

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 8

The preacher begins this chapter with the praise of wisdom, from its excellency and usefulness, (²⁰⁸¹Ecclesiastes 8:1); and advises men, if they would live quietly and comfortably, to honour and obey the king that rules over them, and not be rebellious against him, since he has great power and authority, (²⁰⁸²Ecclesiastes 8:2-5); and not be anxious about things to come, since there is a set time for everything, and future things cannot be known nor frustrated; and, particularly, there is no avoiding the hour and stroke of death, (²⁰⁸³Ecclesiastes 8:6-8); Though there are times wherein wicked men rule over others, it is to their own hurt, and they must die; and though they may be pompously buried, yet are soon forgotten, (²⁰⁸⁹Ecclesiastes 8:9,10); and the reason of their insolence is the delay of justice; yet there will come a time when it shall be well with them that fear God, and ill with the wicked, though they may live long in wickedness; and for the present it may befall good then what wicked men deserve, and wicked men may have that which might, be thought more proper for good men, (²⁰⁸¹Ecclesiastes 8:11-14); wherefore this should give no uneasiness; but men should cheerfully and freely enjoy what they have with thankfulness, there being nothing better than that under the sun, (²⁰⁸⁵Ecclesiastes 8:15); and the chapter is concluded with observing the unsearchableness of divine Providence, (²⁰⁸⁶Ecclesiastes 5:16,17).

Ver. 1. *Who is as the wise [man]?* etc.] Who is as the first man, that was made upright, and was a wise man? not one of his sons. Or who is as the wise man, meaning himself? no man; he was the wisest of men; and yet he could not find out wisdom, and the reason of things, and the wickedness of folly, (²⁰⁷⁵Ecclesiastes 7:25-29); how therefore should any other man? what can the man do that comes after the king? Or who is like to a wise man, to he compared to him for honour and dignity? none; not those of the highest birth and blood, of the greatest wealth and riches, or in the highest places of power and authority; a wise man is above them, they being without wisdom; and especially such as are wise to salvation; these are the excellent in the earth, and the most worthy among men. Or who is a truly wise man?

is there really such a person in the world, that has got to the perfection of wisdom? not one; and very few they are that can, in a true and proper sense, be called wise men. The Targum is,

“who is a wise man, that can stand against the wisdom of the Lord?”

and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? or “a word”^{f187}? the word of God, which is not of private interpretation? none know it rightly, but such who have the Spirit of God, the enditer of the word: Christ is the interpreter, one among a thousand; and, next to him are those who have his mind, and rightly divide the word of truth. The Targum is,

“and to know the interpretation of the words in the prophets:”

this may be understood of the solution of any difficulties in things natural or civil; and of the interpretation of any of the works of God, either in nature or providence, as well as of his word; and he is a wise man, that not only has wisdom in himself, but is able to teach others, and make them wise; can solve doubts, remove difficulties, interpret nature, the works and word of God. Aben Ezra repeats the note of similitude from the former clause, and so it may be rendered, “Who is as he that knows the interpretation of a thing”, or “word?” such an one as Solomon was, (^{<3006>}Proverbs 1:6);

a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine: as Moses, when he came down from the mount, full fraught with the knowledge of the will of God, (^{<0349>}Exodus 34:29,30); and as Stephen, whose wisdom and spirit, by which he spoke, were irresistible, (^{<4060>}Acts 6:10,15); wisdom, which discovers itself in a man’s words and actions, gives comeliness to his person, makes him look amiable and lovely in the eyes of others: or, it “enlightens his face”^{f188}; by it he is able to see the difference between truth and falsehood, and what is to be done and not done; what way he should walk in, and what he should shun and avoid;

and the boldness of his face shall be changed; the ferocity and austerity of his countenance, the impudence and inhumanity that appeared in him before, through his wisdom and knowledge, are changed into meekness, gentleness, and humanity; of an impudent, fierce, and badly behaved man, he becomes meek, modest, affable, and humane; this effect natural wisdom and knowledge has on men^{f189}; and much more spiritual and evangelical wisdom, which comes from above, and is first pure, then peaceable and

gentle, (^{<3017>}James 3:17). Some read it, “the strength of his face shall be doubled”, or “renewed”^{f190}; he shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory; his spiritual strength shall be renewed, and his light and knowledge increase yet more and more, (^{<4738>}2 Corinthians 3:18 ^{<2308>}Isaiah 40:31 ^{<2079>}Ecclesiastes 7:19 ^{<1048>}Proverbs 4:18). But Gussetius^{f191} renders it, his “boldness”, or impudence, “shall be hated”.

