

Though there is no “therefore,” “and,” “but,” or “in consequence,” in verse one, there is still a very close tie between the seventh and the eighth chapters. The terms “wise” and “wisdom” is found thirteen times in the seventh chapter. The scope of wisdom in the seventh chapter centered on practical applications coupled with the benefits of wisdom and limitations that “life under the sun” sometimes places upon it. Remember that he is still heading to the conclusion that the “time and chance” sometimes make even wisdom of no value (Ecc 9:11-12). He offered the following observations in the previous chapter:

- The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning 4
- Listen to the rebuke of a wise man 5
- Oppression makes a wise man mad 7
- Not wisdom to say former days were better 10
- Wisdom is an advantage 11
- Wisdom is protection 12
- wisdom preserves life 12
- Do not be overly wise. 16
- Wisdom strengthens a wise man 19
- I tested all this with wisdom, 23
- I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. 23
- I directed my mind seek wisdom and an explanation, 25

The opening words of the eighth chapter make it clear that Koheleth is not yet finished with practical applications and limitations to wisdom. Though man has sought out many schemes and inventions (7:29), which has made the true use of wisdom a frustrating and lonely experience, this wisdom of God is still a great benefit “under the sun.” The chapter can be summarized:

1. Koheleth sets wisdom as a precious jewel into gold. It is a most precious possession bringing wonderful benefits to the heart and soul of those who possess it. Yet even with wisdom, there will be no escape from certain events in life, and there will still be circumstances which even wisdom cannot explain, understand or modify
2. Difficulties and troubles with civil government are inevitable. When the king’s expectations stray from the path of wisdom what is to be done? What is the course of wisdom when government allows or demands what wisdom condemns if we do not have to personally participate in them? **8:2-8**
3. Though civil government may fail to do its duty and men are set to do evil, though the wicked are buried and forgotten with seemingly no consequences from civil government or from God, it will be well with those who fear God and it will not be well with the wicked. **8:9-13**
4. The vanity (futility) of “life under the sun’s” incomprehensible moral workings. Righteous men receive consequences under the sun that the wicked are due and wicked receive the rewards of the righteous. Since there is often no consistency to life’s rewards/punishments all good men can do is enjoy each day as it comes as a gift from God and expect no more. **8:14-15**
5. There is no formula to “life under the sun!” No key to success! No wisdom or lifestyle that will guarantee long life or permanent success! Man can’t find it out! Though men may claim the wisdom to know it, they cannot find it out! Sooner or later, the claims of those who think they have it all figured out will be proven false! 8:16-17

1. Who is like a wise man?

Koheleth now sets up the perfect man “under the sun,” and asks who can compare themselves favorably or at least equally with him. Who in their own mind is like such a man? “Wisdom is the *“mastery of the art of living in accordance with God’s expectations.”* It describes one who *“fearing God, lives in accordance with what God expects,”* and can apply *“wisdom to every situation in life.”* Who is like that? Who has mastered the art of living “under the sun” in accord with God’s expectations as set forth in His Word? Who can apply wisdom to every situation of “life under the sun?” With all its varied twists and turns, and unexpected rises and falls, truly, who is like a wise man.

Yet This is the goal! The end that Koheleth and all of us ought to be striving for. Being a wise man is a goal worthy of striving to attain. There really is no a higher attainment to be found. And this is a universal truth. True

both “under the sun” and in eternity, the life that now is and the one that is to come. Wisdom is the greatest and most valuable of all possessions.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. 14 For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. Pr 3:13-18

Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 “Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you. 7 “The beginning of wisdom {is:} acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. 8 “Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. 9 “She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.” Pr 4:5-9

“Take my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. 11 “For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things can not compare with her. Pr 8:10-11

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

Since Hebrew poetry rhymes thoughts this is the Holy Spirit’s elaboration on what a truly wise man can do. He knows the interpretation of a thing. The term “interpretation” is defined:

6592 peshet- interpretation, solution

... to explain, interpret, to make interpretation... (Wilson p 231)

When one can find the “*solution*” and then “*explain*” it he is wise. All that comes into one’s life whether it is a blessing or an adversity requires careful thought about how to deal with it. It is often perplexing sometimes even deciding if something is a blessing or a temptation, an adversity, or an opportunity to grow. God gives the solutions and explanations to these things in His word, but man needs wisdom to be able to find them and properly apply them to these circumstances as they arise. Unfortunately, not all that occurs “under the sun” fits into this. Too many things can only be resolved after this life is over and if we refuse that option by leaving the presence of Jehovah and living only from birth to death, then life becomes a hopelessly entangled enigma. This is what Ecclesiastes has been written to reveal to us.

When one can take all the things of life “under the sun,” the good and the bad, the expected and the unexpected, and interpret them properly in light of eternity in order to take the right course, they have found true wisdom. Note again the definition of wisdom. “*Mastery of the art of living in accordance with God’s expectations.*” When one can do this, he will know the interpretation of a thing. Even the term “know” emphasizes this. It speaks of things that are “*observed*” or “*experienced.*” Knowledge that comes from either “*experience with the senses,*” “*by investigating and proving,*” or “*by reflection and consideration.*” Who is able to do this? Who is able to “*experience with the senses,*” and find the solution and explanation? Who is able to “*by investigating and proving*” come to the solution and explanation. Or, who is able “*by reflection and consideration*” to come to the solution or explanation? The answer is only those who fear God and hearken to His knowledge.

A man’s wisdom makes his face shine,

A careful review of the definition makes it clear that this is not a literal shining. It describes things that “*become light,*” “*become bright,*” “*become lighted up,*” and “*give light.*”

215 'owr- to be light or to become light, to shine ... to shine (used of the sun) 3) to become bright b) (in the Niphal) 1) to be illuminated 2) to become lighted up c) (in the Hiphil) 1) to give light, shine (used of the sun, the moon, and the stars) 4) to enlighten (used of the eyes, His law, etc.) 5) to make (cause) to shine (used of the face) BDB)

Since a face cannot literally shine (like the sun), it is clear that this must be something that affects the emotions, mood, and attitude and then reflects upon the countenance. A man’s face will change from being stern to shining based upon an upbeat mood, optimism, and a conviction that all will be well. This is what “*mastery of the art of living in accordance with God’s expectations.*” will do for us. When a man has this kind of wisdom will affect his mood, emotions and countenance. Wilson’s definition brings this out.

“... to be or become light, to shine, or to be bright; of the eyes of one fainting when he recovers; to lighten, to make light, to illuminate; to make light one’s countenance, to cause it to shine, i.e. to cheer, to enliven; spoken especially of God, as regarding men with serene and propitious countenance...”

Other places where this term is used in the Old Testament. Have the idea of having a gracious look that brings

blessings.

“Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.’ 27 “So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them.” Num 6:23-7:1

Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant; save me in Thy lovingkindness. Ps 31:16 (see also Ps 67:1; 119:135; Isa 60:1)

The children of Aaron were commanded to bless the children of Israel with a specific statement. This statement was to remind them that they were to look at the LORD as someone who would bless and keep them, and someone they could look up to as one with a face that was shining down upon them and whose countenance was lifted up toward them. What else could we think of in such a situation than a face that is glad to see us and happy to help. With this as the background of the term, when a man’s face is made to shine, it refers first to a disposition of contentment and happiness, and secondly a countenance that is ready to bless, love and help others, seeking their highest good, and striving to be kind and compassionate to all. This will not only makes a face shine, it will also make one like God.

