

I Intro. (Aug. 3, 2008)

We have the futility of the wicked not being punished quickly for their evil deeds (Ecc. 8:10-12a). He also affirmed that the wicked will face judgment, but sometimes it does not happen when one would expect it (8:12b-15). These things are beyond man's ability to understand (8:16-17).

II Futility Abounds, Yet Some Things Are to Be Preferred (Ecc. 8:10-16).

A. The futility of the wicked not being punished quickly for their evil deeds (8:10-12a).

1. (vs. 10) Spilling over from his experience of observing "a man" exercising "authority over *another* man to his hurt," Solomon thought of the success of "the wicked" whom he had "seen...buried." However this death and burial took place only after a mostly unimpeded life of prominence and importance in the nation of Israel to the point acceptance in sacred circles, going "in and out from the holy place," that is, "the temple,"¹ while receiving "praise in the city where they did this," as the NIV translates it, which is accepted by Dr. Glenn.² "Now that he is gone, people praise him for his piety in the very city where he used to carry on his crooked schemes. Religion can be a façade to cover up dishonesty."³

Darby translates it, "And I have also seen the wicked buried and going away; and such as had acted rightly went from *the* holy place, and were forgotten in the city. This also is vanity."⁴ The Amplified Bible translates the phrase with the term "forgotten" as follows, "and they are [praised and] forgotten in the city where they had done such things,"⁵ that is with no accounting for their wrongs ever brought forward.

As Constable sees it, "First, the wicked get an honorable burial. Second, people soon forget the godly."⁶ The NKJV probably captures the sense well, "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."⁷ In other words, as with the Amplified above, they are forgotten in the sense that they were remembered well for their and never brought to account for their hypocrisy. So, of course, "This too is futility."

2. (vs. 11) This verse affirms the biblical concept of deterrents, that is, that when the wicked are properly and efficiently punished for their evil actions, others take note and refrain from such evil actions so that they might avoid such judgment. They were deterred from committing evil themselves by seeing what befell the wicked who perpetrated their crimes. Vs. 10 records people who got by with what they did, were praised and then forgotten only after no recalled their corruption or even publicly shamed them for so doing. Years passed and no "sentence" was ever "executed," not to mention "quickly." "Therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil," that is, people naturally and reasonably began to think that they could get by with something. Eventually whole societies of people become corrupt with people completely "given" over to doing "evil." This makes official punishment of the wicked virtually impossible, and everyone has to live behind walls and gates with iron bars on the windows and plenty of guns in the house for protection.

3. (vs. 12a) Wanton wickedness then abounds with the result that "a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may" actually "lengthen his *life*," rather than have it shorten because of his evil deeds.

B. The wicked *will* face judgment, but sometimes it does not happen soon (8:12b-14).

1. (vs. 12b) "These verses," that is, 8:12b-14, "are one long sentence in the Hebrew. Verse 14 is the main clause of a subordinate clause consisting of verses 12b-13 and introduced by the Hebrew particle gam (meaning 'though,' not 'still' or 'yet' as in NASB, KJV; not trans. in NIV) before the words I know."⁸ So for the word, "still," we should substitute "though" and begin a new sentence. Then follows Solomon's confirmation of "the doctrine of retribution."⁹ He says that he knows "that it will be well for those who fear God,

1Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 997.

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. 997.

3MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995. Ec 8:10.

4Darby, John Nelson. The Holy Scriptures : A New Translation from the Original Languages. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1996. Ec 8:10.

5The Amplified Bible, Containing the Amplified Old Testament and the Amplified New Testament. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1987. Ec 8:10.

6Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 8:10.

7The New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982. Ec 8:10.

8Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 997.

9Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

who fear Him openly,” that is, that on earth in time, it will be best to refrain from wickedness and to do God’s will, and not to sneak around doing evil things. Instead, be unashamed of the Lord. Publicly acknowledge Him and publicly do His will. This is based of the idea of living literally “in fear before Him.”

2. (vs. 13) Solomon merely continues his confirmation of the principle of retribution. Yes, the righteous will be blessed for godly living, “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.” This is simply the writer’s way of saying that the “lives” of wicked “will be shortened.”¹⁰ This is certainly a biblical principle: “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened” (Prov. 10:27). It is certainly a NT principle as well (Eph. 6:3). Generally those who live a corrupt life, live a shortened life, and those who live righteously, live longer.

3. (vs. 14) Yet, “there is futility which is done on the earth,” as noted by Solomon who completes his long sentence begun in vs. 12b. What is that futility? “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.” Righteous people have calamities strike them down which they most certainly do not deserve. The best known example of this in the OT is Job, but the consummate example in all of history is none other than Jesus Himself who went about doing good as the Creator and Savior of men, but who was crucified for it. On the other hand, and this is what really provokes a man of honor, there are men who practice evil, but things seem to go smoothly for them as if they had performed the good deeds of a godly man. Solomon’s response: “I say that this too is futility.” This is his way of saying that he simply cannot make sense out of this.

4. (vs. 15) Despairing of a solution, Solomon “commended pleasure,” which ironically he had already concluded was also “vanity and striving after wind” (2:10-11). Nevertheless, he advised that “there is nothing good for a man

under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry.” This is not hedonism, “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.”¹¹ Not only that, but it will equip and sustain a man in the midst of “his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.” Though a man will not be able to answer many of life’s enigmas, yet life can and should be enjoyed anyway. This is still pleasing to the Lord.

C. There are things are beyond man’s ability to understand (8:16-17).

1. (vs. 16) “Solomon closed his treatment of the enigma of contradictions in divine retribution much as he had concluded his discussions on the significance of adversity and prosperity (7:1-14) and on the significance of righteousness and wisdom (7:15-29), namely, by acknowledging man’s ignorance of God’s ways (cf. 7:14b, 28a).”¹²

He gave his utmost effort to grasp these things, that is, how the wicked prosper, and how the righteous suffer undeservedly in this world. He “gave” his “heart,” or mind, “to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night).” I can relate to that! But the undertaking was monumental and overwhelming.

2. (vs. 17) In his pursuit of wisdom, Solomon “saw every work of God,” that is, He was generally aware of all that was going on around him, but that does not equal understanding. He had to conclude “that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun,” an expression equal to “every work of God.” He acknowledged that *at best*, man remains largely “ignorant of God’s work.”¹³ We see Solomon’s unparalleled effort again in the expression, “Even though man should seek laboriously.” The “wise man” might be tempted to “say, ‘I know,’” but that

¹¹Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, ().

¹²Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

¹³Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 997.

¹⁰Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

does not mean that he does know. “No matter how brilliant he is, he will not be able to find answers to all the questions.”¹⁴ For at times “he cannot discover,” an expression repeated essentially three times in this verse. In 7:23 Solomon said, “I tested all this with wisdom, *and* I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me.”

III Conc.

Thus Solomon “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”¹⁵ all that God is doing in this world.

In Romans 11:33-36, Paul said, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.”

¹⁴William MacDonald; edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

¹⁵*Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, ().