

I Intro. (June 8, 2008)

Solomon began here commenting on the benefits of wisdom and how it helps a man to understand things that would remain a conundrum for the average person (Ecc. 8:1). Then he turned his attention to one's relationship with the king and the responsibility to submit to his authority (8:2-4).

"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 (Prov. 14:35; 16:14; 20:2)."¹

II The Authority of Government (Ecc. 8:1-4)

A. The benefits of wisdom (8:1)

1. (vs. 1) The wisdom is probably to be understood in relationship to the king. "Because of his wisdom a wise person knows how to act graciously and avoid brash behavior which would lead to his harm (Prov. 14:35)."² We have a rhetorical question here once again, one of Solomon's favorite tools for communication: "Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter?" That could be broken down into two questions as in the NIV, "Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things?"³ Though he was hard-pressed to find wisdom in 7:23 of the sort that could answer life's deepest questions, yet here he acknowledges it again. He does not really answer the question, of course, and the answer may not seem that obvious even if the question is rhetorical. Perhaps the point is that such people are not common. They are not, but on the other hand as the rest of the verse makes clear, they do exist.

The figure that a "man's wisdom illumines him" seems to indicate that when he needs understanding and insight, wisdom provides it like sunshine flooding over the surface of something making it clearly visible. Moreover, when a matter has been weighing heavily on a person, perhaps in relation to some serious matter before the king, producing this "stern face" in view of potential satisfaction before the king, then the wisdom that "illumines him" brings about the understanding

that he needs at just the right moment. The king is satisfied and the one with the insight now has a face that "beams." "One's facial and general appearances reflect wise behavior."⁴ See Numbers 6:25.

B. Submit to the king (8:2-4)

1. (vs. 2) Solomon was a king and he obviously knew how matters were supposed to work in relation to the king: "Keep the command of the king." That was not just a Solomonic perspective. It was also the divine perspective; "because of the oath before God." This oath reflected the commitment of the king's servant upon taking his post. Even today public servants take the oath of office. "The oath of God is an oath of allegiance to a government made in the name of God. The man who appears before the king must be very careful in his conduct."⁵ In accordance with Rm. 13 with which this passage is an OT parallel, *all* people have an obligation to submit to divinely appointed authority.

2. (vs. 3) The expression, "Do not be in a hurry to leave him," makes good sense in light of ancient monarchies. To try to hastily leave one's position in ancient government raised suspicions of evil motives on the part of the one wishing to move on to another position. So "He must never appear overly anxious to depart, lest the king should suspect some intrigue,"⁶ which is a "secret or underhand scheme; a plot."⁷

Just such a plot might be in view in the expression, "Do not join in an evil matter." This might well be a conspiracy to carry out a coup d'état, which by definition is, "A brilliantly executed stratagem; a masterstroke."⁸ But these things seldom work. Those in power generally prevail, "for he," the king, "will do whatever he pleases."

Some writers, including Leupold⁹, take the reference in the term "king" to be to God as the Ruler of the nation of Israel, and the oath to be to the oath that God swore to place one of David's descendants on the throne (Ps. 89:35). So Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say that the king is

¹John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 996.
²Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, 996.
³The Holy Bible : New International Version, electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984. Ec 8:1.

⁴Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 8:1.
⁵KJV Bible Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994. 1273.
⁶KJV Bible Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994. 1273.
⁷*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.
⁸*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.
⁹KJV Bible Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994. 1273.

“Jehovah, peculiarly the king of Israel in the theocracy; Ec 8:3, 4, prove it is not the earthly king who is meant.”¹⁰ This is supposedly proven because of the statement, “he will do whatever he pleases,” which they say could not be said of *any* mere man. However, the expression, “will do,” which seems illimitable, would better be translated, “he *can* do,”¹¹ which simply means that as king, he has been granted the authority to do with underlings as he decides. This is in keeping with Rm. 13 as well.

4. (vs. 4) The statement, “Since the word of the king is authoritative,” has been assumed true throughout the discussion. We know from Rm. 13 et al that this authority is divinely apportioned. There is no authority except from God. So it is in defiance of both the king and God who installed him to challenge that authority and say to him, “What are you doing?” It is to establish oneself as king to challenge the king with such, “who do you think you are?” kinds of questions.

III Conc.

How does this discussion fit in to a democratic society? Here people get into office by a vote of the people, but once they are in, it would appear that we have the same obligation to submit to them as ancient Israel had to submit to their king. To try to treasonously undermine our government carries the same risks as attempting to overthrow the king carried in ancient times. Use wisdom, and do not do it!

¹⁰Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown. A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. Ec 8:2.

¹¹Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.