And the sternness of his face is changed.

The sternness of a face is open to some interpretation. It is translated “sternness” in the NKJ and NAS, “hardness” in the ASV, “boldness” in the KJV, and “hard appearance” in the NIV. The difficulty in the translation is due to the fact that the term is elsewhere translated “might,” “strength,” “power” “strong,” etc. Of it’s 91 uses in the OT, this is the only one where it is applied to the face.

5797 `oz or (fully) `owz- might, strength a) material or physical b) personal or social or political (BDB)

5797 `oz(oze); or (fully) `owz(oze)...strength in various applications(force, security, majesty, praise) (Strongs)

How does a face show “might” and “strength?” How does it show “force” or “majesty?” Since wisdom changes or alters this face, it is obviously not a compliment. This must therefore be the strength of pride, arrogance, selfishness and boldness. The countenance of a self-centered fool gradually giving way to the countenance of a wise and unselfish sage. Wisdom so tempers the understanding and outlook on life that it is seen on the face.

As new ways of looking at things replace old ways and one sees clearly their place in God’s creation regarding what they can and cannot enjoy, what they can and cannot change, what they have to hope for in the future, they take on an entirely different outlook on life. This has a profound affect on their temperament and personality, and thus on their countenance and demeanor.

Wisdom in our Dealings with Rulers

Koheleth has done deep research into many areas of life. He now offers advice to the righteous who want to live “under the sun” in the presence of Jehovah and in His favor. The subject of rulers and oppression has already been discussed several times in the book.

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. Ecc 4:1-2

If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. Ecc 5:8

For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart. Ecc 7:7

What does a righteous man do when he sees oppression in the courts(judgment), oppression in taxes, oppression in the way in which the ruler(dictator) chooses to live his life and exercise his authority over his subjects. When the people asked for a king God warned them of the severe taxes and conscription they would face. He knew they would regret the day they had chosen a king, but warned them that if they persisted in their rebellion, He would not listen to them then.

So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. And he said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place {them} for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 "And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and {some} to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 "He will also take

your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 "And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give {them} to his servants. 15" And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use {them} for his work. 17 "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 1 Sam 8:10-18

Yet this is the least of the kind of oppression that can occur. Just and wise men often stand in fear and dismay as they watch the wicked movements of civil authority. No nation is immune from it. But what is a righteous man to do in such times? Is it God's desire that His servants play the role of subversives and traitors, trying to overthrow all governments each time they move out of harmony with God's law? Should God's people be in the vanguard of civil disobedience, should they be rebellious and protesting every and any cause they strikes them as being unwise?

2. I counsel you, Keep the king's commandment

This answer may startle us, but it is consistent throughout the Scriptures. God does not want His people involved in subversion and rebellion. They are to submit to all authority whether it is just or unjust, tyrannical or fair. The term "keep" is used in the sense of "*tending and taking care of,*" "*watching over,*" "*observe,*" or with "*another verb ... can signify carefully or watchfully doing that action.*"

shamar 8104, "to keep, tend, watch over, retain." This verb occurs in most Semitic languages (biblical Aramaic attests only a noun formed from this verb). Biblical Hebrew attests it about 470 times and in every period. Shamar means "to keep" in the sense of "tending" and taking care of. So God put Adam "into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" Gen. 2:15... The word also means "to keep" in the sense of "watching over" or giving attention to. David, ironically chiding Abner for not protecting Saul, says: "Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king?" 1 Sam. 26:15. In extended application this emphasis comes to mean "to watch, observe"... Another extended use of the verb related to this emphasis appears in covenantal contexts. In such cases "keep" means "to watch over" in the sense of seeing that one observes the covenant, keeping one to a covenant. God says of Abraham: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment..." Gen. 18:19... When used in close connection with another verb, shamar can signify carefully or watchfully doing that action... In a third group of passages this verb means "to keep" in the sense of saving or "retaining." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Though it is not a verb, but a noun, it appears from the context that it is the king's commandment that is to be carefully or watchfully done. What the king utters are the ideas and plans of his heart. These things must be submitted to by others if they are to be successful "under the sun." This is the same advice that Paul and Peter gave under the New Covenant.

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for {rulers} are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Rom 13:1-6

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe {them,} glorify God in the day of visitation. 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.... 17 Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1 Pet 2:12-14, 17

It is doubtful that there was a more corrupt government than the one Paul and Peter lived under. There were abuses and corruption, immorality and subversion, and even persecution of God's people, yet they were to submit and not subvert. This is God's way. He puts governments in and He will take them out. He does not want us to do anything but carefully observe and keep the commands of "every human institution."

This is why the face of the wise man can shine even under oppression and trying circumstances. It is not his responsibility to try and change such things. Only to obey the commands and regulations. When we understand what God expects us to try and change and what we are not to attempt to change, but leave to him, we can release our own conscience and simply do the best we can.

for the sake of your oath to God.

Loyalty to a king and to a country play a large role in the entire human race. It is a part of natural affection to feel patriotism and love for one's country. Traitors are looked upon as the blackest of characters, and treason is generally punishable by death. Men see it this way and it is true. Many countries demand an oath of loyalty or fealty be taken. Though not all countries require this oath, every man and woman of wisdom who fears God sees this oath as unspoken but firmly established. It is for the sake of this oath (whether expressed or not) that all who live successfully "under the sun" must keep the commands of whatever government they are under. This is what is restated in Romans "there is no authority except from God," "those which exist are established by God," "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God" "are servants of God", "it is a minister of God to you for good," "rulers are servants of God," and in Peter "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake" We do not submit because they are right or wrong, fair or unfair, good or evil. We submit for the sake of the oath, for the sake of God's order, and in submission to God's will in allowing them to be in that position.

3. Do not be hasty to go from his presence.

The differences in the translations here capture the difficulty of the term "presence." It is translated "to leave him" in the NAS and "to go out of his sight" in the KJV. The term is the same one that was translated "face" in verse one. It refers to the face, the presence, and the sight of someone. Just as Cain and Jonah sought to live out of the "presence" (same word as here) of Jehovah

Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Gen 4:16

But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. Jonah 1:3

Neither Cain nor Jonah were able to leave God's presence in any real sense, but they did in their own hearts, by refusing to acknowledge Him as God and submit to Him.

Since the contrast Koheleth is making is between being in the presence of the king or taking one's stand for an evil thing, it appears that loyalty to the king and his commands and taking a stand by his side in allegiance is the real issue. Do not be quick to remove your allegiance and loyalty from the king, do not be quick to take your stand against him. It is not wisdom but folly to violate the king's commands and make oneself an outlaw. It can not lead to happiness, but to a loss of liberty and life.

Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.

It is interesting that "stand" in Hebrew has the same basic and figurative meanings that it does in English. Its primary meaning is "to stand upright" in the sense of being up on one's feet. Its secondary meaning is "to take one's stand," "to be established," be "immovable."

