

Ecclesiastes Chapter Eight

Wisdom Changes a Person (v. 1)

VERSE 1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter

מִי כִּהְחָכֵם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבָר (interrog.pro. mi who + prep kaph w/d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs.

chakm wise + waw w/interrog.pro. mi who + Qal part.m.s.abs. yada know + noun m.s.abs.

peshar interpretation, solution + noun m.s.abs. dabar word; “matter”)]?

A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam (וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנֶה)

חֲכֵמַת אָדָם תְּאִיר פָּנָיו [noun f.s.constr. chokmah wisdom + noun m.s.abs. adam + Hiphil

impf.3f.s. ur to shine; here to cause to shine + noun both p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. paneh face + waw

w/noun m.s.abs. oz strength + Pual impf.3m.s. shanah change)].

ANALYSIS: VERSE 1

1. The author has concluded in 7:25-29 that he has not been able to explain the sum of things.
2. He has set forth what he has discovered in his search (7:29).
3. Here attention is directed towards those who were supposed to be able to answer such questions.
4. In verse 1 he raises the question of the wise man and will analyze what the wise man is able to discover or find in 8:17.
5. The term ‘discover’ was prominent in 7:25-29 in regards to Qohelet’s search.
6. He raises two questions in verse 1, that deal with the wise man’s wisdom.
7. The first question is: “Who is like the wise man?”
8. This serves to set the wise man apart from everyone else because the wise man is into pursuing wisdom.
9. I Kings 4:29-34 speaks of the great wisdom of Solomon, which must have been the impetus for the development of a class of wise men who were separate from the priests and prophets (Jer. 8:9; 18:18).
10. The second question he poses with regard to the wise man is: “who knows the interpretation/explanation of a matter?”
11. One expects a positive answer to this question.
12. It is presumed that the wise man would be able to use knowledge to explain matters related to human life.

13. One would not expect that a wise man is able to explain every matter, only that the wise man would be able to provide an answer to many of the issues related to human behavior.
14. There is a tension in other parts of Ecclesiastes with regard to the question of ‘who knows?’
15. The expected answer elsewhere is “no one knows.’
16. In the second half of this verse he presents a benefit of possessing wisdom.
17. “A man’s wisdom illumines him” is literally, “A wise man’s wisdom makes his face shine/beam.”
18. This refers to a cheerful and pleasant demeanor.
19. Furthermore, wisdom is even able to change a face that is ‘hard.’
20. The term “stern” is the words for ‘strength’ (*oz*) and may have the connotation of ‘brazen’ or ‘angry.’
21. It is used this way in Prov. 7:13 “She seizes him and kisses him. And with a brazen face she says to him.”
22. Here it has a negative connotation and point is that wisdom accepted is able to change a harsh or stern facial expression.
23. The argument of chapter 8 shows (or not) that wisdom is able to solve problems related to life.

Proper Behavior in the Presence of Authority (vv. 2-5)

VERSE 2 I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God

אֲנִי פִי-מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹר וְעַל דְּבַרְתָּ שְׁבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים) [*pro.1s. ani + noun m.s.constr. peh mouth; “command” + noun m.s.abs. melek king + Qal imper.m.s. shamar keep + waw w/prep al + noun f.s.constr. dibrah matter; derivative of dabar-word + noun f.s.constr. shebu-ah oath + noun m.s.abs. Elohim*]).

VERSE 3 "Do not be in a hurry to leave him (אֶל-תִּבְהַל מִפְּנֵי תִלָּךְ) [*neg al not +*

Niphal impf.jussive 2m.s. bachal hurry + prep min w/noun both p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. paneh + Qal impf.2m.s. halak walk; “leave”]).

Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases (אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֵּץ יַעֲשֶׂה)

אֶל־תִּעַמֹּד בְּדָבָר רָע כִּי כָּל [neg al not + Qal impf.2m.s. jussive amad stand, remain;

“join” + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. dabar word; “matter” + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil + part ki for + rel.pro. asher “whatever” + Qal impf.3m.s. chapets be pleased + Qal impf.3m.s. ashah do].”

VERSE 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What

are you doing בְּאֲשֶׁר דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ שְׁלִטוֹן וּמִי יֹאמַר־לוֹ מַה־תַּעֲשֶׂה) [prep beth w/rel.pro.

asher + noun m.s.constr. dabar word + noun m.s.abs. melek king + noun m.s.abs. shilton

authority; “authoritative” from shalat to exercise power over + waw w/interrog. mi who + Qal

impf.3m.s. amar say + prep lamed w/3m.s.suff. “to him” + interrog. mah what? + Qal

impf.2m.s. ashah do]?)”