Ver. 2. *I [counsel thee] to keep the king’s commandment*, etc.] Or, “to observe the mouth of the king”^{f192}; what he says, and do according to it when it is agreeably to the law of God, and according to the laws of the kingdom, by which he is to govern; for kings are to be honoured, obeyed, and submitted to, in the lawful discharge of their office: and such counsel and advice as this is wholesome; and, being taken, contributes much, as to the honour of kings, so to the good of kingdoms and states, and to a man’s own peace and comfort. Aben Ezra supplies it,

“I command thee, or I admonish thee;”

for it may be either a charge, or art advice, respecting this and what follows. Jarchi supplies and paraphrases it thus,

“I have need, and am prepared, to observe the mouth (or keep the commandment) of the King of the world;”

and so Alshech,

“observe that which goes out of the mouth of the King of the world.”

And indeed, to understand it, not of an earthly king, but of the King of kings, as it is understood by other interpreters also, suits better with what is said of this King in the following verses; whose commandments, which are not grievous, but to be loved above fine gold, should be kept from a principle of love, without mercenary and selfish views, as they are delivered out by him, and to his glory; and such a charge as this should be attended to, and such counsel be received;

and [that] in regard of the oath of God; who has sworn, that if his children forsake his law, and walk not in his statutes, he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes; and therefore should be careful to keep his commandments, (^{<3880>}Psalm 89:30-35). Those who interpret this of an earthly king, by the oath of God understand the

oath of allegiance and fidelity to him, taken in the name and presence of God, and therefore for conscience's sake should obey him: or render it, "but [so that thou observest] the manner of the oath of God"^{f193}; or takest care to obey him; or do nothing in obedience to kings, which is contrary to the will of God; for God is to be obeyed rather than men, (~~40B~~ Acts 4:19 5:29); especially, and above all things, that is to be regarded.

Ver. 3. *Be not hasty to go out of his sight*, etc.] But of the sight of the King of kings. Do not think to hide thyself from him, for there is no fleeing from his presence, (~~3D07~~ Psalm 139:7); it is best, when under some consternation, as the word^{f194} signifies, or under some fearful apprehension of his wrath and indignation, to fall down before him, acknowledge the offence, and pray for pardon: and to this purpose is the Targum,

"and in the time of the indignation of the Lord, do not cease to pray before him; being terrified (or troubled) before him, go and pray, and seek mercy of him;"

and with which agrees the note of Jarchi,

"be not troubled, saying that thou wilt go and free from his presence, to a place where he does not rule, for he rules in every place."

Such who interpret this of an earthly king suppose this forbids a man going out from the presence of a king in a pet and passion, withdrawing himself from his court and service in a heat, at once;

stand not in an evil thing; having done it, continue not in it; but repent of it, acknowledge and forsake it, whether against God or an earthly king;

for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him; which best agrees with the King of kings, who does what he pleases, in heaven above and in earth below, both in nature, providence, and grace; (see ~~82B~~ Job 23:13 ~~4B3B~~ Psalm 115:3); though earthly kings indeed have long hands, as is usually said, and can reach a great way, and do great things, especially despotic and arbitrary princes, and it is very difficult escaping their hands. The Targum is,

"for the Lord of all worlds, the Lord will do what he pleases."