'amad 5975, "to take one's stand; stand here or be there; stand still." Outside biblical Hebrew, where it occurs about 520 times and in all periods, this verb is attested only in Akkadian ("to stand, lean on")... The basic meaning of this verb is "to stand upright." This is its meaning in Gen. 18:8, its first biblical occurrence. It is what a soldier does while on watch 2 Sam. 18:30. From this basic meaning comes the meaning "to be established, immovable, and standing upright" on a single spot; (Vines)

Taking a stand for something implies a commitment in the heart and a decision of the mind to take a position. Koheleth is warning against taking a stand for evil. This is a term that takes in that which is "bad," or even "wicked." It can be "morally evil or hurtful," "bad" or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness." It is also "the antithesis of shalom"

Committing oneself to doing something that is evil and wrong could mean violating any of the laws of the civil government. It could mean deciding to become a thief or a murderer, and thus taking one's stand outside of the law. Though this could be its meaning, there seems to be a much narrower idea here. The evil has something to do with the king being able to do "whatever pleases him" while verse five speaks of someone asking him, "what are you doing?" It appears that the real issue here is that of moral and ethical judgements of right and wrong and of what is best. Things that good men do not always agree upon and which sometimes though the king is obviously wrong in what he is about to do, cannot be convinced otherwise. When such a situation arises, "He does whatever pleases him," "there is power in his word" and "who can say what are you doing?" Though God allows His people the right not to participate, He does not give them the right to overthrow the government! Peter only said "we must obey God rather than men." He did not say You have no right to rule because of what you

did to Jesus. We may pay the price of death for not participating, but we must not pay the price for treason!

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. 14 you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if {anyone suffers} as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. 1 Pet 4:12-16

Regardless of the reason, when the choice is made to stop the king, it is an evil choice. Our nation tolerates civil disobedience, but God does not. We are not to take a stand against the power of any government. Whether it be in a particular matter or to actually overthrow the government is not the issue. Anything that can raise the ire of a king should not be stood up for. It is folly to take a stand on a thing which violates the king's decree and will thus raise his anger. He does whatever pleases him. He can take your possessions, take your family from you, make you a slave. He can put you in prison, he can declare the death sentence upon you. He has unlimited power.

Though those who live in a democracy, may not fear terrible consequences, the quality of allegiance and submission expected by God has not. God still expects our obedience and submission even though the physical threat for disobedience has been removed. God's children must respect his authority and respect those whom he has placed in authority.

4. Where the word of a king is, there is power, And who may say to him, What are you doing?

The world we live in is so foreign to this type of thinking that it is difficult for us to understand it. Yet outside of America, England and Western Europe, it still holds sway. Though we look at this as the abnormal, it has been the norm throughout the history in most nations. The freedom of speech, and other freedoms we enjoy in this nation are the exception and not the rule. So many in this country have allowed this power to go to their head, and make them fools. They do things that ought not to be done because they have been lulled by such security. Yet in many places on earth the authority of a king is supreme. What he says is the rule, and you do not antagonize or in any way anger him. In such places, no one can to him "what are you doing?" When people live in a monarchy, they are wise to submit to the commands of the king no matter how oppressive they are. This is the way to live a tranquil and quiet life in spite of the turmoil around them. Children of God are not afflicted with the foolish notion that everything must be perfect "under the sun." They know that the crooked cannot be made straight and the wanting cannot be numbered (Ecc 1:14-15). They know that there will be oppression and the God sees it and will deal with it. It does not rest with them. They look to the wisdom and power of God in such matters.

5. He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;

This is the most important aspect of all the advice here given. Those who decide on social change, on seeing that oppressive governments are going to be destroyed and that all policies which are unfair are removed are setting themselves up for serious troubles in this life. As in verse three, there is a difficult line to draw. This verse could be taken to teach that at no time should we ever violate the laws of a king. As was pointed out earlier, there are times when we must take a stand for God at whatever cost to ourselves. Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, were placed in such a position and made the right choice, but they did not seek to overthrow the government. They only sought to obey God. So also with Daniel, when told to stop praying to God, he did not seek to overthrow the king or the law, he only did what he knew was right.

But when we find ourselves able to serve God and fulfill our duties, and a circumstance arises we do not agree with, we should keep his command, and leave the rest to God. When it is a matter of injustice or corruption that we are not forced to participate in, then the wisest course is to simply leave it alone and keep the commands of the king. If it can be voted out, if it can be elected out, then do so, if one must disobey the laws of the land to see social change, then a child of God must have no part in it. This is in our own best interests. When an oppressive law or government is in existence, and it has no real affect on our spiritual or moral relationship to God, generally the only thing one can do by fighting it is to bring harm on themselves and their family. There is a time for every purpose under heaven. God will take care of the extreme injustices of men. Leave it to Him.

And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment.

The wise man does not let such oppression sway him from his obedience and loyalty to God and to the civil government under which he lives. The wise man's heart discerns this. His heart discerns both time and judgement. The term time is the same one used back in chapter three

“there is a time for every purpose.” Time means “*a period of time*” “*appointed time*” and “*season.*” It also means an “*appropriate time*” or an “*opportunity.*” It was used over and over in chapter three as “a time to... and a time to ...” The wise man’s heart discerns and understands this. He knows that God has a time for such things to happen and a time to rectify and fix them. This is what allows him to let such things pass, since he knows God does not need his help in such circumstances.

Not only does a wise man understand time and how God works within it, he also understands “judgment.” He discerns that it is God who will take the role of “*sitting as a judge, hearing a case, and rendering a proper verdict.*”

mishpat 4941, "judgment; rights." This noun, which appears around 420 times, also appears in Ugaritic. This word has two main senses; the first deals with the act of sitting as a judge, hearing a case, and rendering a proper verdict. Eccl. 12:14 is one such occurrence: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Mishpat can also refer to the "rights" belonging to someone (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

But there is a time for judgment. The wise man gives place to the time when God deals with injustice and evil. God has told us what He wants His people to do.

'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD. Lev 19:18

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Rom 12:17-19

A wise man knows all this and is patient. He bears wrongs, and is mistreated, but does not seek retribution against the government which passes it upon him. He gives place to the wrath of God. He knows that there is a time when God will deal with it.

6. Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,

This is a universal truth which must be accepted by true children of God who wish to have the wisdom that will make their face shine. God will take care of it in His own time and in His own way. There are too many factors and variables which only God knows for His people to fret over how and when God is going to do something. Mark it down, there is a time and a judgment for every matter. Jesus stresses this in the gospels. It may come here and it may not. It may come in our lifetime and it may not. But one of the absolutes even in life “under the sun” is that there is a time and judgment for every matter.

God has a time and a judgment for every matter. We see how this worked during the time of the apostles in Jerusalem. They knew when they had to take a stand and when they simply had to accept the customs of an oppressive government. They accepted slavery, oppressive taxes, and the confiscation of their possessions. They did not compromise their obedience to God. But through all this they did not seek to overthrow the Jewish or Roman government. Paul accepted his imprisonment, and death, and lived to the very end His own inspired words in Romans 13. He trusted in God with his whole heart, and did not lean on his own understanding.

Though the misery of man increases greatly.

This meaning of this clause rests on the term “though,” which is generally used to give the reason, purpose or time behind a preceding statement. It is translated “because” in the ASV, “therefore” in the KJV, “when” in the NAS, and “though” in the NIV and NKJ.