VERSE 5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart

knows the proper time and procedure לֹא יָדַע דְּבַר רָע וְעַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט יָדַע לֵב חָכָם)

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה [Qal part.m.s.abs. shamar keep + noun f.s.abs. mitswah command + neg lo + Qal

impf.3m.s. yada know; “experiences” + noun m.s.abs. dabar + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil; “trouble” +

waw w/noun both s.abs. eth time + waw w/noun m.s.abs. mishpat justice; w/time = “proper

time” + Qal impf.3m.s. yada know + noun m.s.abs. leb heart + adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise].

ANALYSIS: VERSES 2-5

1. In vv. 2-4 Q. moves to the subject of wisdom in a person’s relationship to authority.
2. How does wisdom function in the presence of a king?
3. The setting appears to be that of employment at the royal court.
4. This definitely had its challenges.
5. Wisdom is designed to help someone know how to conduct themselves in the presence of a monarch.

6. Cf. Prov. 14:35 “The king’s favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, but his anger is toward him who acts shamefully.”; 16:14 “The fury of a king is like messengers of death. But a wise man will pacify it.”; 24:21 “My son, fear the LORD and the king. Do not associate with those who are given to change.”; 25:6 “Do not claim honor in the presence of the king. And do not stand in the place of great men.”
7. Q. begins this with a admonition to “Keep the commandment of the king...” (v. 2).
8. What better place to test the validity of wisdom than in the presence of an authority figure of this stature?
9. The exhortation, “Obey the command of the king even according to the manner of the oath to God.”
10. What is to be obeyed, ‘the mouth of the king’ is parallel to the phrase ‘the command of Yahweh’ in Num. 14:41, 22:18, and, 24:13.
11. Both use the noun *peh* (mouth) expressing a verbal directive towards persons.
12. The seriousness of the command is seen in the way in which obedience is to be carried out (“according to the manner of the oath before God”).
13. There is a direct parallel between the command of a king and an oath made before God.
14. Both are placed on the same level of importance.
15. In verses 3 the person who comes before a king is advised not to do two things.
16. The first: “Do not be in a hurry/rush to leave” the king’s presence.
17. Such an action suggests that the individual who has been given a specific directive is not serious about the matter he is commanded to carry out.
18. A servant who is given a directive is to listen carefully, and to leave the king’s presence in a dignified purposeful manner.
19. The second warning to a servant of the king is not agreeing with the king’s directive.
20. “Do not stand with a bad cause” warns against pushing something that is different from what the king desires.
21. These two imperatives in verse 3 warn against unwise behavior in the presence of absolute authority by either acting in a rash way in order to push an agenda that the king has not authorized.
22. The advice represents proper behavior in the presence of a king that characterizes the wise man,
23. The third line of verse 3 and verse 4 reinforces the importance of acclimating to authority.
24. He advises not to buck the authority of the kings “for he will do whatever he pleases,” and “the word of the king is authoritative,” and “who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’”
25. Following the warnings and the rationale for compliance with the king’s directive comes the benefits for wise behavior in the king’s presence in verse 5, or for that matter, before any authority recognized in the WOG.
26. By avoiding unwise conduct in the presence of authority the wise man “experiences no trouble (*ra*).”
27. Line 2 shifts the subject from obedience to authority to divine timing.
28. The basis for wise conduct is stated as: “for a wise heart knows the proper time and the right action.”
29. The advantage of wisdom is that it knows when the time is right and knows the appropriate action to take regarding a matter.
30. We have doctrine, prayer, divine guidance through circumstances, and other wise persons to get us through situations where wisdom is needed.

Divine Timing in the Circumstances of Life (vv. 6-9)

VERSE 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a

man's trouble is heavy upon him (יִשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט כִּי־רַעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו)

יִשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט [part ki for + prep lamed w/noun m.s.constr. kol “every” + noun m.s.abs. chapets

delight + part. yesh there is + noun both s.abs. eth time + waw w/noun m.s.abs. mishphat

“proper” + part ki “though” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam + adj.f.s.abs. rab great; “heavy” +

prep al w/3m.s.suff.].

VERSE 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen

(כִּי־אֵינָנוּ יָדָע מַה־שִּׁיְהִיָּה כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יִגִּיד לוֹ)

one + Qal part.m.s.abs. yada know + interrog. mah what + rel.pro. prefix w/Qal impf.3m.s.

hayah be; “will happen” + part ki for + prep kaph w/rel.pro. asher “when” + Qal impf.3m.s.

hayah “it will happen” + interrog mi who + Hiphil impf.3m.s. nagad tell + prep lamed

w/3m.s.suff.]?)

VERSE 8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority

over the day of death (אָדָם שְׁלִיט בְּרוּחַ לְכַלּוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין שְׁלִטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמּוֹת)

אָדָם [adv ayin no + noun m.s.abs. adam + adj.m.s.abs. shallit “authority” + d.a.w/prep beth

w/noun both s.abs. ruach wind + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. kla hold back, restrain + d.o. +

d.a.w/noun both s.abs. ruach wind + waw w/adv ayin or + noun m.s.abs. shilton mastery

“authority” + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. yom day + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. maweth death];

and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it [ואין מִשְׁלַחַת בְּמִלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יִמְלֹט רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו] [waw w/adv ayin no + noun f.s.abs. mishlachath discharge + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. milchamah war + waw w/neg lo + Piel impf.3m.s. malat deliver + noun m.s.abs. rish-a guilt; “evil” + d.o. + noun m.p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. ba-al owner; “who practice it”]).