Ver. 4. *Where the word of a king [is, there is] power*, etc.] Or "dominion"^{f195}. Authority goes along with his word of command; and there is an inferior magistracy, a subordinate power under him, ready to execute

his will upon the rebellious and disobedient. Jarchi interprets it, the word of the holy blessed God; and the Targum, the word of that King who rules over all the world; where his word of doctrine comes, not in word only, it is with power: his written word is quick and powerful; the word of his Gospel preached is the power of God to salvation; or is accompanied with power to enlighten dark minds, quicken dead sinners, unstop deaf ears, soften hard hearts, and deliver men from the slavery of sin and Satan; it makes men, of enemies, friends to God, Christ, and good men; transforms them by the renewing of their minds, and comforts and establishes saints; all which is attributed to the word; and are the effects of almighty power, (~~3012~~ Hebrews 4:12 ~~3016~~ Romans 1:16); his word of command also comes with power, being clothed with his authority; and is submitted to by his people in the day of his power upon them, who readily and cheerfully obey it;

and who may say unto him, what dost thou? call him to an account for, or complain of any of his works of creation, providence, or grace? This best agrees with God than with an earthly king; and is said of him elsewhere, (~~3012~~ Job 9:12 33:14 ~~2045~~ Daniel 4:35).

Ver. 5. *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing*, etc.]

Either the commandment of an earthly king, which should be kept, when agreeably to the laws of the nation, and not inconsistent with the commands of God; and such as do observe it “know no evil”^{f196}, as it may be rendered, or no sorrow; they live peaceably and quietly, and enjoy the favour and protection of the government under which they are, and have praise of men; (see ~~3013~~ Romans 13:3 ~~3012~~ 2 Timothy 2:2); or the commandments of the heavenly King, the singular being put for the plural; so the Targum,

“whoso keepeth the commandments of the Lord shall know no evil in the world to come.”

Nor in this world neither; no evil befalls them; what may be thought to be so is for their good; though they know and are conscious of the evil of sin, and commit it, yet not willingly, and with love to it, and so as to make it the work of their lives; but lament it, repent of it, and forsake it, and do not feel the evil of punishment for it; yea, such enjoy much good; have much communion with God; large discoveries of his love; dwell in him, and shall at last dwell with him in the heavenly city; (see ~~3012~~ John 14:21,23 ~~3012~~ 1 John 3:22,24 ~~3024~~ Revelation 22:14);

and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment; he knows not only what is his duty to do, both with respect to God and men, to a temporal prince or the King eternal; but he knows also the most fit and convenient time of doing it; and lays hold on every opportunity that offers, and which may be called “redeeming time”, (⁴⁸⁵⁰Galatians 6:10

⁴⁸⁵⁶Ephesians 5:16); and he knows the right manner in which it should be performed, with all the agreeable circumstances of it, which he carefully observes; or he knows the judgment that will be passed, or the punishment that will be inflicted on delinquents, either by God or men; and therefore is careful to keep the commandment, and avoid it: and especially he remembers there is a judgment to come, when everything will be brought to an account; and, though he does not know the precise day and hour, yet he knows there will be such a time; so some render it, “the time of judgment”^{f197}: the Targum is,

“and the time of prayer, and of judgment, and of truth, is known by the heart of the wise.”

Ver. 6. *Because to every purpose there is time and judgment*, etc.] There is a fit season, and a right and proper manner of doing everything that is to be done; (see ²⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 3:1-8); which a wise man discerns; and which when a man hits upon, it prevents a great deal of mischief, which for want of it comes upon men, as the following clause shows; some refer this to the punishment of the wicked, and to a future judgment. So the Targum,

“to every business there is a time good and evil, and according to the judgment of truth the whole world is judged;”

and to the same purpose Jarchi,

“there is a time fixed for the visitation of the wicked, and there is judgment before the Lord; this is vengeance or punishment;”

therefore the misery of man [is] great upon him; he not observing the right time and manner of doing what he ought, brings much trouble upon himself; his days are few and full trouble, and every day has a sufficiency of evil in because of the evil of sin, the evil of misery presses upon him, and is a heavy burden on him Jarchi's note is,

“when the wickedness of a man is great, then cometh his visitation.”

