eccl 8:8d). They did not obtain a good reputation (Eccl 7:1; cp. Prov 10:7) and their fellow citizens (and fellow worshippers) soon forget them. "This too is futility [*hebel*]," Solomon declares.<sup>21</sup> ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

14 Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 283, observes that the statement depicts a bondage of a person's will to evil.

15 Leupold, *Ecclesiastes*, 189, takes this verse as a reference "to keeping back a spirit that is about to depart from the earthly tabernacle of this body."

16 Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 213 fn 27.

17 Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge: Coming to Terms with Reality* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 237–47.

18 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 218, "certainty eludes every honest interpreter, even though the problems are often hidden behind smooth English translations."

19 [R. N. Whybray, Ecclesiastes, New Century Bible Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 135. Garrett prefers "funeral" as a paraphrase for "holy place"; Garrett,

**"When the Wicked Are Applauded"** There are few things more bitter than watching a hypocrite be honored, especially when their life harmed others. But Solomon reminds us: This is not the final verdict. Earth may forget, but God remembers. A man's funeral is not the measure of his eternity. God's justice is sure, even if it's slow. Don't lose heart when truth seems buried with the wicked. You

are called to live for God's approval, not the applause of man. Do not envy those who appear to succeed by deception. Their gain is fleeting. Live with eternity in view. God sees what men forget. Don't base your legacy on human praise. It fades. Seek the "well done" from Christ. Anchor your hope in God's final justice, not human courts.

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**NET NOTE** on **forgotten** (versus **praised**) - The Masoretic Text reads וְשִׁכְחוּ (véyishtakkékhū, "and they were forgotten"; Hitpael imperfect 3rd person masculine plural from שָׁכַח, shakhakh, "to forget"). Apart from the MT reading here, the verb שָׁכַח "to forget" never occurs elsewhere in the Hitpael (HALOT 1490 s.v. שָׁכַח; BDB 1013 s.v. שָׁכַח). Many medieval Hebrew MSS read וְשִׁתְּבוּ "and they boasted" (Hitpael imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from שָׁבַח, shavakh, "praise, boast"). This alternate textual tradition is reflected in the Greek versions, e.g., Old Greek: καὶ ἐπὴνέθησαν (kai epēnēthēsan, "and they were praised"), Aquila and Theodotion: καὶ ἐκαυχῆσαντο (kai ekauchēsanto, "and they boasted"), and Symmachus: καὶ ἐπαινοῦμενοι (kai epainoumenoi, "and they were praised"). This is also reflected in the Vulgate. The English versions are divided; several follow the MT and translate "they were forgotten" (KJV, ASV, NASB, MLB, NJPS), but a good number adopt the alternate textual tradition and translate either "they were praised" or "they boasted" (NEB, RSV, NAB, NIV, NRSV). The context of 8:10–17, which focuses on the enigmatic contradictions in divine retribution (sometimes the wicked are not punished), favors the alternate tradition. The wicked boast that they can come and go as they please in the temple, flaunting their irreligion without fearing divine retribution (8:10). This thought is continued in v. 11: failure to execute a sentence against a criminal emboldens the wicked to commit more crimes, confident they will not suffer retribution. It is likely that the original reading of וְשִׁתְּבוּ was confused for וְשִׁכְחוּ because the root שָׁבַח ("to praise; to boast") is much rarer than the common root שָׁכַח ("to forget"). The phrase is best rendered "they boasted" (NEB: "priding themselves") rather than "they were praised" (NAB, RSV, NRSV, NIV)—the verb שָׁבַח means "to praise" in Piel, but "to boast" in Hitpael (Ps 106:47; 1 Chr 16:35; HALOT 1387 s.v. שָׁבַח; BDB 986 s.v. שָׁבַח). This approach is adopted by the committee for the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible Project: see D. Barthélemy, e.d., Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 3:584–85.

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**Futility** (**vanity**, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness) ([01892](#)) **hebel** means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. Hebel commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21, cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! **Hebel** refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use "my days are but a **breath**." (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where hebel parallels behālā from root bāhal "to hasten": Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) **Hebel** "generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be "Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die." (Gilbrant)

**Michael Eaton** adds **Hebel** means (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness (NEB), spelt out in Job 7 where the 'vanity' (Job 7:16, Heb.) of man's life is a 'breath' (Job 7:7), an evaporating cloud (Job 7:9), soon to be ended (Job 7:8) and return no more (Job 7:9f.); (ii) unreliability, frailty, found also in Psalm 62 where God, a 'Rock' and a 'high tower' (Ps 62:6), is compared with man who is 'vanity' (Ps 62:9), a 'leaning wall' and a 'tottering fence' (Ps 62:3); (iii) futility, as in Job 9:29 (Heb.), where 'in vanity' means 'to no effect'; (iv) deceit (cf. Jer. 16:19; Zech. 10:2). Ecclesiastes includes each of these emphases. All is untrustworthy, unsubstantial; no endeavour will in itself bring permanent satisfaction; the greatest joys are fleeting. Between Eccl 1:2 and Eccl 12:8 the Preacher will echo this key statement about thirty times, showing that his book is in fact its exposition. Vanity characterizes all human activity (Eccl 1:14; 2:11): joy (Eccl 2:1) and frustration (Eccl 4:4, 7–8; 5:10) alike, life (Eccl 2:17; 6:12; 9:9), youth (Eccl 11:10) and death (Eccl 3:19; 11:8), the destinies of wise and foolish (Eccl 2:15, 19), diligent and idle (Eccl 2:21, 23, 26). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 56](#))

**Vine's** summary of **hebel** - **First**, the word represents human "breath" as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath] (Job 7:16). **Second**, hebel means something meaningless and purposeless: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). **Third**, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities ..." (Dt. 32:21, the first occurrence). See SPIRIT usage notes.

**Warren Baker** adds that **hebel** "refers to the vanity and ultimate emptiness and meaninglessness of all things in this life, whether they seem good or bad (Eccl. 1:2, 14; 2:11, 15, 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 4, 9; 7:6, 15; 8:10; 9:9; 11:8). Combined with itself in the plural, it means **absolute meaninglessness** (Eccl. 1:2). Idols and the vain religious customs associated with them are all delusions (Jer. 10:3, 15). It denotes an

empty, vain life (Eccl. 6:12). Used with the verb *hābal*, it means to carry out vain talk or action or what is empty (Job 27:12). As an adverb, it means to talk in vain, emptily (Job 35:16). To walk after *hebel* means to go after or follow vanity (2 Ki. 17:15; Jer. 2:5). Anything obtained through evil is vain, such as wealth (Prov. 13:11)." (Borrow Complete Word Study Dictionary— Old Testament)

**Victor Hamilton** (See [TWOT](#)) on "the cluster of references (of [hebel](#)) found in Ecclesiastes (thirty-six). These may be grouped into several subdivisions. First are those passages in which the author states his inability to find fulfillment in work, both in his failure to be creative and in his lack of control over the privilege of free disposition of his possessions; this is "vanity": Eccl 2:11, 19, 21, 23; Eccles. 4:4, 8; Eccles. 6:2. Second are those verses in which the author struggles with the idea that the connection between sin and judgment, righteousness and final deliverance is not always direct or obvious. This is an anomaly about life and it is vanity": Eccles. 2:15; Eccles. 6:7-9; Eccles. 8:10-14. The meaning of *hebel* here would be "senseless." Thirdly are those verses in which the author laments the shortness of life; this is vanity": Eccles. 3:19; Eccles. 6:12; Eccles. 11:8, 10. Life, in its quality, is "empty" or "vacuous" (and thus unsubstantial), and in its quantity is "transitory." Rather than the above observations being final conclusions about life by the author of Ecclesiastes, perhaps they reveal something of his method and his concealed premise. He may be attempting to demonstrate man's inability to find meaning to life unaided by divine revelation and interruption. This solo quest will always end in futility.

