
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 face is changed.

A man's wisdom makes his face shine, Ecc 8:1. Kings are to be greatly respected, Ecc 8:2-4. Of him who keeps the commandment; of the misery of man; of the certainty of death, Ecc 8:5-8. Of him that rules another to his own hurt, Ecc 8:9. The end of the wicked, Ecc 8:10. God's longsuffering, Ecc 8:11, Ecc 8:12. It shall be ill with wicked men, Ecc 8:13. Strange events in the course of Providence, Ecc 8:14, Ecc 8:15. God's works cannot be found out, Ecc 8:16, Ecc 8:17.

Verse 1

Who knoweth the interpretation - פֶּשֶׁר pesher, a pure Chaldee word, found nowhere else in the Bible but in the Chaldee parts of Daniel. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." Every state of the heart shines through the countenance; but there is such an evidence of the contented, happy, pure, benevolent state of the soul in the face of a truly pious man, that it must be observed, and cannot be mistaken. In the Hebrew the former clause of this verse ends the preceding chapter. Who has ever been deceived in the appearance of the face that belonged to a savage heart? Those who represent, by painting or otherwise, a wise man, with a gravely sour face, striking awe and forbidding approach, have either mistaken the man, or are unacquainted with some essential principles of their art.

The boldness of his face shall be changed - Instead of יֵשׁוּנָה yeshunne, which signifies shall be hated, many of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have יֵשׁוּנֶה yeshunneh, shall be changed or doubled. Hence the verse might be read, "The wisdom of a man shall illuminate his face; and the strength of his countenance shall be doubled." He shall speak with full confidence and conviction on a subject which he perfectly understands, and all will feel the weight of his observations.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 2 I say, "Keep the king's command!" because of the oath to God.

Verse 2

To keep the king's commandment - This sentence would be better translated, I keep the mouth of the king; I take good heed not to meddle with state secrets; and if I know, to hide them. Or, I am obedient to the commands of the laws; I feel myself bound by whatever the king has decreed.

In regard of the oath of God - You have sworn obedience to him; keep your oath, for the engagement was made in the presence of God. It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to David, 2Sam 5:1-3; to Joash, 2Kgs 11:17; and to Solomon, 1Chr 29:24.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 3 Don't be hasty to go out of his presence. Don't persist in an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him,

Verse 3

Be not hasty - I consider the first five verses here as directions to courtiers, and the more immediate servants of kings.

Be steadily faithful to your sovereign. Do not stand in an evil thing. If you have done wrong, do not endeavor to vindicate yourself before him; it is of no use; his power is absolute, and he will do what he pleases. He will take his own view of the subject, and he will retain it. The language of a despotic sovereign was ever this, *Sic volo sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas*; "I will this. I command that. No hesitation! My will is law!" Therefore it is added here, Where the word of a king is, there is power - influence, authority, and the sword. And who may say unto him, whether he acts right or wrong, What doest thou? Ecc 8:4. No wonder in such governments there are so many revolutions; but they are revolutions without amendment, as it is one tyrant rising up to destroy another, who, when seated in authority, acts in the way of his predecessor; till another, like himself, do to him as he has done to the former. In our country, after a long trial, we find that a mixed monarchy is the safest, best, and most useful form of government: we have had, it is true, unprincipled ministers, who wished to turn our limited into an absolute monarchy; and they were always ready to state that an absolute monarchy was best. Granted; provided the monarch be as wise, as holy, and as powerful as God!

ECCLESIASTES 8: 4 for the king's word is supreme. Who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

ECCLESIASTES 8: 5 Whoever keeps the commandment shall not come to harm, and his wise heart will know the time and procedure.

Verse 5

Both time and judgment - It is a matter of great importance to be able to discern When and How both to speak and act; but when time and manner are both determined, the matter comes next. What shall I speak? What shall I do? When, how, and what answer to time, manner, and knitter. To discern all these, and act suitably, is a lesson for a philosopher, and a study for a Christian.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 6 For there is a time and procedure for every purpose, although the misery of man is heavy on him.

Verse 6

To every purpose there is time - $\Upsilon\Phi\text{N}$ chaphets, every volition, every thing that depends on the will of man. He has generally the opportunity to do whatever he purposes; and as his purposes are frequently evil, his acts are so too: and in consequence his misery is great.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 7 For he doesn't know that which will be; for who can tell him how it will be?

ECCLESIASTES 8: 8 There is no man who has power over the spirit to contain the spirit; neither does he have power over the day of death. There is no discharge in war; neither shall wickedness deliver those who practice it.

