

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

"Who Is A Wiseman?"

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Introduction

1. The entire second section of the book (chaps. 7-12) provides some conclusions and comments on why life is probably worth living after all. Heavy emphasis is given to proverbs and maxims which are often disconnected.

2. It is true that wisdom is given a high place with the author. Often things are outside his realm to understand (7:23, 24), but nonetheless, wisdom is extolled. It is not totally obtainable, but to be sought.

3. The incomparable superiority of the wise man is advanced (v. 1). There is none like him among the sons of men. No one understands like the wise man. He knows how to unfold and explain difficult things. He gets to the bottom of a matter. Furthermore, no one looks like a wise man. He shines in his face because wisdom is related to folly as light is to darkness. Furthermore, this brightness is related to a boldness which causes him to lack bashfulness in favor of intellectual superiority over the common ranks.

4. Such wisdom as outlined (v. 1) provides certain items of understanding. Here are some of them:

1. Relative to KINGS vv. 1-9.

a. Fidelity to king vv. 1-4. Interestingly, Solomon connects obedience to the king with an oath to God. Hence, it becomes a religious item (v. 2). There may be a subtle hint of Solomon's own concerns for people toward himself. He warns and exhorts concerning thoughtless avoidance of duty to the king (v. 3). It is best to avoid evil with the king. The king has a sovereignty which is not to be denied. He does "whatsoever pleases him" (v. 3). So forceful are his thoughts on this that he actually uses terms applied elsewhere to God to show the king's high place (cf. Isa. 45: 9; Dan. 4:32; and Job 9:12 with v. 4).

b. Problem with king vv. 5-7. The heart of the wise man who quietly sits it out under dynastic oppression will come to the knowledge that there is a time when oppression ends and it will suffer punishment (v. 5). This wise man will see there is a terminus and judicial decision. This meaning of the verse (5) is complemented by a series of four grammatically connected items in vv. 6, 7:

1) There is with God a time for everything (v. 6a).

2) Wickedness becomes great; judgment comes suddenly (v. 6b).

3) Judged man doesn't know what happened to him (v. 7a).

4) Judgment comes unexpectedly (v. 7b).

c. Difficulty for king vv. 8, 9. Added to the above mentioned four items, Solomon records four impossibilities (v. 8):

- 1) No one has power over wind/spirit.
- 2) No one has power over death.
- 3) No one has power over war.
- 4) No one has power over wickedness.

The resultant thought is that the ruler who moves in the arena of wickedness will finally suffer hurt himself (v. 9). This is the conclusion of thoughtful search.

2. Relative to GOVERNMENT vv. 10-15.

Two groups may be mentioned as an apparent contradiction (v. 10). The wicked is buried, but the righteous is forgotten in the very place where he performed his holy duties. This is vanity for Solomon. But this apparent difficulty with divine rectitude should not be mistaken (v. 11). There is righteous requital coming. Meanwhile, the heart of the wicked do anything! The sinner seems to sin wantonly and becomes old in it while in good health, yet this is all a shadow. Only the one who fears God will be well in the end (vv. 12, 13). To enforce this conclusion, Solomon notes that there is a contradictory distribution of destinies between the righteous and the wicked. This is vanity. It is only a part of the illusory shadowy side of the present life. There is more than can be seen on the surface! What do you do then? Solomon has but one thought, an ultimatum he has previously given (cf. v. 15 with 2:24; 3:12, 22).

3. Relative to PHILOSOPHIZING vv. 16, 17.

As destinies appear to be mysteries, so the toil on all sides seems to be impossible to understand. Nonetheless, Solomon sought two items: 1) to know wisdom and 2) to use that wisdom to comprehend the events on earth. What he viewed was restlessness--activity night and day. With all of this tormenting restlessness on earth, there is a work of God going on. But the knowledge of this work of God is beyond man's understanding. The highest problems of life remain unsolved.

Conclusion Solomon has come again to a dead end. Common sense leads nowhere! There are mysteries unsolved. What do you do? Turn to the Lord. Why? Because it is not in man that walks to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23). He can do what you cannot do (Prov. 3:5, 6). Hallelujah!