**HEBEL - 67X/64V - breath(5), delusion(2), emptily(1), emptiness(2), fleeting(2), fraud(1), futile(1), futility(13), idols(7), mere breath(2), nothing(1), useless(1), vain(3), vainly(1), vanity(19), vanity of vanities(3), vapor(1), worthless(2).** Deut. 32:21; 1 Ki. 16:13; 1 Ki. 16:26; 2 Ki. 17:15; Job 7:16; Job 9:29; Job 21:34; Job 27:12; Job 35:16; Ps. 31:6; Ps. 39:5; Ps. 39:6; Ps. 39:11; Ps. 62:9; Ps. 78:33; Ps. 94:11; Ps. 144:4; Prov. 13:11; Prov. 21:6; Prov. 31:30;

Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8;

Isa. 30:7; Isa. 49:4; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 2:5; Jer. 8:19; Jer. 10:3; Jer. 10:8; Jer. 10:15; Jer. 14:22; Jer. 16:19; Jer. 51:18; Lam. 4:17; Jon. 2:8; Zech. 10:2

Deuteronomy 32:21<sup>±</sup> 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their **IDOLS** (no god = ESV, so-called gods = CSB, false gods = NET)(*hebel*; Lxx - [eidolon](#)). So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

**Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the 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.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:11 When a sentence is not executed at once against a crime, the human heart is encouraged to do evil.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:11 π ο κ σπιν γινομ νη ντ ρρησις π τ ν ποιο ντων τ πονηρ ν ταχ δι το το πληροφορ θη καρδ α υ ν το νθρ που ν α το ς το ποι σαι τ πονηρ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because there is no contradiction made on the part of those who do evil quickly, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully determined in them to do evil.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of

people is filled with the desire to commit crime.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:11 When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:11 When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because sentence hath not been done on an evil work speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of man is full within them to do evil.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence on the evil-doer is not carried out on the instant, people's hearts are full of desire to do wrong.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against evildoers is not promptly executed, therefore the hearts of men are filled with the desire to commit evil--

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:11 When a sentence against a crime isn't carried out quickly, people are encouraged to commit crimes.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because punishment for an evil work comes not quickly, the minds of the sons of men are fully given to doing evil.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.

- sentence: Ex 8:15,32 Job 21:11-15 Ps 10:6 50:21,22 Isa 5:18,19 26:10 Isa 57:11 Jer 48:11 Mt 24:49,50 Ro 2:4,5 2Pe 3:3-10
- fully: Jer 42:15

#### Related Passages:

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Romans 2:4-5 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Isaiah 26:10 Though the wicked is shown favor, He does not learn righteousness; He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, And does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.

### **SLOW JUDGMENT EMBOLDENS SIN**

**Because** Solomon explains why evil continues unchecked in society. The reason is delayed justice emboldens more evil, for they misunderstand delay in judgment.

**The sentence** (a judicial sentence against a crime) **against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil** The judgment or sentence for wrongdoing is not carried out immediately, whether by earthly courts or by divine intervention. The delay here implies a gap between crime and punishment, often exploited by sinners. In fact, because there is no immediate consequence, people assume there may be no consequence at all. People's hearts become hardened and fully committed to wrongdoing, emboldened by the apparent absence of retribution. In short, delayed justice encourages more evil, as people assume there is no accountability. The heart of the problem is men's hearts which are rotten at the core so that like a cup, their heart becomes full to do evil indicating their brazenness as nothing restrains their sinful acts. In other words the lack of swift judicial punishment only emboldens the wicked to commit more crimes without fear of retribution.

**NET NOTE** on **not executed quickly** - tn Heb "is not done." The verb **עָשָׂה** ('asah, "to do") refers to a judicial sentence being carried out (HALOT 892 s.v. 2). The Niphal can denote "be executed; be carried out" of a sentence (Eccl 8:11) or royal decree (Esth 9:1; BDB 795 s.v. 1.a). Similarly, the Qal can denote "to execute" vengeance (Judg 11:36) or judgment (1 Sam 28:18; Isa 48:14; Ezek 25:11; 28:26; Ps 149:7, 9; BDB 794 s.v.).



People mistake divine patience for divine indifference (cf. Romans 2:4). The wicked exploit God's long-suffering. But God's delay is not denial—it is grace, giving time for repentance. This verse reflects the already/not yet tension of divine justice: Justice is certain, but not always immediate. The righteous are called to trust, not despair.

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

**William Barrick** - Because of the sluggish pace of the legal system, the law loses its power to dissuade people from evil. Solomon observes that people give themselves more fully to committing evil deeds when "the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly" (Eccl 8:11). Deniers of Solomonic authorship point out that Solomon, as king, had control over the pace of justice. Why complain about something over which he himself had control? He did not make every legal decision. Like all kings he delegated authority in lesser cases to other leaders (see Eccl 5:8). Some failed to expedite justice or were slowed in the process by accepting bribes (cp. Eccl 7:7). All such injustice comes about because of the fallen nature of humanity. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**NET NOTE** on **fully to do evil** - Heb "is full to do evil." The verb מָלֵא (male', "to fill") is used figuratively (metonymy): the lack of swift judicial punishment only emboldens the wicked to commit more crimes without fear of retribution. Most English versions translate the term literally: "are filled" (NIV, MLB, YLT), "is fully set" (KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV). However, several versions nuance it figuratively: "emboldened" (ASV, NJPS) and "boldly" (NEB). Moffatt renders the line, "Because sentence on a crime is not executed at once, the mind of man is prone to evil practices."

**"Don't Mistake Delay for Denial"** God's justice is never in doubt, but it is often delayed. Why? Because God is gracious. He gives time to repent. He shows patience. But the human heart often abuses that grace. What should lead us to repentance often leads others to rebellion. You may be wondering why God hasn't acted yet—on corruption, abuse, lies, injustice. Don't give up hope. He sees all, and He will act—in His time. Delayed justice is a reality under the sun. It tests faith and reveals hearts. God's patience is not weakness—it is mercy. Avoid presuming on God's patience. Let His kindness lead you to repentance.

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#### **Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - SLOW JUSTICE

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Ecclesiastes 8:11

The evening news had reported that a convicted killer on death row faces execution in just a few days. And now, on a network TV newsmagazine program, the face of a well-known minister fills the screen; he explains that this particular prisoner should not die by lethal injection. The minister is a longtime proponent of the death penalty—both on biblical and practical grounds. He believes that some crimes are so heinous that death is society's only proper response. In this case, however, he is willing to make an exception.

The Lord spoke to him, the minister says, and "laid it on my heart that I should pray" for this particular person. He has done that, he explains, and now favors commuting the sentence to life in prison without possibility of parole. The prisoner's life has been so radically changed by the gospel, he says, that execution would serve no purpose.