VERSE 9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun (זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנָתַן אֶת־לְבִי לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ) [d.o. + noun m.s.constr. kol all + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + Qal perf.1s. ra-ah see + waw w/Qal infin.constr. nathan give; “applied” + d.o. + noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart; “mind” + prep lamed w/noun m.s.constr. kol “every” + noun m.s.abs. ma-asheh deed + rel.pro. asher + Niphil perf.3m.s. ashah do + part tachton under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun] **wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt** [לְרַע לוֹ] [Qal perf.3m.s. shalat “exercise authority” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs.adam + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. adam + prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. ra evil; “hurt” + prep lamed w/3m.s.suff.]].

ANALYSIS: VERSES 6-9

1. Verse 6 reiterates the affirmation of verse 5 “to every activity there is a proper time and a right action” [a translation].
2. This is in agreement with the poem of 3:1-11 that God has set everything on a time line.
3. Here, the wise man using wisdom (doctrine) can ascertain the proper time and the right action.
4. In the poem of chapter 3 timing and action is viewed from the divine perspective, but here it is viewed from the human side.
5. The word order of v. 6a is: “For every delight (noun *chepets* cf. 3:1, 17; 5:3, 7; 8:3, 6; 12:1, 10) there is a proper time and procedure (*mishpat* judgment).”
6. The term translated “delight” refers to that which is pleasing or good or beneficial.

7. Qohelet reaffirms in 8:6a that such a time and action does exist; and he follows it with three statements in 8:6b-7, each introduced by the particle *ki*.
8. In the first statement: “though a man’s trouble is heavy upon him” he is saying that even when a person is under extreme adversity there is a proper time and action.
9. This is in line with our understanding of the doctrine of suffering.
10. Extreme adversity does not negate the proper time and proper action principle.
11. Adversity is a much greater challenge for the wise man than non-stressful or even pleasant circumstances.
12. God’s promises and faith-rest get the wise man through adversity.
13. What the wise man does not know is expressed in verse 7.
14. He does not know “the what” or “the when” of the day of adversity.
15. Life is too uncertain to know what will happen and when it will happen.
16. This is a good thing!
17. In verses 7 & 8 Qohelet illustrates by a series of examples that even the wise man is helpless to change or ascertain future events unless of course God reveals the timing of a future event.
18. Otherwise humans are left with uncertainty about the “what” and the “when” adversity will strike.
19. The first example of human has to do with the wind (8a).
20. The phrase is mistranslated in the NAS and should read: “no one has power over the wind to restrain the wind.”
21. Humans cannot control the wind.
22. The second example (v. 8b) of human impotence has to do with the day of one’s death.
23. To have “power/authority over the day of one’s death” is beyond the individual’s ability to suspend (“there is a time to die” from the poem).
24. The third example (v. 8c) deals with war: “there is no discharge in the time of war.”
25. The best approach to this seems to be that “discharge” does not refer to release from the battle **before** the battle begins, but rather **after** the battle has begun.
26. Hence, the force of the preposition *bet* would be ‘in’ the battle (the first three examples in verse 8 are introduced by ‘in’).
27. The 4th example (v. 8c) is introduced by the common negative ‘not’ (*lo*).
28. The 4th example reads: “wickedness cannot deliver those who practice it.”
29. Evil types may boast concerning the benefits of evil-doing, such as monetary gain (Prov. 1:11-13) and pleasure (Prov. 7:13-20), but they are powerless to stave off divine retribution (i.e., sin unto death).
30. Such activity can led to an early death (7:17), and often does for many; but not necessarily (cf. 7:15c).
31. Qohelet brings this section to a close in verse 9.
32. The word ‘power’ connects verse 9 to verse 8c.
33. The abuse of power on the part of a person in a position of authority and the harm it inflicts upon an underling is the subject of verse 9.
34. The section began with the proper response to authority that characterizes the wise man.
35. However, this example supports the idea of verse 6b which views a person facing extreme adversity.
36. The word ‘king’ is not used here indicating an individual or even mankind (*adam*).
37. Abuse of power is commonplace in human history.

38. Wisdom shows the wise man how to function in the presence of absolute authority when it is exercised properly.
39. The wise man conducts himself responsibly before the king and suffers no ill effects.
40. But if any authority acts corruptly bringing “hurt” to a person, there is within the counsel of wisdom a proper action.
41. This is the 5th illustration of verse 6b (“when a man’s trouble is heavy upon him”).
42. An informed wise man knows how to suffer indignities, but the average person is not so adept.