3588 kiy- a) that; yea, indeed b) when (of time); when, if, though (with a concessive force) c) because, since (causal connection) d) but (after negative) e) that if, for if, indeed if, for though, but if f) but rather, but g) except that h) only, nevertheless I) surely j) that is k) but if l) for though m) forasmuch as, for therefore(BDB)

There are slight differences of meaning in the clause if we take it to be the reason for the preceding instead of the consequence, but only of time. He is either affirming that man must submit to the above even though it increases his misery(NKJ/NIV), or he is stating that there must be a time and a judgment for every matter

“because” the misery of man increases greatly and sooner or later God must act. Since both of these are true and taught elsewhere in Scripture (the former by Paul, Peter, Daniel and Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and the latter in the rich man and Lazarus), it is not of great importance to figure out which one is taught

Suffice it to say that all godly servants of the Lord must do both. They must give place to God’s vengeance knowing that He will repay and yet submit in well doing to a faithful Creator:

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Rom 12:19

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. 1 Pet 4:19

There is therefore no limit to how much men must take. No matter how hostile and oppressive a government might become, God does not want them involved in insurrection. He doesn’t want them breaking laws to some higher end or doing evil that good may come (Rom 3:8). The misery of man can increase greatly. The poverty and sorrow which some live under is testimony to that truth. How much shall be taken until the oath be broken? How much can a dictator do before one can forget the commands of God and take matters into their own hands. Well, though the misery of man increases greatly, he must still continue to be submissive to God. God will take care of the wicked people who have done evil (vengeance), as well as our souls.

7. For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

The last two verses of this section have thoughts with universal application. This makes it tempting to broaden them out to discuss more than the subject of oppression, civil government and the responsibilities of the righteous servant of the Lord when he sees such things. But this must be resisted. The subject has not really changed. He brings it up again in verse nine, “one man rules over another to his own hurt.”

No one knows what tomorrow will bring. The future is veiled and can not be predicted. We simply do not know when or how God is going to intervene. When Habakkuk complained to God about the conditions he was forced to live in, God informed him that he was even then prepared the Chaldeans to destroy Judah (Hab 1:1-17). Moses attempt to overthrow Egypt failed for it was not in God’s time, but 40 years later God came to him to release his people from bondage.

It is futile to interfere with God’s direct workings with civil authorities. Gamaliel’s advice to the Jews fits well here.

And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God. Acts 5:38-39

Since we do not know what will happen, we should never violate God's laws to bring about change. It may fail, and nothing will change except we have become a sinner and an outlaw. It may be that God himself plans a change and our efforts are useless and pointless and simply show rebellion against him. Man does not know what or when things will happen. He does not know what will succeed and what will fail. One thing he knows.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. Prov 3:5-7

Since he does not know what will occur, who can tell him when it will occur? With such limited knowledge, we ought to have the good sense to leave things in the capable hands of God.

8. No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death.

Koheleth now brings up three more reasons why it is futile to interfere in God’s working with the nations. Death is the mightiest of all oppressors. There is no fighting it. When the spirit begins to leave the body, there is no one who has the power to control it. This is a terrible thought the first time one ponders and comprehends it. Yet when one humbles themselves under the mighty hand of God and gives all things into the hands of him who does have the power then once again their face can shine. When Paul faced the oppression of civil government unfairly wielding the greatest of all its power in removing our spirit from the earth through death, he placed his fate into the hands of God.

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. 2 Tim 1:12

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.... 16 At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him {be} the glory forever and ever. Amen. 2 Tim 4:6-18

The man whose face shines through with wisdom has accepted this truth, and lives accordingly. He knows that he cannot the power man wields over his body and spirit but has so adjusted his life that all this is taken into account. We are but vapors appearing for a little while.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. ... 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are {just} a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, {you ought} to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. James 4:10, 14-16

No one is wise who does not take this into account and live in accord with it. No one can control the spirit's departure, and no one has power over the day of their death. They do not know when it will be or how it will be and they cannot select it.

There is no discharge in that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it. The term "discharge" is defined.

"4917 mishlachath, mish-lakh'-ath; fem of 4916; a mission, i.e. (abstr. and favorable) release, or (concr. and unfavorable) an army: - discharge, sending." (Strong p 74)

The idea is that there is no favorable outcome in that war. The fight for the soul in the day of death by the body in order to retain life is always lost. There has never once been a favorable outcome. Though the body fights for life, it cannot win. We must be ready every day for that battle to be lost. Coupled with this truth is the another absolute truth. Wickedness never delivers those who are given to it. It might give a temporary release and truce to those who seek to use it, but always in the end those who use wickedness to deliver and extricate themselves from troubles always bring greater woes upon them. It is folly to choose this path. It may seem good, but it ends in death (Pr. 16:25). Do not select that path for seeking ways out of trouble. It will never succeed. It is as fruitless as seeking to fight death itself.

His point has been powerfully made. It is the responsibility of all men to be loyal and submissive to their government. Even when they oppress and do evil, it is always futile to fight oppression with rebellion or sin. God has a time for everything, and we must submit and humble ourselves under his plan. We do not know what tomorrow will bring and we do not have the power to even keep our own soul from death. We must not pick a fight here for we cannot win it.

Ecclesiastes 8:9-17

August 30, 1998

Verse nine forms the bridge between the thoughts of 1-8 and those of 10-13. He is summing up his thoughts and preparing the reader for what is to come. In the ASV the paragraph break is placed after verse 8, while the NAS places it after verse nine. In all fairness it could go either place. It perfectly sums up what he has just discussed in 1-8, while at the same time it prepares the reader for the next subject.

9. All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun:

The term "seen" has the meaning of "observe," "examine," "discover," or "gain understanding," leading to one's being able to "perceive," "realize," or "get acquainted with" it. In this case, Koheleth has done extensive research (See comments on Ecc 4:1). He has seen examples of all the things spoken of above. He has seen oppressive governments and the misery it brought to men. He has seen men tempted to overthrow a king because they felt it best. He has seen them destroyed because the king was more powerful than they thought. He has seen wise men watching with horror the excesses of kings, but knowing their place waited for the judgment of God.

He has seen examples of the right time for every purpose and judgment coming. He has also seen that often men come to great misery while waiting for that time. He has also observed as man after man fought the battle to retain his spirit and continue his life under the sun and lost.

He also applied his heart to it. This term has a general meaning of “*to deliver, give, place, set up, lay, make, do.*” He took his heart and gave it or set it to ponder and strive to comprehend every work that is done under the sun. It is important to note that he uses “all” and “every” which are both from the same term describing “*the whole*” “*the entirety*” “*everything in a given unit.*”

kol- 3605, “all; the whole.” The noun kol, derived from kalal, has cognates in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, and Moabite. Kol appears in biblical Hebrew about 5,404 times and in all periods. Biblical Aramaic attests it about 82 times.... The word can be used alone, meaning “the entirety,” “whole,” or “all,”... Kol can signify everything in a given unit whose members have been selected from others of their kind: (Vine)

He has seen then the “*entirety*” of what he spoke of above, and applied his heart to “*everything in*” the “*given unit.*” of the works done under the sun that fall under the category of men being over men. His conclusion on the matter is very simple and clear:

There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

Using the same term as found in Chapter Three:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: Ecc 3:1

The term refers either to “*a period of time*” or to “*opportunity*” for something to occur. He is now adding this to the list given there. Just as there is a “*period of time*” and an “*opportunity*” to be born and to die, to have war and to have peace there is also a “*period of time*” and an “*opportunity*” when one man can rule over another. It is a bitter thing to admit and come to understand, but because of the present set of circumstances set in motion because of man’s sin and God’s purpose to redeem as many as possible, “life under the sun” allows for the “*opportunity*” for one man to “*have mastery*” “*dominate*” or “*exercise power over*” another.