Then another face fills the screen. I do not recognize her but the text at the bottom calls her a "victim's rights advocate," which means she speaks on behalf of the family members who lost a loved one in a brutal murder fifteen years ago. She doesn't make the biblical argument; she simply notes that religious conversion of any kind should not be used as a reason to escape the death penalty. The law in this case is clear. The prisoner must die at the appointed hour.

Finally, a third face appears—the woman who hosts the show. She asks the preacher, "How can justice be served when the crime itself was committed fifteen years ago, and the case has taken years to come to trial, with the scheduled execution many years after that?"

The preacher has no quick reply, and indeed there's no easy answer to such a question. But it is "precisely on point," as lawyers like to say. Justice delayed is justice denied. Wrongdoers must be punished, and, in general, the quicker the better.

Solomon reminds us that evildoers take heart when the sentence is not quickly carried out. They interpret delay of judgment as meaning that judgment will never come. On a broad scale, this is one of the major objections made by nonbelievers against God. They mistake His forbearance for indifference, and thus they make an eternal mistake. Hell will be filled with people who thought they would never go there.

Lord God, may I never use Your patience as an excuse to sin. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you believe that it takes too long for lawbreakers to be sentenced for their crimes? If so, what should be done about it?
- Suppose that God punished you quickly for every sin you committed. What effect would that have on your life?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Job 21:7-15; Psalm 10:1-11; and 2 Peter 3:3-10.

**Ecclesiastes 8:12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.**

KJV 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:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:12 Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes and still live a long time, yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people— for they stand in fear before him.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:12 ς μαρτεν πο ησεν τ πονηρ ν π τ τε κα π μακρ τητος α τ τι κα γε γιν σκω γ τι σται γαθ ν το ς φοβουμ νοις τ ν θε ν πως φοβ νται π προσ που α το

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:12 He that has sinned has done evil from that time, and long from beforehand: nevertheless I know, that it is well with them that fear God, that they may fear before him:

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:12 Although a sinner commits crime a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I also know that it will go well with God-fearing people, for they are reverent before Him.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:12 But even though a person sins a hundred times and still lives a long time, I know that those who fear God will be better off.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner is doing evil a hundred times, and prolonging himself for it, surely also I know that there is good to those fearing God, who fear before Him.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:12 The sinner who does wrong a hundred times lives on. But this too I know, that there is good in store for people who fear God, because they fear him,

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him,

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:12 because the sinner does evil a hundred times and survives. Though indeed I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, for their reverence toward him;

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:12 A sinner may commit a hundred crimes and yet live a long life. Still, I know with certainty that it will go well for those who fear God, because they fear him.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his life is long, I am certain that it will be well for those who go in fear of God and are in fear before him.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him;

- **sinner:** Ec 5:16 7:15 1Ki 2:5-9 21:25 22:34,35 Pr 13:21 Isa 65:20 Ro 2:5 Ro 9:22 2Pe 2:9
- **surely:** Ec 7:18 Ps 37:11,18,19 112:1 115:13 Pr 1:32,33 Isa 3:10,11 Isa 65:13,14,20-24 Mt 25:34,41-46 Lu 1:50
- **fear before:** Ec 3:14 1Ch 16:30 Ps 96:9

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Psalm 73:16-17 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight 17Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end.

Isaiah 3:10-11 Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions. 11Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, For what he deserves will be done to him.

Malachi 3:16-18 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. 17“‘They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” 18So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Romans 2:6-8 (GOD) Who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

## **CONFIDENCE AMID CORRUPTION JUSTICE DELAY, NOT DENIED**

**Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life**- Solomon observes that some sinners seem to get away with evil over and over, without punishment. Wicked men sin with impunity and still live long lives. Solomon is content to wait patiently.

Ecclesiastes 8:12 follows Solomon’s realistic—and troubling—observation in verse 11 that when judgment is delayed, wickedness increases. Now, in verse 12, he begins to affirm the ultimate justice of God. Though sinners may prosper and live long lives, Solomon expresses a firm conviction that those who fear God will be blessed. It is a turning point from perplexity (vv.10–11) to confidence in God’s justice (vv.12–13).

**Still I know** ([yada](#); Lxx - [ginosko](#) - present tense - continually) **that it will be well for those who fear God**- Note the interesting beginning - usually Solomon says “I have seen...saw” (Ec 8:9) but this time he says I KNOW! Here is the contrasting good news! Despite appearances, Solomon clings by faith to truth. What he sees doesn’t shake what he knows is true. God rewards those who fear Him. In the long run, those who revere God will be blessed, regardless of how things seem now.

*Fear of God is “the awe and holy caution  
that arises from realization of the greatness of God.”*  
-- Michael Eaton

**Who fear Him openly**- “Before His face” literally, in His presence which implies sincere, heartfelt reverence, not just outward religion.

**Michael Eaton** says for Solomon the Fear of the Lord “is part of his summary of the requirements of wisdom (Eccl 12:13). The ‘seasons’ of life need it (Eccl 3:14); worship demands it (Eccl 5:1-7). It will bring deliverance (Eccl 7:18) and ultimate vindication, as is promised here. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Solomon is painfully honest: sinners often prosper. But his conclusion is not cynicism—it is faith. Despite temporary injustice, he declares: God will bless those who fear Him. Evil is never ultimately safe. Appearances deceive, but truth stands firm. This is a clear contrast between seeming and reality, echoing Asaph in Psalm 73:1-28+ (READ THIS PSALM): the wicked may prosper for a time, but the righteous are secure in God.

**Fear** in Ecclesiastes - Eccl 3:14 Eccl 5:7 Eccl 7:18 Eccl 8:12 Eccl 8:13 Eccl 12:13

*A true God-fearer goes through life more conscious of what  
God thinks or knows, than of what people might think or know.*

**Barrick** - In Eccl 8:12 Solomon observes that an evil person might have the opportunity to commit an act of evil 100 times and still live a long time. In the light of verse 11, it appears that he attributes to God the same delay in justice that is so evident in human courts of law. But Solomon declares, “still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.” Notice the departure from the writer’s usual “I have seen.” **This truth he knows by conviction and holds by faith.**<sup>22</sup> A true God-fearer goes through life more conscious of what God thinks or knows, than of what people might think or know. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**“It Will Be Well”** - In a world where evil thrives publicly and righteousness suffers quietly, we need this truth: It will be well for those who fear God. This is not wishful thinking—it’s eternal perspective. God is never outwitted. His promises are not based on

momentary outcomes but ultimate realities. So when the wicked seem to flourish and you feel forgotten, remember: God sees. God keeps His word. God will make it well—in this life or the next. Wicked people may seem to prosper, but their reward is temporary. Those who fear God will ultimately be blessed. It may not be visible now, but it is guaranteed. Fear of God is the true path to life and peace. Justice is not always immediate, but it is inevitable. Faith holds to God's promises even when appearances lie. Do not envy sinners. Their prosperity is fleeting. Cling to what you know, not just what you see. Let Scripture, not circumstance, define reality. Practice the fear of the Lord daily. Live in reverent awareness of His presence.

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## Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - IS GOD INTOLERANT?

Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

We live in a "postmodern" age. If that term is new to you, it simply means that we live in an age in which our culture has largely abandoned the notion of truth. One hundred years ago most people shared a common moral code based to a large degree on the teachings of the Bible. Even people who were not Christian made their moral judgments based largely on what we today call the "Judeo-Christian" tradition. There was a large consensus that certain things were right and others wrong, that some things were permitted in society and others were not. That shared consensus gave enormous stability to the culture and allowed people from diverse backgrounds to live together in peace.