Ver. 7. *For he knoweth not that which shall be,* etc.] Or that “it shall be”^{f198}; that he ever shall have the opportunity again he has lost, nor what is to come hereafter; what shall be on the morrow, or what shall befall him in the remaining part of his days; what troubles and sorrows he shall meet with, or what will be the case and circumstances of his family after his death;

for who can tell him when it shall be? or “how it shall be”^{f199}? how it will be with him or his; no one that pretends to judicial astrology, or to the art of divination, or any such devices, can tell him what is to come; future things are only certainly known by God; none but he can tell what will certainly come to pass; (see ²⁰¹⁸²Ecclesiastes 3:22 6:12); Jarchi interprets it of a man’s not considering for what God will bring him to judgment, and that no man can tell him the vengeance and punishment that will be inflicted.

Ver. 8. [*There is] no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit,* etc.] Which is not to be understood of the wind, which the word used sometimes signifies, and of men’s having no power to restrain that, or hinder it from blowing; for to what purpose should Solomon mention this? rather it may be considered as a check upon despotic and arbitrary princes not to stretch their power too far; since they had none over the spirits or minds of men, and could not hinder them from thinking ill of them, and wishing ill to them, nor restrain their hatred of them; whatever power they had or exercised over their bodies and estates, they had none over their spirits, or their consciences; no lawful power to restrain them from their to God, nor to oblige them to do that which he has forbidden; nor to compel them to anything against conscience; nor to bind their consciences in matters indifferent: or as an argument with subjects to obey the commands of their sovereign; since it is not in their power to restrain the spirit and wrath of princes, which is as the roaring of a lion, and as: he messengers of death, (²⁰¹⁶⁴Proverbs 16:14 19:12); particularly to be careful that they do not commit any capital offence, for which sentence may be passed to take away life; when it will not be in their power to retain it; nor rescue themselves out of the hands of justice and the civil magistrate, but must submit. Or else it is to be understood of every man’s spirit at the hour of death, and of the unavoidableness of it, as the next clause explains it; and by “spirit” is meant, either the sensitive soul, the same with the spirit of a beast, without which the body is dead, and is like the wind that passeth away, and ceaseth when the breath is stopped; or the rational soul, the

spirit that is committed to God, and returns to him at death, (^{<0238>}Luke 23:43 ^{<4075>}Acts 7:59) (^{<2120>}Ecclesiastes 12:7). This a man has not power over to dismiss or retain at pleasure; he cannot keep it one moment longer when it is called for and required by the Father of spirits, the Creator of it; he has not power “to restrain”^{f200} it, as in a prison, as the word signifies, as Alshech observes; whence Aben Ezra says, that the spirit or soul in the body is like a prisoner in a prison; but nothing, that attends a man in this life, or he is in possession of, can keep the soul in this prison, when the time of its departure is come; not riches, nor honours, nor wisdom and leaning, nor strength and youth, nor all the force of medicine; the time is fixed, it is the appointment of God, the bounds set by him cannot be passed, (^{<2000>}Ecclesiastes 3:2 ^{<8007>}Hebrews 9:27 ^{<0479>}Genesis 47:29) (^{<1845>}Job 14:5). The Targum is,

“no man has power over the spirit of the soul to restrain the soul of life, that it might not cease from the body of man;”

and to the same sense Jarchi,

“to restrain the spirit in his body, that the angel of death should not take him;”

neither [hath he] power in the day of death; or “dominion”^{f201}; death strips a man of all power and authority, the power that the husband has over the wife, or parents over their children, or the master over his servant, or the king over his subjects; death puts down all power and authority: it is an observation of Jarchi’s, that David after he came to the throne is everywhere called King David, but, when he came to die, only David, (^{<1000>}1 Kings 2:1); no king nor ruler can stand against death any more than a beggar; up man is lord of death any more than of life, but death is lord of all; all must and do submit to it, high and low, rich and poor; there is a day fixed for it, and that day can never be adjourned, or put off to another; and as man has not power to deliver himself in the day of death, so neither his friend, as the Targum, nor any relation whatever;