7980 shalat- to domineer, to exercise power over, to dominate, to have mastery, to be master, to lord it over a) (Qal) to domineer, to lord it over, to become master b) (Hiphil) 1) to give power of 2) to get mastery of

There are times when a tyrant will rule over another and mistreat and harm him. The phrase “to his own hurt” can be either objective or subjective. It could refer to the hurt that the tyrant inflicts upon a slave, or it can be the hurt that the tyrant receives to himself by being a tyrant. Grammatically either is permissible. The Scriptures also indicate that both are possible. Pharaoh did both. He made the lives of Israel miserable, but his tyrannical reign led to his own destruction along with that of his nation.

And Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?” Ex 10:7

The NIV translates it subjectively(his own hurt) while the NAS translates it objectively(the hurt of others).

All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Ecc 8:9 (NIV)

All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over {another} man to his hurt. Ecc 8:9 (NAS)

Since both are obvious and Scriptural, it seems to make little difference to the context which we choose.

10. Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness,

No matter who strong, mighty or powerful, death suddenly enters the life of the wicked and brings it to a close. Koheleth observed(He again took time to “*examine,*” and “*discover,*” so he could “*gain understanding*”). He observed that wicked people(those who are “*in the wrong,*” because they “*have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrong doing.*”). One who “*does not seek God*” “*challenges God*” “*loves violence,*” and “*oppresses the righteous*” is placed by Jehovah into this category. When such a person is buried, what does one say. All their hopes and dreams were for “life under the sun,” and that life is now gone forever. They have made no preparation for the day of their burial. They have come(had opportunity) and gone(now buried and forever lost the opportunity) from the place of holiness.

This may describe the nature of their wickedness. They have come and gone from the holy place. It may be affirming that their wickedness is the fact that like most of those in Israel, at one time they had been righteous and then left it. Other passages certainly reflect this truth. In the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27-28, God makes it very clear that those who have been given great blessings are going to be held to a higher accountability. This is summarized by Peter:

For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, {returns} to wallowing in the mire." 2 Pet 2:20-22

Another possibility is that this clause does not describe their wickedness, but instead simply states the fact. They died in wickedness and were forever removed from the holy place. They will never have the opportunity for repentance again.

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, the overall context of this passage(8:9-13)is that the outward distinctions between the righteous and the wicked are often blurred "under the sun." The moral government of God is often not clearly discernable when only looking at the events of this life. Sometimes wicked people enjoy "life under the sun" to the full without problem or difficulty right up to the end(Ps 73:1-28). Sometimes the righteous die young with little or no enjoyment of the things of life, or even suffer more than the wicked(Heb 11:35-40; 12:1-13)

This leads to perplexing questions and conclusions which he asks in succession. The basic idea appears to me to revolve around the inequity of the death of truly wicked men. They die, and they leave this world and the evil they have done is forgotten, and it appears that there is no real retribution whatsoever. This is a vanity and it leads to the next statement that if justice is not speedily executed, the hearts of men become even more fixed to do evil. Yet though this is seen on the surface, the final conclusion in 12-13 is that it is not true! Though it be multiplied a hundredfold, it will never be that it will be well with the wicked, but the end of the righteous will always be well. This is a fundamental truth which is to be fixed into the hearts of all the godly. There will certainly be times when it does not appear to be true, but never let it go, because before the end of time, it will be proven to be abundantly true.

With this overall context in mind, what meaning shall we understand Solomon to be expressing here? The wicked are often seen being buried. A man is killed in the commission of a crime, a man is killed before he can be brought to justice. Tyrants die before their crimes catch up with them. So many wicked people committing so many varieties of wickedness upon their fellow man. Yet so often all one sees is their burial. Then, in spite of all their crime and evil, they are forgotten:

and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity.

The unfairness of this is driven home again and again even in our own day. A man commits a terrible crime against humanity. He is not caught or punished, he dies and is forgotten. It seems that he got away with it. It is not fair that some men can live in wickedness and do evil things, and then simply be forgotten. They die without punishment, and then their evil is forgotten as though it never happened. Where is the justice in that? Where is the retribution? It is obvious that "life under the sun" brought no retribution and never can! They are gone! This is a vanity! A fact that once again reveals the futility, the emptiness, the meaninglessness of "life under the sun." For the wicked to "get away" with their crimes through death and then not even have the penalty of being remembered for their infamy is a great vanity. It is a difficult and sore trial to the righteous. All should be punished for their crimes! They should be made to pay for their evil. Yet they don't. They die just like the righteous and are forgotten just as the righteous and are buried right next to the righteous. There doesn't seem to be any retribution. It is vanity.

11. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,

This passage is true in every realm of life. From the small company which tolerates evil doing without retribution, to the city, the state, the country, the church, or the home, any time evil works go unpunished, or are not speedily punished, a very unfortunate set of circumstances arises. The term "sentence" is defined.

“6599 PITHGAM... a (judicial) sentence;- a decree, sentence.” (Strong p 97)

This is the first step. The person has been declared guilty, and the punishment has been determined. It is obvious that this person is guilty(wicked). The sentence has been passed. The penalty has been decreed. they have in fact done an evil. They have violated what is good by being “*morally evil or hurtful*,” either with “*evil words*,” “*evil thoughts*,” or “*evil actions*.” Someone has assessed their conduct, passed judgment and set the penalty. It has not yet been “executed.” This is a very common word(used over 2600 times). It signifies what one can “*make*” “*do*” or “*create*.” Generally though it conveys the idea of something one produces.

6213 `asah- 1) to do, to fashion, to accomplish, to make a) (Qal) 1) to do, “to make, do, create.” This root also occurs in Moabite and Phoenician (only in a proper name). It occurs in early extra-biblical Hebrew, Hebrew, and about 2,625 times in the Bible (in all periods). It should be distinguished from the second sense of `ashah, “to squeeze.” In its primary sense this verb represents the production of various objects. ...” (Vines)

The sentence has not yet been produced, created or brought into being. It has been decreed, but not executed. The real issue here centers on the time frame. It needs to be done speedily if the evil affects of the next phrase are to be avoided. It must be done “*promptly*,” “*hastily*,” “*quickly*,” and “*swiftly*.”

“4120 MEHERAH... properly a hurry; hence (adv.) promptly: hastily, quickly, shortly, soon, make with speed, swiftly.” (Strong p 62)

Once the sentence has been passed, it must be carried out in a hurry. There is a great need for this if it is to have the necessary impact. This too is true on whatever level of discipline that must be meted out. When civil government determines that a citizen has committed a crime and needs to be punished and the punishment is set, it is imperative that the sentence be carried out in a hurry. When parents determine that a child is guilty, and has passed sentence on the activity, the punishment needs to be meted out promptly. If it is not done quickly then a terrible consequence will follow.

therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

The term therefore is made up of two terms. They are combined many times in the Old Testament to emphasize a result or consequence.