That consensus has almost entirely disappeared, which is why we can't decide how we feel about abortion, pornography, adultery, divorce, and gay (homosexual) rights. In the old days we didn't debate those issues because our shared value system taught us that it is wrong to kill unborn babies, that adultery is always evil, that homosexuality is shameful, and that pornography corrupts public morality. Today there is simply no widespread agreement on those issues. If the old Trinity was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the new trinity is tolerance, diversity, and pluralism. "All truth is relative." We worship tolerance, we celebrate diversity, and we praise pluralism. And woe to the man or woman who dares to speak against the new trinity.

One writer expressed the new view this way: "God, it seems to me, almost certainly is more intolerant of intolerance than of homosexuality, because intolerance is a greater violation of love, which by my reading of the Scriptures is the behavior God most desires in us."

Consider the assertion that God is "intolerant of intolerance." On the face of it, this appears to be a nonsensical statement. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that God is "intolerant of intolerance." Come to think of it, I'm not aware of any major Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox creed that makes such a statement. To be "intolerant of intolerance" is an expression that has no real roots in classical theology of any kind.

Who are those who do not fear God? Those who do not fear, or respect, God are those who excuse sin and tolerate behavior that God calls evil. Solomon warns that in the end it will not go well for them. The debate over morality is as old as the human race because it goes back to the question the serpent asked Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Has God indeed spoken?" The answer is yes, He has, and He has not stuttered. We would all be better off if we took His Word seriously.

O Lord, help me to stand on Your Word without fear, without favor, without compromise. Amen.

### SHINING THE LIGHT

- What evidence do you see to suggest that it will go better for God-fearing people than for the wicked?
- Describe a person who fears the Lord and one who doesn't. How does this difference play out in the crucial moral issues of this generation?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 1 Kings 22:29-38; Psalm 112; and Matthew 13:47-50.

**Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not go well with the wicked, nor will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:13 καὶ γὰρ ὁ κ σται τ σεβε καὶ ὁ μακρυνε μ ρας ν σκι ς ὁ κ στικ φοβο μενος π προσ που το θεο

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:13 but it shall not be well with the ungodly, and he shall not prolong his days, which are as a shadow; forasmuch as he fears not before God.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:13 However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:13 Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:13 The wicked will not prosper, for they do not fear God. Their days will never grow long like the evening shadows.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:13 And good is not to the wicked, and he doth not prolong days as a shadow, because he is not fearing before God.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:13 but there is no good in store for the wicked because he does not fear God, and so, like a shadow, he will not prolong his days.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:13 but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:13 and that it shall not be well with the wicked man, and he shall not prolong his shadowy days, for his lack of reverence toward God.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not go well for the wicked. They will not live any longer. Their lives are like shadows, because they don't fear God.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:13 But it will not be well for the evil-doer; he will not make his days long like a shade, because he has no fear before God.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:13 but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

- **it will:** Job 18:5 20:5 21:30 Ps 11:5 Isa 57:21 Mal 3:18 Mt 13:49,50 Joh 5:29
- **not:** Ps 55:23 Isa 30:13 2Pe 2:3
- like a: Ec 6:12 Job 7:6,7 14:2 Ps 39:5 144:4 Jas 4:14

#### Related Passages:

Psalm 55:23 But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction; Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days. But I will trust in You.

### IT WILL NOT BE WELL WITH THEIR SOUL

**But** (term of contrast) **it will not be well for the evil man** The ultimate outcome for the wicked is not blessing or peace, regardless of how things may look now.

This verse is the counterpart to Ecclesiastes 8:12, where Solomon declared, "It will be well for those who fear God." Now in verse 13, he declares the opposite: It will not go well for the wicked. This balancing structure reaffirms Solomon's deep conviction in final divine justice, despite the temporary success or longevity of the wicked under the sun.

**And he will not lengthen his days like a shadow**- "Prolong days" is an idiom for long life or enduring prosperity. Normally one thinks of a shadow as ephemeral and fleeting, but Barrick thinks "**Like a shadow**" probably refers to the way that shadows become exceedingly long late in the day." That fits with several translations like ESV which has "neither will he prolong his days like a shadow," like a shadow lengthens.

**NET NOTE** on **like a shadow** - The phrase “**like a shadow**” (לִצֶלֶת, katsel) modifies the verb (“prolong”) rather than the noun (“days”). Several English versions misconstrue the line: “*he will not prolong his days, [which are] like a shadow*” (KJV, ASV); “*the man who does not fear God is like a shadow*” (NEB); and “*he will not prolong his shadowy days*” (NAB). It should be rendered “*he will not prolong his days like a shadow*” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, MLB, NIV). Unlike a shadow that lengthens at sunset, the wicked do not normally live long.

*Though he may 'lengthen (his days)....the judgment  
falling upon him is that he will not lengthen his days!*

**Michael Eaton** - Equally he is certain that, despite the delay, calamity will finally befall the sinner. Though he may **lengthen** (his days)’ (v. 12, Heb.), the judgment falling upon him is that he will not *lengthen his days!* The paradox has been elucidated in various ways. Some see a quotation (Gordis;GNB) or the hand of a redactor (e.g. Lauha). Leupold sees a play on words which may be paraphrased: ‘though he go on long (in sin) he shall not make his days long.’ This is possible, since ‘his days’ occurs in the Hebrew of v. 13 but not of v. 12. The present writer believes that the Preacher ‘drops the veil of secularism’ (Kidner) and puts the two statements side by side to be deliberately provocative. It is typical of the duality which pervades Ecclesiastes: from the ‘under the sun’ viewpoint the sinner is infuriating in his long survival; from the perspective of faith time looks different and the Preacher cannot imagine sin endlessly unrebuked and unjudged (cf. Jas 4:13f.). The paradox also raises the possibility of a life after death, where the sinner will no longer go on in his sin. This is confirmed in that a *shadow* is a figure of the insecurity of human life (cf. Pss 102:11; 109:23). In the light of this, AV *neither shall he prolong his days which are as a shadow* (cf. RV) is preferable to RSV *neither will he prolong his days like a shadow*. This accords with the context, and the verse can only mean that the unrighteous will not flourish beyond the grave (cf. Pss 49; 73; Eccl. 3:16-21; 12:14). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**because** (term of explanation) **he does not fear God**- Solomon explains why the one who is evil, who does not fear God will not live long. The wicked man’s downfall is rooted in his lack of reverence for God. This is not ignorance but arrogance—he lives as if God is irrelevant or absent.

Note on Paradox: This may seem opposite to Ec 8:12 (“may lengthen his life”), but one way to rationalize these two passages is that here Solomon shifts to eternal perspective. Whatever length they have, it is like a shadow without substance or security.