and [there is] no discharge in [that] war; death is a warfare as well as life, with which nature struggles, but in vain; it is an enemy, and the last that shall be destroyed; it is a king, and a very powerful one; there is no withstanding him, he is always victorious; and there is no escaping the battle with him, or fleeing from him; a discharge of soldiers in other wars is sometimes obtained by interest, by the entreaty of friends, or by money; but

here all cries and entreaties signify nothing; nor does he value riches, gold, or all the forces of strength; (see ^{<10128>}2 Samuel 12:18 ^{<18369>}Job 36:19); under the old law, if a person had built a new house, or married a wife, or was faint hearted, he was excused and dismissed; but none of these things are of any avail in this war, (^{<6316>}Deuteronomy 20:5,6,8); captives taken in war are sometimes dismissed by their conquerors, or they find ways and means to make their escape; but nothing of this kind can be done when death has seized on the persons of men. Some render it, there is “no sending to” or “in [that] war”^{f202}; there is no sending forces against death to withstand him, it is to no purpose; there is no sending a message to him to sue for a peace, truce, or reprieve; he will hearken to nothing; there is no sending one in the room of another, as Jarchi observes,

“a man cannot say, I will send my son, or my servant;”

no surrogation is allowed of in this case, as David wished for, (^{<10853>}2 Samuel 18:33). Aben Ezra interprets it, no armour, and so many interpreters; and so the Targum;

“nor do instruments of armour help in war;”

in this war: in other wars a man may put on a helmet of brass and a coat of mail, to protect and defend him, or throw darts and arrows; but these signify nothing when death makes his approach and attack;

neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it; or “the masters of it”^{f203}; that is, from death; neither Satan the wicked one, as Jerom, who is wickedness itself, and with whom wicked men are confederate, can deliver them from death; nor sinners the most abandoned deliver themselves, who have made a covenant with it, and an agreement with hell, (^{<23815>}Isaiah 28:15,18); such who are masters of the greatest wicked craft and cunning, and who devise many ways to escape other things, can contrive none to escape death; nor will riches gotten by wickedness deliver the owners of them from death; (see ^{<3002>}Proverbs 10:2 11:4); This sense is mentioned by Aben Ezra, and not to be despised.

Ver. 9. *All this have I seen*, etc.] Observed, taken notice of, and thoroughly considered; all that is said above, concerning the scarcity of good men and women, the fall of our first parents, the excellency of wisdom, the necessity and advantage of keeping the king’s commandment, the time and manner of doing it, the evil consequences that follow an

inattention to these things, ignorance of what is to come, and the unavoidable-ness of death;

and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun; not so much to mechanic works and manual operations performed by men, as to moral or immoral works, and chiefly the work of Providence with respect to good and bad men, the consequence of which were the following observations;

[there is] a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt; or “the man ruleth over men”^{f204}; for this is not to be understood of private rule in families, of the parent over his children, or master over his servant, but of a king over his subjects; who is the man, the principal man in the kingdom; and such a man ruling in an arbitrary and tyrannical way is to his own detriment in the issue. So Rehoboam; by his oppressive government, lost ten tribes out of twelve. Some have lost their whole kingdoms, and come to an untimely end; as well as ruined their immortal souls. Some render it “to his hurt”^{f205}; to the hurt of those that are ruled, when it should be for their good, the protection of their persons and properties; but instead of that they lay heavy burdens upon them, take away their property, and injure and insult their persons. So the Targum,

“to do ill to him.”

But Jarchi interprets it of the king himself. Some take it in both senses; and so it is usually in fact, that wicked princes rule to their own hurt, and the hurt of their subjects.