5921 `al- as a preposition: 1) upon, on the ground of, according to, on account of, on behalf of, concerning, beside, in addition to, together with, beyond, above, over, by, on to, toward, to, against as a conjunction: 2) because that, because, notwithstanding, although...

3651 ken- as an adverb: 1) so, therefore, thus a) thus, so b) just so c) therefore ... g) (with prep) 1) therefore, this being so (specific)... 3) therefore, on this ground (general)

This consequence is going to follow every time the above set of circumstance occurs. It is going to cause the hearts of the sons of men to become fully set on evil. The term “fully” It means “*to be full*,” “*to be filled up*” “*to the full extent of what is expected*,” and even “*filling to overflowing*.”

male’ 4390, “to fill, fulfill, overflow, ordain, endow.” This verb occurs in all Semitic languages (including biblical Aramaic) and in all periods. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 250 times. Basically, male’ means “to be full” ... The verb is sometimes used figuratively as in Gen. 6:13, when God noted that “the earth is filled with violence.”... Used transitively, this verb means the act or state of “filling something.” ... Male’ is used of “filling to overflowing”-- not just filling up to the limits of something, but filling so as to go beyond its limits: “For Jordan overfloweth all his banks... “ Josh. 3:15. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

If anyone in authority does not quickly punish those who do evil are caught, convicted and sentenced to a particular punishment, then this is going to be the end result. Their hearts will fill to overflowing with wickedness. There will be no respect for authority, no fear of being caught, and no attempt to stop doing that which is evil.

This basic meaning must now be woven back into the context of the section. Because God does not speedily execute his wrath on sinful men who are doing wickedness, many of them have allowed their hearts to be fully set in them to do evil. This presents an interesting paradox between the value of God’s mercy and the damage done by judgement being put off in hopes of man’s repentance. The only way for man to be saved is to put of judgment until after this life is over, and give man an opportunity to repent of his wickedness.

But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one {fact} escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,

not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 2 Pet 3:7-10

For some this leads to repentance, and for others it leads to a hardened heart that is fully set to do evil. What choice would we have God make? If He executes His wrath and His justice immediately after sin, then none will have time to repent, and His eternal irrevocable judgment begins. If He does not immediately punish their evil doing, then some are going to turn God's grace into a further hardening of their hearts. Solomon presents this fact in a way that startles the mind and causes it to move rapidly. He does not offer an answer, only observes its truth. That it is true cannot be denied. God's vengeance on evil doers is often so far off that it is put out of the mind. Some of the righteous over the years have had severe difficulty with the truth of this. Paul warns to simply wait for it.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Rom 12:19

God's day is coming. The day in which He will settle all accounts and make all the wicked pay for their wickedness has been known since the days of Enoch.

And about these also Enoch, {in} the seventh {generation} from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, 15 to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." Jude 1:14-15

Though this life cannot always reflect the true justice of God due to higher motives of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, and though the wicked take these and fully set their hearts to do evil, the fact remains that vengeance, judgment and justice are coming upon all men. Though the sentence is not executed speedily, because God in love and mercy gives all time to repent, and though this gives to some evil doers the time to really harden their hearts and become fully set to do evil, God rules and ultimately will show the truth presented in the next two verses.

12. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged,

Even though it may look like the sinner is prospering because the sentence is not speedily executed. Even if a sinner gets away with his sins a hundred times, and even if he lives to be a hundred years old, still the man of faith and trust in God knows that this is not the way to determine how events will ultimately turn out. We walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor. 5:7). It is the latter end, what happens after the curtain closes and everyone else in life forgets. It is what happened to the rich man after his death when he was in torment in flame (Luke 16:23), it is the latter end that will count.

When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me- Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Ps. 73:16-20

yet I surely know

As an inspired writer he here offers the truth. A truth blurred "under the sun" because of the curse of sin and God's desire to save. Though this truth is denied, overlooked or ignored by the wicked, and though it may not even look "under the sun" like it could possibly be true, the fact remains that Koheleth surely knew it! The term surely is a word of "*emphasis*," "*stress*" or "*climax*," and is also translated with "*indeed*."

1571 gam- 1) also, even, indeed, moreover, yea a) also, moreover (giving emphasis) ... c) even (for stress) ... d) indeed, yea (introducing climax) BDB

It emphasizes and stresses that in spite of outward appearances to the contrary, Koheleth has knowledge that contradicts it all! He knows the truth! This term is a deeper understanding than the term "seen" and "saw" of verses ten and eleven. This is knowledge that comes from "*experience with the senses*," "*by investigating and proving*," or by "*reflection and consideration*." More importantly, this "*'knower' has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing.*"

Koheleth knows this because God has revealed it to him. He brings this out more fully in the concluding chapters of the book:

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. Eccl 11:9

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. Eccl 12:14

that it will be well with those who fear God,

With this knowledge, added to all the rest of what the Scriptures have to say, Koheleth has knowledge of the truth, and all that occurs “under the sun” will not change it. In spite of all outward appearances the inspired writers proclaim that the righteous will have it well. They will be rewarded for their service. They will receive the blessings and the comforts which the Lord has to give. No matter what life “under the sun” brings to us, it has no bearing upon this truth. Events “under the sun” may contradict this truth. Do not believe them. It will be well with those who fear God. The term “well” is the same one used in Genesis one to describe the initial acts of creation as being “good.” It describes all that is “good” “pleasant” and “agreeable.” Things that make one “glad,” “happy,” and “prosperous.” This is what those who fear, respect and hold God in reverence have to look forward to. We may or may not be enjoy our life “under the sun,” but Paul captured this same thought very powerfully:

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. II Cor 5:6-8

It is only when we are at absent from the body, thus out of this life “under the sun,” and at home with the Lord that this promise is complete.

who fear before Him.

The repetition of fear is obviously for emphasis. Though we are always before Him, some like Adam and Eve wanted to hide from His presence (Gen 3:8), while Cain wanted to go out of the presence of the LORD(Gen 4:16). Others want to fear in His presence. Those who fear before Him are those who recognize that they do in fact live in His presence, and because they know this, they live in awe, reverence, respect. It will be well for those who do.

13. But it will not be well with the wicked;

This carries the same “knowledge” as the previous verse. “I know it will not be well with the wicked.” God’s revealed truth is that the wicked will never have the peace of the righteous.

But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 21 “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.” Isa 57:20-21

This is God’s revealed truth. It will never end well for the wicked. In the mercy and grace of God, while they “live under the sun” you can’t tell the difference on the outside:

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you 45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous.” Mt 5:44-45

But there is a huge difference in the day of their death.

nor will he prolong his days which are as a shadow,

This is the main reason why it will never be well with the wicked. The choice they made is to get it here and now. They have rejected God, rejected all that God has promised and chosen instead to live for “life under the sun.” Yet death awaits all men and sooner or later death comes and snatches them away. No one can prolong his days “under the sun.”

Until I came into the sanctuary of God; {then} I perceived their end. 18 Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form. Ps 73:17-20

The key to this whole section is set forth above. The wicked are in slippery places, their life is no more stable and no more tangible than a shadow. The days of the wicked are only a shadow. There is no substance to them. There is no hope to them. There is no guarantee to them. They pass one by one with no security and no real

lasting satisfaction. All of this as just punishment for his lack of fear before the Lord.

because he does not fear before God.