**William Barrick** - An evil person’s major problem consists of the lack of any fear of God (Eccl 8: 13). In Eccl 8:12 a sinner “may lengthen his life,” but in Eccl 8:13 the wicked “will not lengthen his days.” [Kidner](#), observing this conflict suggests that the first refers to physical life and the latter subtly raises the matter of an after-life for godly individuals: “This could mean that whereas the godly man has hope beyond the grave, the ungodly has none: however long postponed, death will be the end for him.” (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#)) “**Like a shadow**” probably refers to the way that shadows become exceedingly long late in the day. [Barton](#) takes that figure to indicate that “sinners never reach the evening of life.”<sup>24</sup> Malachi 3:13–4:3+ replicates these same themes: the seeming futility of serving God when the wicked appear to prosper (Eccl 3:13–15), the contrast between those who fear God and those who do not (Eccl 3:16– 18), and the future judgment of the wicked (Eccl 4:1–3). The double reference to “futility” (hebel) in Ec 8:14 sets the stage for a summary like that in Eccl 7:15. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

19 Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 328–29 fn 199. Ernest W. Hengstenberg, A Commentary on Ecclesiastes (1869; repr., Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publishing, 1977), 200, concludes that “the holy” indicates “ideal persons” (the righteous).

20 Commentators suggest a number of emendations for “**forgotten**” in an attempt to eliminate the difficulty of speaking of the forgetting of the wicked as something negative (See [NET NOTE](#)), when it would seem to be a good thing. Thus, one emendation uses “**praised**,” which a reader could more readily take as a cause for the frustration of the righteous; Garrett, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 329 fn 200. Another solution retains “**forgotten**,” but inserts “the righteous” as the object; Roland Murphy, Ecclesiastes, Word Biblical Commentary 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 85. The contrast then rests between the wicked being buried with honor and the righteous being forgotten.

21 “This is [hebel](#)” occurs in Eccl 2:15, 19, 21; 2:23, 26; 4:4, 8, 16; 5:10 [Heb., 9]; Eccl 6:2, 9; 7:6; 8:14.

22 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 123.

23 Derek Kidner, A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance: Ecclesiastes & the Way of the World, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 77. He refers to Pss 49:14–15 and 73:18–20 for the same concept of an after-life. Likewise, Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 123.

24 George Aaron Barton, [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes](#), International Critical Commentary (1908; reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1971), 154; Longman, Ecclesiastes, 220.

**“The Quiet Collapse of the Wicked”** Wickedness can roar loudly in this life. It seems untouchable, clever, rewarded. But Solomon says: It will not go well. Not in the end. Not forever. Their prosperity is a shadow—visible, but insubstantial. Their confidence is a



mirage. Their path, though smooth for a time, ends in collapse. So don't fear the wicked. Don't envy them. Instead, fear the Lord—for that is where life, peace, and lasting hope begin. The wicked will not escape judgment. Even if delayed, it is sure. A life without the fear of God is fleeting. True well-being belongs only to those who revere God. The prosperity of evil is temporary and deceptive. God sees all, and He will make all things right. Don't fear or idolize the powerful wicked. Their reign is short and shallow. Root your life in the fear of the Lord. That's where true blessing lies. Avoid building your life on what is "shadowy." Status, wealth, and fame are not secure foundations. Teach others the end of unrepentant sin. Speak the truth in love: apart from Christ, no one prospers forever (Mark 8:36+). Pray for the wicked to fear God before it's too late.

**Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.**

KJV 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:14 Here is another enigma that occurs on earth: Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve, and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the righteous deserve. I said, "This also is an enigma."

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:14 σὶν μάταις τῆς πεποηται π τς γς τις σ δ καιοι τι φθ νει πρς ατο ς ς πο ημα τ ν σεβ ν κα ε σ ν σεβε ς τι φθ νει πρς ατο ς ς πο ημα τ ν δικα ων ε πα τι κα γε το το μάταις τῆς

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there are righteous persons to whom it happens according to the doing of the ungodly; and there are ungodly men, to whom it happens according to the doing of the just: I said, This is also vanity.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a futility that is done on the earth: there are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:14 And this is not all that is meaningless in our world. In this life, good people are often treated as though they were wicked, and wicked people are often treated as though they were good. This is so meaningless!

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity that hath been done upon the earth, that there are righteous ones unto whom it is coming according to the work of the wicked, and there are wicked ones unto whom it is coming according to the work of the righteous. I have said that this also is vanity.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:14 Another futile thing that happens on earth: upright people being treated as though they were wicked and wicked people being treated as though they were upright. To me this is one more example of futility.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:14 This is a vanity which occurs on earth: there are just men treated as though they had done evil and wicked men treated as though they had done justly. This, too, I say is vanity.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is something being done on earth that is pointless. Righteous people suffer for

what the wicked do, and wicked people get what the righteous deserve. I say that even this is pointless.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a thing which is to no purpose done on the earth: that there are good men to whom is given the same punishment as those who are evil, and there are evil men who get the reward of the good. I say that this again is to no purpose.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity which takes place on earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

- **a futility:** Ec 4:4,8 9:3 10:5
- **there are:** Ec 2:14 7:15 9:1-3 Job 9:22-24 21:17-34 24:21-25 Ps 73:13,14 Mal 3:15

## WHY DOES THE WICKED PROSPER AND THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER?

**There is futility which is done on the earth** - There exists a tragic reality on earth, a distortion of what should be.

**That is, there are righteous men to whom it happens** (befalls them) **according to the deeds of the wicked** (as if they were wicked) - **NLT** - "And this is not all that is meaningless in our world. In this life, good people are often treated as though they were wicked," Solomon once again returns to life's disturbing contradiction. Sometimes the **righteous** suffer like the wicked, and the **wicked** prosper like the righteous.

*Retribution and reward  
are totally reversed.*  
-- Michael Eaton

**On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous.** The wicked, who deserve judgment, instead receive the prosperity and favor expected for the righteous.

**I say that this too is futility** ([hebel](#); [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) This reversal of justice is another example of life's frustrating, fallen condition under the sun.

**William Barrick** - The double reference to "**futility**" ([hebel](#)) in Ec 8:14 sets the stage for a summary like that in Eccl 7:15. ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**Philip G Ryken** - As far as this present life is concerned, the wicked often seem to get what they do *not* deserve....Oh, the injustice of it all! If God is righteous, then we would expect him to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Yet often he seems to do exactly the opposite. Good people have troubles that only bad people deserve, while bad people get what only good people deserve. Cruel dictators drive out free governments. The man who robs investors of their inheritance gets a huge bonus, while hardworking people lose their jobs and their homes. Suffering pastors are put in prison, while the persecutors of the church grow strong in their cruel power. To bring things down to the personal level, the student who cheated on a difficult exam gets an A, but all you get is a C-. The worker who stabbed you in the back gets the promotion, while you remain stuck at the same pay grade. Or you make a commitment to chastity, and although you are still single, the girl who throws herself at men gets a ring on her finger and a long white dress. The Preacher is telling us that in this life there is a reversal of retribution and reward. This is not just the way things seem, but the way they actually are. So what is the use of being righteous? If bad people get a good life, then what do we gain by godliness? The Preacher called this "vanity." The Reformation theologian Theodore Beza called it "repugnant to reason." I would call it an absurd injustice. (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - A TOPSY-TURVY WORLD

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun. Ecclesiastes 8:14-15

Life is filled with many mysteries. For instance, a tornado touches down on a quiet residential street. Fifteen seconds later twelve homes have been reduced to rubble. But it wasn't twelve homes in a row. It was four destroyed, then three skipped, then five gone, then one skipped, then three more hit.