Ver. 10. *And so I saw the wicked buried*, etc.] Or “truly”^{f206}, verily, as the Targum, this is matter of fact; or “then I saw”, as Aben Ezra and others, upon applying his heart to every work; or when he observed particularly wicked magistrates, he took notice that some of them continued in their power until death, and died in their beds, and were carried to their graves in great pomp and state, and interred in a very magnificent manner, when they deserved no burial at all, but, as King Jeconiah, to be buried with the burial of an ass;

who had come and gone from the place of the holy; which most understand of the same persons, of wicked magistrates buried, who kept their posts of honour and places of power and authority as long as they lived; and went to and came from the courts of judicature and tribunals of justice, in great state and splendour; where they presided as God’s

vicegerents, and therefore called the place of the holy, (¹⁸³⁰Psalm 82:1,6); or though they were sometimes deposed, yet they were restored again to their former dignity; or though they died and were buried, yet in a sense rose again in their children that succeeded them, so Aben Ezra: but it seems better to understated it of other persons, and render the, words thus, “and they came, and from the place of the holy”, or “the holy place they walked”^{f207}; that is, multitudes came to attend the funeral of such rich and mighty men, and walked after or followed the corpse; and ever, the priests and Levites from the temple made a part of the funeral procession, and walked in great solemnity from thence to the place of interment, which was usually without the city;

and they were forgotten in the city where they had done; all their evil deeds were forgotten, their acts of oppression and injustice, as if they had never been done by them. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions are, “and they were praised in the city”; panegyrics upon them were written and rehearsed, monuments were erected to their honour, with large encomiums of them; and so it may be read by the change of a letter; and Jarchi says, do not read “forgotten”, but “praised”; and so he says it is interpreted by their Rabbins. The whole may be considered in a very different view thus “but then I saw”, etc. such arbitrary rulers die, and laid in the grave, one after another, and their names have been buried in oblivion, and never remembered more in the city where they have exercised so much power and authority. The latter part of the text is by many understood of good men, and rendered thus, “and” or “but [on the contrary] they were forgotten in the city where they had done right”^{f208}; their persons and their good deeds were remembered no more; but this seems contrary to (¹⁸³⁶Psalm 112:6 ²⁰⁰⁷Proverbs 10:7). The Targum paraphrases the whole thus;

“and in truth I have seen sinners that are buried and destroyed out of the world, from the holy place where the righteous dwell, who go to be burned in hell; and they are forgotten among the inhabitants of the city; and as they have done, it is done to them;”

this [is] also vanity; the pompous funeral of such wicked magistrates.

Ver. 11. *Because sentence [against] an evil work is not executed speedily*, etc.] Any evil work done by magistrates, or others, against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and is threatened with his vengeance; the decree is gone forth, the sentence is passed, God is determined upon

punishment; but there is a delay of it, he exercises patience and longsuffering to answer some end of his, both towards his own people and the wicked; as well as to display some of his own perfections; but because so it is, the judgment comes not at once;

therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil; or their “heart is full to do evil”^{f209}; they have not only a fulness of sin in them naturally as is in every man’s heart; but they are filled with resolution, boldness, and courage, to commit sin, promising themselves impurity from the seeming delay of justice; such an abuse do they make of the patience and forbearance of God; they become more and more hardened in sin and bent upon the commission of it.

Ver. 12. *Though a sinner do evil an hundred times*, etc.] That is ever so many times, a certain number for an uncertain; though he lives in a continued course of sin, being resolved upon the above consideration to give himself a swing to his lusts. The Targum renders it a hundred years; though he should live so long in sin, yet at last should be accursed (^{אמרי} Isaiah 65:20). This and what follows are said to check the boldness and presumption of the sinner upon the patience of God; and to make the people of God easy under the delay of justice, and the prosperity of the wicked;

and his [days] be prolonged: or rather, “and he prolongs unto him”^{f210}; that is, God prolongs unto him, not days only, but the execution of the sentence against his evil works; or defers his wrath and punishment; so Jarchi,