The reason for of all this is that he does not reverence, respect and honor God. Those who do not love, reverence and respect God cannot expect any help from God in the end.

14. There is a vanity which occurs on earth,

He now turns to a very serious difficulty about “life under the sun.” Even though he knows the above is true by inspiration, there is often no corroborating evidence of it “under the sun.” The wicked can appear to have things well with them “under the sun” and the righteous can appear that they do not have things well with them “under the sun.” This is a vanity because it leads to a terribly false conclusion.

Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. Ps 73:1-8

Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. 13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. Ps 73:12-14

No one should ever draw such a conclusion, for God has given enough evidence not to make, but sometimes it is made. This is therefore another example of the futility and meaninglessness of life “under the sun.” Which makes it another reason for the conclusion set forth in 1:2:

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Eccl 1:2

that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked;

The just man is one who does what is “lawful” and “right” in the eyes of God. It is also the man who has been “justified and vindicated by God.”

6662 tsaddiyq- just, lawful, righteous ... b) just, right (in one’s cause) c) just, righteous (in conduct and character) d) righteous (as justified and vindicated by God) e) right, correct, lawful (BDB)

Yet because of the curse, and because God wishes to give all men the opportunity to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, sometimes such a man receives what the wicked ought to receive. There are just men who die young, who have tragedy and sorrow enter their lives which is not befitting or congruous to their service to God. There are just men who are persecuted, and destroyed simply because they are trying to do right. They are treated like an evil doer while seeking with all their hearts to serve God. Jesus was an example of this, so was Paul, Peter and all the apostles. All who live godly will find this to be true as well. (II Tim. 2:12).

again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous.

The current set of circumstances with “life under the sun” can also lead to wicked men getting the fate that ought to be reserved only for the righteous. There are wicked men who live a life of sin, and yet find ease, joy and peace. They gain wealth, honor, power, popularity, long life, etc.

When God set into motion the curse, the principle of the survival of the strongest was set into being. It is true in the insect world, it is true in the animal world, and it is true with men. Some men have found that the strength of their wickedness has led them to great power, wealth and luxury. Yet though it might give some false impressions, God sets the record straight. Even if a wicked man receives a good life, it really is what should have been given to the just. Only the just deserve the blessings of God.

I said that this also is vanity.

This is a vanity of life for it is not the true picture. It is the picture Satan wishes to weave. It is the easy path, but it is vain, and the righteous, and those whose hearts are filled with faith see it as such. It is not true, but an empty puff of smoke. Solomon stresses both at the beginning and the end of this statement that it is a vanity. He wishes for no misunderstanding here. It is not a true picture, it is only a surface conclusion. Anyone who digs deeper finds the same truth he expressed in the previous verses.

15. So I commended enjoyment,

Since being righteous doesn't always bring benefits to "life under the sun," what can the righteous do to insulate themselves from these ups and downs over which they have no control? Koheleth commends enjoyment. No matter how bad "life under the sun" becomes for those who fear God, there are some things that will always remain constant. Our inspired writer wants to hold up enjoyment to both "*laud*," and "*praise*" it.

7623 shabach- 1) to soothe, to still, to stroke a) (Piel) to soothe, to still b) (Hiphil) stilling (participle) 2) to laud, to praise, to commend a) (Piel) 1) to laud, to praise (God) 2) to commend, to congratulate (the dead) b) (Hithpael) to boast (BDB)

Why does he extol, praise and recommend enjoyment? As has been noted several times already in the book, because of the curse of sin, all that is in this life is temporary. No matter what is built here, it will be torn down and not remembered. The righteous may or may not enjoy all that this life has to give in the way of material wealth, prosperity, popularity or power. But no matter how high or low, all who fear God can learn to enjoy whatever they do have. This has been a common refrain throughout the book.

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? Eccl 2:24-25 (NKJ)

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor-- it is the gift of God. Eccl 3:12-13

And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him? Eccl 3:22

Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun {during} the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. 19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. Ecc 5:18-19

Is it starting to sink in? God wants the righteous to enjoy what there is to enjoy in their life whether that be little or much. There is so much beauty and loveliness to "life under the sun." that was untouched by the curse. There is also a real harsh bitterness to it. At any given moment the righteous must choose what they will focus upon. We can become bitter, angry, resentful, jealous and sullen. We can allow the inequities of life to beat us down and leave us a shell. But there is another choice that God offers. Paul spoke of it many years later.

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Phil 4:11-13

Enjoyment is an inner state of mind based upon whatever circumstances we choose to create it with. It is the "*joy*," "*gladness*," "*gaiety*" and "*pleasure*" we extract from life. For some it takes a great deal while for others, it takes just a beautiful day and a good meal. God wants us to learn as Paul did to enjoy our lot in life whatever it might be. it.

8057 simchah- joy, mirth, gladness a) mirth, gladness, joy, gaiety, pleasure b) the joy (of God) c) a glad result, a happy issue(BDB).

Since the righteous "know" that it will "surely" be "well" with those who fear God(8:12), and that because of the present set of circumstances while living under the curse of sin "under the sun." they may suffer through no fault of their own, they need to learn to be content and to praise and laud the enjoyment they can get from the simple things of life. Once again(for the fourth of five times) Koheleth offers two of the most simple places where it can be found.

because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry;

The reason God wants man to view "life under the sun" in this manner is because man has nothing better. The term "nothing" is a word for "*nonexistence*," "*negation*," for it "*negates the existence of the one or thing*."

'ayin 369, "no; not; nothing; or else, nor." Cognates of this word appear in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Phoenician (Punic). The word appears 789 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods.'Ayin may be used absolutely, with no suffixes and not in a construct chain. When so used the word signifies nonexistence. In other contexts the word means "nothing ... In the construct state 'ayin has the same basic meaning. Elsewhere the word expresses simple negation... With a suffixed pronoun 'ayin negates the existence of the one or thing so represented; with the suffixed pronoun "he," the word means "he was no longer": (Vine's Expository

Dictionary)

This is something to accept by faith. There simply is nothing better “under the sun” than to eat drink and be merry. He tried wealth, power, learning, accumulation of things, and now after assessing the frustrations of life, the conclusion still comes back the same. There is nothing more to be gained from “life under the sun” than to enjoy your food, your beverages, and the things you can extract merriment from. The term “merry” refers to “*a spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilation,*” “*a feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act,* and “*a feeling prompted by some external and unsustained stimulus.*” It is also “*a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care.*”

samach 8055, “to rejoice, be joyful.” This verb ... appears in all periods of Hebrew and about 155 times in the Bible.... usually refers to a spontaneous emotion or extreme happiness which is expressed in some visible and or external manner. It does not normally represent an abiding state of well being or feeling. This emotion arises at festivals, circumcision feasts, wedding feasts, harvest feasts, the overthrow of one’s enemies, and other such events.... suggests three elements:(1) a spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilation, (2) a feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act, and (3) a feeling prompted by some external and unsustained stimulus. (Vine’s)

“...to rejoice, to be joyful, to be glad: the primary idea seems to be that of a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care; sometimes of a louder joy, to be or make merry...” (Wilson p 346

There are so many things that can do this. A beautiful sunrise, a smile on the face of one we love, a victory, the wisdom we gain from a defeat, a success, or the wisdom we gain from failure. On and on it goes. We can all learn to be content and merry in whatever circumstances we find ourselves if we trust the Lord and keep our expectations low.

for this will remain with him in his labor for the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

This God’s guarantee to those who fear him! This will remain with him all the days of his life. He will always get the enjoyment from his food, beverages and labor and no one can take this from him all the days of his “life under the sun.” The term remain means that God will “*twine*” it to us, it will “*unite*” with us, “*adhere to*” and “*accompany*” us.