How do you explain it? Should we assume that the twelve homes were destroyed because the people who lived in them deserved special punishment? What does that say about the residents of the four homes that were left untouched? But we can ask the question another way. Why do murderers live forever while the good die young? "That's not true," you object. "Many murderers spend years in prison and some are put to death. And surely many good and decent people live to a ripe old age and die with their children and grandchildren gathered round them." I grant the point—and so does Solomon—that not all the wicked prosper, nor are all the righteous unfairly punished. But in a perfect world the wicked would never prosper and the righteous would never be punished. If the truth be told, there are enough criminals who seem to prosper that it does give a thoughtful person reason to pause.

Solomon's advice concerning this seeming injustice is simple. Don't worry about it. That's right, just don't worry about how God administers the universe. This may seem like cavalier or even cruel advice, but I think it means that we shouldn't worry about those things over which we have no control. I have a friend who uses a phrase that makes enormous sense at this point: "Feel free to have no opinion about that." What a liberating thought that is. Since you don't know why certain things happen, and since you can't figure it out by investigation, why worry about it?

Don't let your frustration with the big picture keep you from enjoying the present moment. Life is hard enough without taking on extra burdens you weren't meant to bear. Let God be God. In the meantime, enjoy the life He has given you. Feel free to have no opinion about how God runs the universe. Then go out and take on the day.

Sovereign Lord, I'm going to let You take care of Your business, and I ask You to help me take care of mine.  
Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Can you think of anything that bothers you that you would be better off having no opinion about?
- Are you willing to trust God to run the universe without any input from you?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Luke 23:13-25; Philemon 8-21; and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

**Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.**

KJV 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 labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:15 κα πνεσα γ σ ν τ ν ε φ ρ ο σ ν η ν π ο κ σ τ ι ν γ α θ ν τ ν θ ρ π π τ ν λ ι ο ν π ι ε μ τ ο φ α γ ε ν κ α τ ο π ι ε ν κ α τ ο ε φ ρ α ν θ ν α ι κ α α τ σ υ μ π ρ ο σ τ α ι α τ ν μ χ θ α τ ο μ ρ α ς ζ ω ς α τ ο σ α ς δ ω κ ε ν α τ θ ε ς π τ ν λ ι ο ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:15 Then I praised mirth, because there is no good for a man under the sun, but to eat, and drink, and be merry: and this shall attend him in his labour all the days of his life, which God has given him under the sun.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:15 And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun

than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people in this world than to eat, drink, and enjoy life. That way they will experience some happiness along with all the hard work God gives them under the sun.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:15 And I have praised mirth because there is no good to man under the sun except to eat and to drink, and to rejoice, and it remaineth with him of his labour the days of his life that God hath given to him under the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:15 And therefore I praise joy, since human happiness lies only in eating and drinking and in taking pleasure; this comes from what someone achieves during the days of life that God gives under the sun.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:15 Therefore I commend mirth, because there is nothing good for man under the sun except eating and drinking and mirth: for this is the accompaniment of his toil during the limited days of the life which God gives him under the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I recommend the enjoyment of life. People have nothing better to do under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy themselves. This joy will stay with them while they work hard during their brief lives which God has given them under the sun.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I gave praise to joy, because there is nothing better for a man to do under the sun than to take meat and drink and be happy; for that will be with him in his work all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:15 And I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink, and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life which God gives him under the sun.

- Then I: Ec 2:24 3:12,13,22 5:18 9:7-9 1Ti 4:3,4 6:17

#### **Related Passages:**

Ecclesiastes 2:24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. 19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

### **JOY IN THE MIDST OF TOIL EAT, DRINK AND REJOICE**

**So** - This functions like a term of conclusion. Solomon has just described the injustice of life (v.14)—the righteous suffering and the

wicked prospering—and declared this too as hebel (vanity, vapor). Now in verse 15, he returns to a major refrain of Ecclesiastes: In a world that often doesn't make sense, enjoy the simple, God-given gifts of life. This is not hedonism, but a humble theology of contentment.

I like the way **Donald Glenn** explains it "Having shown that there are enigmatic contradictions in the doctrine of retribution—righteousness is not always rewarded and wickedness is not always punished, and sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous meet with disaster—Solomon again recommended the enjoyment of life. He said that life's best is to enjoy the fruits of one's labor (i.e., to eat and drink; cf. Ec 2:24; 3:13; 5:18) and "to rejoice" or be glad (cf. Ec 3:12; 5:19). Also he noted that this joy would enliven one's labor (i.e., it would accompany him in his work). As is obvious from earlier occurrences of this theme (cf. Ec 2:24-26; 3:12, 22; 5:18-20), this is not Epicurean hedonism based on despair but is a note of submission. Man cannot control or predict adversity or prosperity; however, each day's joys should be received as gifts from God's hand and be savored as God permits (Ec 3:13; 5:19). All this is to be while one is under the sun (twice in Ec 8:15; cf. comments on Ecc 1:3). (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 280](#))

**I commended** (praised) **pleasure** Solomon affirms that joy in daily life is good—even amid the world's brokenness. **Pleasure** is not shallow laughter, but real joy in life's blessings.

**For** (term of explanation) **there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry** - In a confusing, unjust world, Solomon sees enjoying daily blessings as one of the few stable goods God allows.

**And this will stand by him in his toils** ([amal](#); [Lxx](#) - [mochthos](#) = hard, difficult labor involving suffering) - The idea is that joy in life's simple pleasures will accompany him, support him, stick with him, acting as a companion and consolation during life's hardships. So even our toilsome lives are from God and we should receive them with gratitude and joy.

**Philip G Ryken** - In spite of all the vanity "under the sun," it is possible for us to find genuine joy in the ordinary things of daily life. Indeed, that is one of the main points of this book. Here is how **Augustine** summarized its message: "*Solomon gives over the entire book of Ecclesiastes to suggesting, with such fullness as he judged adequate, the emptiness of this life, with the ultimate objective, to be sure, of making us yearn for another kind of life which is no unsubstantial shadow under the sun but substantial reality under the sun's Creator.*" (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#))

**Throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun** - Note that our life is a divine gift, even in a fallen world. The bottom line is that in a world of uncertainty and injustice, the righteous can still find joy in God's daily gifts. Solomon says that contentment is still possible amid brokenness. He is not speaking of secular hedonism, but of holy enjoyment.

**Michael Eaton** - The Preacher does not try to unravel the enigma completely. Rather he presents a practical solution, along lines now familiar. Again he is concerned about earthly life (under the sun), commends joy (cf. Eccl 2:26; 3:12; 5:18, 20) and contentment (to eat and drink; cf. Eccl 2:24f.; 3:13; 5:18). This is to be our encouragement amid daily life and activity, a life-long (through the days of life) close companion (go with him translates Heb. yilwennū, 'cleave to him', join on to him'). The secret of it all is: it is God-given. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**TSK** - Some consider this as the cavil of an infidel objector, equivalent to the Epicurean maxim, {Ede, bibe, lude; post mortem nulla voluptas,} "Eat, drink, and play; there is no pleasure after death." But it may be regarded as a recommendation of a moderate use of worldly things, with a cheerful and contented mind; which may justly be considered as the greatest advantage which can be made of all below the sun: and amidst all changes, such a frame of mind, if the result of right principles, may and ought to be preserved; and it will be the recompence and solace of all our labours and toils.