“and the holy blessed God prolongs to him, and does not take vengeance on him;”

and to this purpose is the Targum,

“and from the Lord is given to him space to return;”

yet surely I know; from the word and promise, and from experience, having observed it in a multitude of instances, which have abundantly confirmed the truth;

that it shall be well with them that fear God; not with a servile but filial fear, with a holy, humble, fiducial, affectionate, and an obediential fear; not through any terrible apprehension of his majesty, his judgment, his wrath

now and hereafter; but under a sense of his being and perfections, and especially his mercy, grace, and goodness: it is well with such persons in all things; with respect to things temporal they shall not want what is proper for them; and with respect to things spiritual they are interested in the love, grace, and mercy of God; have much made known to them; are remembered by him; the sun of righteousness rises upon them; the eye of God is on them, and his heart towards them, and his hand communicates every needful supply to them; and they are guarded, not only by his angels, but by himself; and it is well with them at all times; in times of public calamity they are either taken from it beforehand, or preserved in it; all afflictions are for their good; it goes well with them at death and judgment; and they will be happy both in the millennium state and in the ultimate glory, So the Targum,

“it shall be well in the world to come with them that fear the Lord;”

(see ^{<1347>}Psalm 34:7-9 31:15 ^{<6118>}Revelation 11:18); with this compare (^{<2180>}Isaiah 3:10,11); it is added,

which fear before him: whose fear is not hypocritical, but sincere and hearty; not in show only, but in reality; not the precepts of men, and as before them, but as the sight of God; having always a sense of omniscience and omnipresence before them; and especially this fear is exercised by them when they are his house, in the assembly of his saints, attending his word and ordinances: or “which fear at his presence”; which fills them with a holy awe, as well as with joy and gladness. The Targum is,

“which fear before him, and do his will.”

Ver. 13. *But it shall not be well with the wicked*, etc.] It shall be ill with him; more is designed than is expressed, (^{<2181>}Isaiah 3:11); in life they have no solid peace and comfort; at death they will be turned into at judgment they will hear the awful sentence, “Go, ye cursed”, and will be in torment to all eternity, (^{<4254>}Matthew 25:41);

neither shall he prolong [his] days, [which are] as a shadow: wicked men sometimes do not live out half their days, which, according to the course of nature, and common term of life, they might be thought to live; or if they prolong their days in wickedness, as sometimes they do, (^{<21075>}Ecclesiastes 7:15); yet their days at longest are but a shadow which declines, and is quickly gone; or, however, they do not attain to eternal life, which is sometimes meant by prolonging days, and is length of days for ever and

ever, (²⁵³¹⁰Isaiah 53:10 ¹²¹⁰⁴Psalm 21:4); this they never enjoy; but when the righteous go into life lasting, they go into everlasting punishment. The reason of this is,

because he feareth not before God; the fear of God is not before his eyes, nor in his heart; he goes on in sin without fear of him, boldly and openly commits it, and instead of taking shame for it, or repenting of it, glories in it; stretches out his hand against God, and bids defiance to him, and desires not the knowledge of him, and refuses to obey him The Targum of the whole is,

“and it shall not be well with the wicked, and he shall have no space in the world to come; and in this world his days shall be cut off, and they shall flee and pass away as a shadow, because he fears not God.”

Ver. 14. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth*, etc.] Transacted in this lower world under the sun, through the permission and direction of divine Providence; not that it is a vanity on the part of God, who has wise ends to answer by it, for the good of his people, the trial of their graces, etc. or to bring sinners to repentance, or harden them in sin; but this shows the vanity and uncertainty of all worldly things, and that there is no happiness to be had in them;

that there be just [men], unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: to whom evil comes, as the Targum and Jarchi; who are treated as if they were wicked men, and dealt with in providence as sinners would be, if they had the just desert of their wicked works; being attended with poverty, sickness, and disgrace, and other calamities of life, as Job, Asaph, Lazarus, and others, and yet truly righteous and good men;

again, there be wicked [men] to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous; to whom good things come, as the Targum and Jarchi; who have an affluence of good things, all the outward blessings of life, as health, wealth, honour, long life, etc. as if they had lived the best of lives, and were the most righteous persons upon earth; see (¹⁸¹⁰⁷Job 21:7-13 ¹⁹⁷³⁴Psalm 73:4,5,7 ²¹⁶⁹Luke 16:19);

I said, that this also [is] vanity; this is said, as some think, according to the judgment of corrupt nature; or as it is apprehended by such who do not rightly consider the judgments of God and the wisdom of Providence in the ordering of things to answer good purposes; or rather the sense is, this is

one of the miseries and infelicities of this life, and which demonstrates the emptiness of all things here below, and that the chief good and supreme happiness is not to be had here; but there is and must be a future state, when all things will be set right, and everyone will have and enjoy his proper portion.