3867 lavah ; a primitive root; properly, to twine, i.e. (by implication) to unite, to remain....” (Strong’s)

lavah- 1) to join, to be joined ... b) (Niphal) to join oneself to, to be joined unto (BDB)

To be joined, to adhere to, to accompany. (Wilson p 2)

This is a very precious promise and one that ought to be near and dear to the hearts of all those who fear God. It comes from such passages:

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” 6 so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?” Heb 13:5-6

God promises that this will happen and He promises that he will not leave us or forsake us. One will not receive the rewards of righteousness here, nor can they expect that life will reward them with all its fruits. This is too much to expect. But what those who fear can expect is here offered. Let them find all their joy here and they will never be disappointed!

In his concluding remarks, he warns us that though this is a general guideline, and will help to enjoy what can be enjoyed, it is not the solution to life. As a matter of fact, there is no formula! There is no key to success! We simply live one day at a time enjoying what can be enjoyed and striving to understand what cannot be fully comprehended. Those who think they have it all figured out will be proven false! 8:16-17

16. When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, Koheleth has drawn some further conclusions in the eighth chapter that help to smooth out some of the more thorny issues of life. But none of these things even begins to open the lid that holds the secrets of wisdom. Even with all this information, Koheleth could not do it. He gave his heart completely to the task, he sought to know(“*experience with the senses,*” “*by investigating and proving,*” or by “*reflection and consideration.*” He also sought to see(“*observe,*” “*examine,*” “*discover,*” or “*gain understanding,*” so he could “*perceive,*” “*realize,*” or “*get acquainted with.*” He worked very very hard to gain an understanding of the business done on earth. The term “business” is a term used exclusively in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is defined as “*occupation,*” “*task,*”

“employment” “job.”

6045 `inyan- an occupation, a task, a job

6045 `inyan ado, i.e. (generally) employment or (specifically) an affair:

It is used to describe either the outcome or meaning of all the effort, toil, and labor that is done under the sun. Two passages help us see exactly what he is seeking to comprehend.

*I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous **task** {which} God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. 1:12-15*

I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. 3:10

He sought to see the business that is done on the earth. He wanted to delve even more deeply into all this. Two passages seem to indicate what he was trying to unravel, but he just couldn't do it.

For who knows what is good for a man during {his} lifetime, {during} the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? Eccl 6:12

7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen? Eccl 8:7

There is no answer, no explanation. There is one for our relationship with God. But the formula for what goes on “under the sun” could not be fathomed.

even though one sees no sleep day or night,

Even if he had devoted twenty-four hours a day to it, it would not have mattered. It is beyond man's ability to be able to do it.

17. Then I saw all the work of God,

As Solomon approached the very citadel of God's works in this world he ran into severe difficulty in comprehension. The deeper he proceeded, the more complicated things got. As he saw all the works of God and the interrelationships that they have with one another, he began to go slower and slower, until he was finally exhausted and could simply go no further. God has so set up “life under the sun” after the curse in such a way that it cannot be fathomed or mastered.

Everything God has made looks simple on the surface, but the deeper one goes, the more complicated it becomes. God's work “under the sun” simply cannot be comprehended.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has know the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counselor? Or who has fist given to Him And it shall be repaid him? For of Him and through Him and unto him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Rom. 11:33-36

that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.

A simple statement of fact. Man cannot find out the work done under the sun. The term work is the same one used above. It is a much broader one than the term task in the previous verse. It is the “*general word for work*,” in the sense of what one produces or makes. It can be deeds, labor, business, undertakings, enterprises, or achievements. It simply refers to the end result of labor.

4639 ma` aseh- a deed, a work a) a deed, a thing done, an act b) work, labor c) business, pursuit d) undertaking, enterprise e) an achievement f) deeds, works (of deliverance and judgment) g) work, a thing made h) work (of God) I) a product

The product of God's labor and toil and the product of man's labor and toil are both incomprehensible. It cannot be found out. No matter how wise one might be and how much effort they expend they will not be able to find it out.

For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it;

A man might set the goal and then “labor” to discover it.

5998 amal to labor, with the idea of effort and exhaustion; to toil...trouble, vexation, sorrow...”(Wilson p. 241)

He might work and toil to the point of exhaustion to “discover” it. This term also has the idea of strong effort

and toil. When one is striving to “seek” and “search,” for “*something that is lost or missing,*” and “*whose location is unknown,*” they will obviously be working hard.

baqash 1245, "to seek, search, consult." This verb occurs only in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew. It appears in the Bible about 220 times and in all periods. Basically baqash means "to seek" to find something that is lost or missing, or, at least, whose location is unknown... The sense "seek to secure" emphasizes the pursuit of a wish or the accomplishing of a plan. ... This image may have an emotional coloring, such as, "to aim at, devote oneself to, and be concerned about."... (Vines)

Yet even with all this, he will not find it. The search is fruitless. No one can find “*where it is*” no matter how “*purposeful*” the search.

matsa' 4672, "to find, meet, get." ... Matsa' refers to "finding" someone or something that is lost or misplaced, or "finding" where it is. The thing may be found as the result of a purposeful search... may connote not only "finding" a subject in a location, but "finding something" in an abstract sense... can also mean "to discover."... (Vine's)

How clear can God be. If we are going to wait until we understand things better before giving ourselves completely to God, we are never going to do it. This gives even greater power to the passage that demands that we trust in the LORD with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding. It is an act of love on God's part to demand this because it really is not in man that walks to direct his steps.

moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

For those who are still not convinced, and feel that he just gave up too easily, there is this one final clause. Moreover is a term that stresses that this is the final word on this subject.

1571 gam-... a) also, moreover (giving emphasis) ... c) even (for stress) d) indeed, yea (introducing climax).. (BDB)

Even a truly wise man. One who submits to God and uses only God's revealed will for his quest. It won't matter whether one has a true and full wisdom of God and a knowledge of the Scriptures, or they have a crafty and shrewd worldly wisdom in physics, chemistry, etc. .

2450 chakam-wise, a wise (man) a) skillful (in technical work) b) wise (in administration) c) shrewd, crafty, cunning, wily, subtle d) learned, shrewd (class of men) e) prudent f) wise (ethically and religiously)

No one, no matter how wise, skillful, shrewd, cunning, wily, learned or prudent will be able to complete this attempt. The answers are simply not available. This is true for the following reasons. Some things are secret (Deut. 29:29) they cannot be known or fathomed by man because they have not been revealed. Man might seek to understand them, but he never will. Other things are too wonderful (Job 42:3), they are too high and lofty to be understood. This is offered as a warning to the righteous. You just can't find all the answers. Go as far as you can, but realize that sooner or later you are going to have to accept your limitations and rely on your faith to take you the rest of the way.