**Barrick** - Eccl 8:15 reveals the third carpe diem text declaring that life is the gift of God (see Eccl 2:24–26; 5:18–20). "Commend" conveys the concept of a strong recommendation.<sup>25</sup> However, Solomon does not advise enjoyment of life as an anesthetic to deaden the pain of inequity, injustice, and death. His point is that human beings ought not waste their God-given joys by seeking to usurp the authority or work of the Creator. Fretting over the brevity and seeming unfairness of life brings no joy, no peace, no rest, and no solution. God's wise bestowment of all things stands behind all that happens "under the sun." No one can understand the ultimate reasons for what happens, because even the wisest is but a fool by comparison to God. We should not beat our "heads against the wall trying to figure out life."<sup>26</sup> An impressive continuity exists between Solomon's teaching and that of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25–34). ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

**"Finding Joy in the Now"** In a world of injustice, confusion, and delay, Solomon offers this gentle wisdom: Rejoice in what you have. Enjoy the life God gave you. Not because everything is fair. Not because you've figured it all out. But because joy is a gift from God that helps you endure life's toil. God isn't asking you to escape life. He's asking you to embrace His daily mercies. This is not resignation. It's reverent contentment. Joy is a gift from God—especially amid a broken world. Slow down and savor today's blessings. Meals, relationships, laughter—receive them as from God. Remember that joy coexists with sorrow. You can rejoice even when justice is delayed.

**Toils** (mischief, toil trouble, anguish) (05999) **amal** from verb **amal** = to labor especially the dark side of labor, the grievous and unfulfilling aspects of work) means trouble, labor, toil. In Ecclesiastes the Septuagint usually translates amal with the noun **mochthos** which describes hard and difficult labor involving suffering hardship, struggle, strenuous toil. Note that **amal** is not just describing physical toil but can also describe mental anguish as in the following passages -- anguish (Ps. 25:18), Joseph's 'anguish' of mind (Ge 41:51), the 'misery' from which Israel was delivered (Nu 23:21NIV), Job's 'trouble' (Job 3:10).

**Labor (amal)** is used by Solomon in Ps 127:1<sup>+</sup> explaining how man's labor is in vain without the LORD! = "Unless the LORD builds the house, They **labor (amal)** in **vain** who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in **vain**."

**Gilbrant** - This is the noun that describes the labor that Qoheleth, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, considered vanity, because the laborer could never enjoy the fruit of the labor (Ecc. 1:3; 2:11). The term is used figuratively to describe the heaviness of certain painful thoughts, particularly the psalmist's concern over the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:16). 'āmāl can also refer to the fruit or produce of labor (Ps. 105:44; Ecc. 2:19) and the notion of trouble or vexation (general weariness or weariness of situations and circumstances). Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh since God had made him forget all his toil (Gen. 41:51). The Lord heard the affliction and toil of his people in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them (Deut. 26:7). Job's so-called friends are called "troublesome comforters" (Job 3:10; 16:2). The Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, experienced for our sakes "the anguish of his soul" (Isa. 53:11). 'āmāl may also be translated "wickedness" (cf. Num. 23:21; Isa. 10:1), which conveys the emotion of vexation and anguish associated with sinful behavior, especially by those who are the recipients of such evil acts. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**AMAL USES IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 2:10; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:18; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:20; Eccl. 2:22; Eccl. 2:24; Eccl. 3:13; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:6; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:9; Eccl. 5:15; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 5:19; Eccl. 6:7; Eccl. 8:15; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 10:15;

**Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),**

KJV 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:)

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,

NET Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I tried to gain wisdom and to observe the activity on earth— even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night—

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:16 ν ο ς δ ω κ α τ ν κ α ρ δ α ν μ ο υ τ ο γ ν ν α ι σ ο φ α ν κ α τ ο δ ε ν τ ν π ε ρ ι σ π α σ μ ν τ ν π ε π ο ι η μ ν ο ν π ι τ ς γ ς τ ι κ α γ ε ν μ ρ κ α ν ν υ κ τ π ν ο ν ν φ θ α λ μ ο ς α τ ο ο κ σ τ ι ν β λ π ω ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:16 Whereupon I set my heart to know wisdom, and to perceive the trouble that was wrought upon the earth: for there is that neither by day nor night sees sleep with his eyes.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the activity that is done on the earth (even though one's eyes do not close in sleep day or night),

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep,

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth--his eyes not seeing sleep day or night--

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:16 In my search for wisdom and in my observation of people's burdens here on earth, I discovered that there is ceaseless activity, day and night.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that hath been done on the earth, (for there is also a spectator in whose eyes sleep is not by day and by night),

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:16 Having applied myself to acquiring wisdom and to observing the activity taking place in the world -- for day and night our eyes enjoy no rest-

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on



earth, how one's eyes see sleep neither day nor night,

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to observe what is done on earth,

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I carefully considered how to study wisdom and how to look at the work that is done on earth (even going without sleep day and night),

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I gave my mind to the knowledge of wisdom and to seeing the business which is done on the earth (and there are those whose eyes see not sleep by day or by night),

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep;

- When I: Ec 8:9 7 7:25
- there is that: Ec 2:23 4:8 5:12 Ge 31:40 Ps 127:2

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

Ecclesiastes 7:25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.

Psalms 127:2 It is vain ([HEBEL](#)) for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Job 11:7 Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

## SLEEPLESS FOR WISDOM STILL FUTILITY

Note that this verse is the first part of a sentence that is completed in verse 17. Verse 16 introduces Solomon's struggle of seeking to understand the mysteries of life under the sun.

**When I gave my heart to know wisdom - I gave my heart** means deep mental focus and emotional investment. **To know wisdom** describes Solomon's pursuit of understanding of how life works. In other words, Solomon undertook a serious and exhaustive quest to understand divine wisdom as it applies to earthly life.

**and to see the task** (business, activity) **which has been done on the earth** (aka "under the sun") - Solomon tried to observe and interpret human existence—its work, striving, and suffering.

**Even though one should never sleep day or night** - NET = "even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night" The effort to understand life is so overwhelming that even if he could search as we say "24/7" round the clock, 7 days a week he would still not arrive at an answer to life's mysteries.

**TSK** - Solomon here records the result of his perplexing inquiries into the affairs of men, and the purposes, providence, and works of God. And when he examined with great attention and diligence into the works of God, he found he could neither comprehend nor explain them; and was persuaded, that no application or capacity would enable a man to fathom the depth of the Divine dispensations in this lower world. How vain, then, are all cavils against Divine providence; when we can neither understand, nor comprehend it!

**William Barrick** - Solomon reviews his pursuit of wisdom in Eccl 8:16–17 (cp. Eccl 1:13). In his search for wisdom he could eliminate sleep and still not succeed (Eccl 8:16). Interestingly, his earlier speech concerning labor with wisdom (2:18–23) includes the observation that the mind of the wise laborer (Eccl 8:21) has no rest even at night (Eccl 8:23). ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth—his eyes not seeing sleep day or night—then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it. Ecclesiastes 8:16-17

God's ways and ours are quite different. In verses 16-17 Solomon reminds us of that fundamental truth, writing that even if a man stays up all night he still won't fathom all that God has done. Nor can it be discovered by the application of human wisdom. What God does stands in a completely different category beyond our reach.

We see this clearly when we consider our spiritual salvation: It is by grace, wholly apart from human works. Everything within us fights against the notion that we contribute nothing to our own salvation. How, then, are we saved from God's wrath? If it is not by our own good works, how will we ever get to heaven? If not by our righteousness, then where will we find the righteousness we need?