Ver. 15. *Then I commended mirth*, etc.] Innocent mirth, a cheerfulness of spirit in whatsoever state condition men are; serenity and tranquillity of mind, thankfulness for what they have, and a free and comfortable use of it; this the wise man praised and recommended to good men, as being much better than to fret at the prosperity of the wicked, and the seemingly unequal distribution of things in this world, and because they had not so much of them: as others; who yet had reason to be thankful for what they had, and to lift up their heads and be cheerful, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God in another world. The Targum interprets it of the joy of the law;

because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; of earthly things there is nothing better than for a man freely and cheerfully, with moderation and thankfulness, to enjoy what God has given him; this is what had been observed before, (~~20024~~ Ecclesiastes 2:24 3:22 5:18); and is not the language of an epicure, or a carnal man, who observing that no difference is made between the righteous and the wicked, that it is as well or better with the wicked than the righteous, determines to give up himself to sensual lusts and pleasures; but it is the good and wholesome advice of the wise man, for men to be easy under every providence, satisfied with their present condition and circumstances, and be cheerful and pleasant, and not distress themselves about things they cannot alter;

for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun; man's present life is under the sun, and is continued as long as it pleases God; though it is but short, rather to be counted by days than years, and is a laborious one; and all that he gets by his labour, enjoyed by him, is to eat and drink cheerfully; and this he may expect to have and continue with him as long as he lives, even food and raiment, and with this he should be content.

Ver. 16. *When I applied mine heart to know wisdom*, etc.] The nature and causes of things; the wisdom of God in his providence, and the grounds

and reasons of his various dispensations towards the children of men: the Targum interprets it, the wisdom of the law;

and to see the business that is done upon the earth; either the business of Providence, in dealing so unequally with the righteous and the wicked, before observed; and which is a business very afflictive and distressing for curious persons to look into, not being able to account for it: or the labour and toil of men to get wealth and riches, and to find happiness in them;

(for also [there is that] neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes); or has any sleep in his eyes, through his eager pursuit after worldly things, or, however, has but little; he rises early and sits up late at his business, so close and diligent is he at it, so industrious to obtain riches, imagining a happiness in them there is not: or else this describes persons curious and inquisitive into the affairs of Providence, and the reasons of them; who give themselves no rest, day nor night, being so intent upon their studies of this kind; and perhaps the wise man may design himself.

Ver. 17. *Then I beheld all the work of God*, etc.] Not of creation, but of Providence; took notice of it, contemplated on it, considered it, and weighed it well; viewed the various steps and methods of it, to find out, if possible, at least, some general rule by which it proceeded: but all so various and uncertain,

that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: he can find out that it is done, but not the reason why it is done: the ways of God are in the deep, and not to be traced; they are unsearchable and past finding out; there is a **βαψος**, a depth of wisdom and knowledge, in them, inscrutable by the wisest of men, (^{<49719>}Psalm 72:19 ^{<5113>}Romans 11:33);

because, though a man labour to seek [it] out, yet he shall not find [it]; Noldius and others render it “although”; not only a man that, in a slight and negligent manner, seeks after the knowledge of the works of divine Providence, and the reasons of them; but even one that is diligent and laborious at it is not able to find them out; they being purposely concealed by the Lord, to answer some ends of his;

yea, further, though a wise [man] think to know [it], yet shall he not be able to find [it]; a man of a great natural capacity, such an one as Solomon himself, though he proposes to himself, and determines within himself to find it out, and sets himself to the work, and uses all the means and methods he can devise, and imagines with himself he shall be able to find

out the reasons of the divine procedure, in his dispensations towards the righteous and the wicked; and yet, after all, he is not able to do it. The Targum is,

“what shall be done in the end of days;”

wherefore it is best for a man to be easy and quiet, and enjoy what he has in the best manner he can, and submit to the will of God.