Verse 8

There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit - The Chaldee has, "There is no man who can rule over the spirit of the breath, so as to prevent the animal life from leaving the body of man." Others translate to this sense: "No man hath power over the wind to restrain the wind; and none has power over death to restrain him; and when a man engages as a soldier, he cannot be discharged from the war till it is ended; and by wickedness no man shall be delivered from any evil." Taking it in this way, these are maxims which contain self-evident truths. Others suppose the verse to refer to the king who tyrannizes over and oppresses his people. He shall also account to God for his actions; he shall die, and he cannot prevent it; and when he is judged, his wickedness cannot deliver him.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 9 All this have I seen, and applied my mind to every work that is done under the sun. There is a time in which one man has power over another to his hurt.

Verse 9

One man ruleth over another to his own hurt - This may be spoken of rulers generally, who, instead of feeding, fleece the flock; tyrants and oppressors, who come to an untimely end by their mismanagement of the offices of the state. All these things relate to Asiatic despots, and have ever been more applicable to them than to any other sovereigns in the world. They were despotic; they still are so.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 10 So I saw the wicked buried. Indeed they came also from holiness. They went and were forgotten in the city where they did this. This also is vanity.

Verse 10

Who had come and gone from the place of the holy - The place of the holy is the sacred office which they held, anointed either as kings or priests to God; and, not having fulfilled the holy office in a holy way, have been carried to their graves without lamentation, and lie among the dead without remembrance.

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.

Verse 11

Because sentence - פִּתְגָּם pithgam, a Divine decree or declaration. This is no Hebrew, but a mere Chaldee word, and occurs only in the later books of the Bible - Esther, Ezra and Daniel, and nowhere else but in this place. Because God does not immediately punish every delinquency, men think he disregards evil acts; and therefore they are emboldened to sin on. So this longsuffering of God, which leadeth to repentance, is abused so as to lead to farther crimes! When men sin against the remedy of their salvation, how can they escape perdition?

ECCLESIASTES 8: 12 Though a sinner commits crimes a hundred times, and lives long, yet surely I know that it will be better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him.

Verse 12

Though a sinner do evil a hundred times - If God bear so long with a transgressor, waiting in his longsuffering for him to repent and turn to him, surely he will be peculiarly kind to them that fear him, and endeavor to walk uprightly before him.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he lengthen days like a shadow; because he doesn't fear God.

Verse 13

But it shall not be well with the wicked - Let not the long-spared sinner presume that, because sentence is not speedily executed on his evil works, and he is suffered to go on to his hundredth transgression, God has forgotten to punish. No, he feareth not before God; and therefore he shall not ultimately escape.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 14 There is a vanity which is done on the earth, that there are righteous 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.

Verse 14

There be just men - See on Ecc 7:16 (note).

ECCLESIASTES 8: 15 Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be joyful: for that will accompany him in his labour all the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

Verse 15

Then I commended mirth - These are some more of the cavils of the infidel objector: "Since virtue is frequently under oppression, and vice triumphs in health, and rolls in wealth, I see plainly that we should not trouble ourselves about future things; and therefore should be governed by the maxim Ede, Bibe, Lude. Post mortem nulla voluptas."

Eat, drink, and play,

While here you may;

For soon as death

Has stopp'd your breath

Ye ne'er shall see a cheerful day.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on the earth (for also there is that neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes),

Verse 16

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom - This is the reply of the wise man: "I have also considered these seeming contradictions. God governs the world; but we cannot see the reasons of his conduct, nor know why he does this, omits that, or permits a third thing. We may study night and day, and deprive ourselves of rest and sleep, but we shall never fathom the depths that are in the Divine government; but all is right and just. This is the state of probation; and in it neither can the wicked be punished, nor the righteous rewarded. But eternity is at hand; and then shall every man receive according to his works. He that spends his life in the eat, drink, and play, will find in that day that he has lost the time in which he could have prepared for eternity.

ECCLESIASTES 8: 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man can't find out the work that is done under the sun, because however much a man labours to seek it out, yet he won't find it. Yes even though a wise man thinks he can comprehend it, he won't be able to find it.

Verse 17

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun - I saw it to be of such a nature -

1. That a man cannot find it out.

2. That if he labor to find it out, he shall not succeed.

3. That though he be wise - the most instructed among men, and think to find it out, he shall find he is not able. It is beyond the wisdom and power of man. How vain then are all your cavils about Providence. You do not understand it; you cannot comprehend it. Fear God!