One term coined during the Reformation nicely answers that question. John Calvin and Martin Luther said that we are saved by the application of an "alien righteousness." The word alien conjures up visions of strange little creatures with no hair and bulging eyes. But that's not what Luther and Calvin meant at all.

The term alien simply means "from another place." To say that we are saved by an "alien righteousness" means that we are saved by righteousness that comes "from another place." It comes not from within us as a result of our good deeds, but from outside of us entirely. Where, oh where, can a guilty sinner find righteousness "from another place"? He can find it in Jesus Christ! That's the "alien righteousness" that saves guilty sinners.

To make myself clear, I am saying that salvation is completely outside you and me. We do not save ourselves, and we contribute nothing to our salvation—nothing at all. God calls us, His Spirit draws, He gives us faith to believe, and He applies to us righteousness "from another place"—the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means there is nothing you can do to add to the work of Christ. It stands complete on its own. You either accept it or reject it—there is nothing in between.

Lord Jesus, thank You for providing righteousness from another place when I had nothing to offer but my own sins. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Why can't good works save us or help to save us?
- What does the term "alien righteousness" mean? Why must salvation come from someplace outside ourselves?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 73; John 18:37; and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

**Ecclesiastes 8:17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.**

KJV 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 labour 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.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

NET Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I discerned all that God has done: No one really comprehends what happens on earth. Despite all human efforts to discover it, no one can ever grasp it. Even if a wise person claimed that he understood, he would not really comprehend it.

BGT Ecclesiastes 8:17 καὶ ἑδὼν σὺ πᾶν τὰ ποιεῖματα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐ δύναται ἄνθρωπος τὸ εὑρεῖν σὺν τῷ νοῦν αὐτοῦ, πεποιημένων πᾶν τὸν κόσμον, ὅτι οὐ δύναται ἄνθρωπος τὸ ζητῆσαι καὶ οὐκ ἐρᾷ καὶ γὰρ ὁ πρῶτος τοῦ γινώσκειν οὐ δύναται τὸ εὑρεῖν

LXE Ecclesiastes 8:17 And I beheld all the works of God, that a man shall not be able to discover the work which is wrought under the sun; whatsoever things a man shall endeavour to seek, however a man may

labour to seek it, yet he shall not find it; yea, how much soever a wise man may speak of knowing it, he shall not be able to find it: for I applied all this to my heart, and my heart has seen all this.

CSB Ecclesiastes 8:17 I observed all the work of God and concluded that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it.

ESV Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

NIV Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

NLT Ecclesiastes 8:17 I realized that no one can discover everything God is doing under the sun. Not even the wisest people discover everything, no matter what they claim.

YLT Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I considered all the work of God, that man is not able to find out the work that hath been done under the sun, because though man labour to seek, yet he doth not find; and even though the wise man speak of knowing he is not able to find.

NJB Ecclesiastes 8:17 I have scrutinised God's whole creation: you cannot get to the bottom of everything taking place under the sun; you may wear yourself out in the search, but you will never find it. Not even a sage can get to the bottom of it, even if he says that he has done so.

NRS Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.

NAB Ecclesiastes 8:17 I recognized that man is unable to find out all God's work that is done under the sun, even though neither by day nor by night do his eyes find rest in sleep. However much man toils in searching, he does not find it out; and even if the wise man says that he knows, he is unable to find it out.

GWN Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw everything that God has done. No one is able to grasp the work that is done under the sun. However hard a person may search for it, he will not find its meaning. Even though a wise person claims to know, he is not able to grasp it.

BBE Ecclesiastes 8:17 Then I saw all the work of God, and that man may not get knowledge of the work which is done under the sun; because, if a man gives hard work to the search he will not get knowledge, and even if the wise man seems to be coming to the end of his search, still he will be without knowledge.

RSV Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

- that a man: Ec 3:11 7:23,24 11:5 Job 5:9 11:7-9 Ps 40:5 73:16 104:24 Pr 30:3,4 Isa 40:28 Ro 11:33

#### **Related Passages:**

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

Job 5:9 Who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number.

Proverbs 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

**UNSEARCHABLE WISDOM:  
GOD'S WORK, MAN'S LIMIT**

**and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun.** Solomon has contemplated everything that God does—and concludes that it is ultimately unsearchable by human wisdom. Despite our efforts, we cannot discover the meaning or purpose behind all that God allows under the sun.

**Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover** - Even the most diligent search for understanding will fall short. No matter how hard he tries, he will not find it.

**and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.** Even the wisest minds cannot fully comprehend God's sovereign purposes. If they claim to, they are self-deceived.

Solomon's conclusion should drive us all to seek the only Source of true Wisdom, Jesus Christ, Paul writing...

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **Who became to us wisdom from God**, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1Co 1:30-31+)

**Donald Glenn** - In emphatic terms, repeating the negative three times (Ec 8:17) and the verb "comprehend" twice —no one can comprehend... man cannot discover... he cannot really comprehend—Solomon said that no one can understand God's ways (Ec 3:11; cf. Isa. 55:9; Ro 11:33) even if he expended all his energies or were wise and claimed he could. (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 281](#))

**William Barrick** - The "work of God" serves as the object of Solomon's observation (Ec 8:17; cp. 3:11, 14; 7:13, 29). However, humans are incapable of discovering all of God's work "under the sun." Whether the search involves God's work in the past (Ec 7:24) or the future (Ec 7:14), it will elude the searcher. Paul writes similarly when examining the mercy of God in Romans 11:33–36. "How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Ro 11:33b). His statement does not reflect skepticism, neither does Solomon's.<sup>27</sup> Chapter 8's conclusion reverberates in the words of 1 Corinthians 1:20–25. Human wisdom cannot save anyone from their inability to control their circumstances or from their inherited sinful nature. Only God's wisdom meets this task. God displays His wisdom in the person of the Messiah Himself. The ultimate answer to Solomon's questions comes in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastes removes all claims to the salvific value of human wisdom. This book prepares the human heart for the greater message of redemption. No one can turn to the Redeemer until they first recognizes their own inability to do anything for themselves. The final chapters of Ecclesiastes pick up from the message of Eccl 8:16–17 and point the reader toward God, the Maker or Creator, who alone controls life "under the sun." ([Ecclesiastes 8 Commentary](#))

Questions for study:

- What produces greater graciousness and forgiveness in believers?
- How should believers conduct themselves before government leaders?
- Over what things do we have no control?
- How does Solomon "know" what he knows in verse 12?
- What does fretting over inequities and injustices and inability say about one's relationship to their Creator?

25 Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 291.

26 Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 356.

27 Contra Longman, Ecclesiastes, 223.

**"You Don't Have to Understand Everything"** Have you ever stayed up late, mind racing, trying to understand why something happened? Solomon did. And here's what he found: You can study, strain, and search—but some things belong to God alone. This is not a call to stop thinking—but to start trusting. Let the unanswered questions push you closer to the One who knows all things, even when you don't. Peace doesn't come from knowing everything—it comes from knowing God. God's works are beyond human understanding. We must approach life with humility. Seeking understanding is good—but trust is better. Life under the sun includes mystery—by God's design. We are called to rest in God's wisdom, not our own. Submit to God's sovereignty in what you cannot explain. Pursue wisdom, but let faith finish where reason ends. Guard against spiritual arrogance. No human being "has it all figured out." Worship the God who sees the whole picture—even when you don't.