

FACT QUESTIONS 7:29

405. Give two reasons why Solomon expresses "gravity" at this particular point.
406. What is Solomon "underscoring" in this verse?
407. Explain what is meant by "devices" or "inventions."
408. What *one* invention does Solomon cite?
409. The word translated "device" is used elsewhere only in II Chronicles 26:15. From this passage, what does the use of the word illustrate?
410. State Solomon's conclusion.

C. ADMONITIONS TO USE WISDOM IN THE WORK OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF LIFE 8:1—9:18

1. Work in submission to the king. 8:1-8

TEXT 8:1-8

- 1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.
- 2 I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.
- 3 Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.
- 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"
- 5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.
- 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when a man's trouble is heavy upon him.
- 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?
- 8 No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge

in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

225. Who is the man who knows the interpretation of a matter?
226. What two things will wisdom do (verse one)?
227. Are the "king" and "God" to be taken synonymously in verse three?
228. After reading through verse eight, can you find evidence that *requires* that the "king" be interpreted to mean God? Discuss.
229. Does God approve of entering into an agreement with Him through an oath? (Cf. Exodus 22:11; II Samuel 21:7; Ezekiel 17:18)
230. Does the "him" in verse three refer to God or to the king who rules the land? (Cf. 10:4)
231. What word in verse four indicates why the king can do whatever pleases him?
232. What will keep a wise man from getting into trouble with the local authority? (verse five)
233. What principle taught in verse six has previously been detailed in chapter three, verses one and seventeen?
234. According to verse seven, man does not know "what" will happen to him or "when" it will happen. Read 3:22; 6:12; 7:14 and 9:12. In each case, determine if it is the "when" or the "what" that Solomon refers to.
235. Identify the four things in verse eight that man cannot do.

PARAPHRASE 8:1-8

Who can compare with the wise man? Who but a wise man understands what things mean, or knows the interpretation of a matter? It is because of wisdom that a man's face shines like a light, and the hardness of his countenance changes until

his face actually glows. It is wise counsel to keep the king's command. Have you not made an oath before God that you will keep his command? We know the king will do whatever pleases him. Therefore, you will be wise if you do not hurry from his presence simply because you are agitated with his command. Above all, do not stand for an evil cause. It is the king who has the authority in the land and his word is law. None dare say to him, "What are you doing?" A wise man knows when and how to act—he knows the proper time and procedure. He who keeps the law of the king will discover that he is free from every evil thing, and will therefore remain out of trouble. You have already been instructed in the truth that there is a proper time and place for every desire of man—yet, you must be aware of the heavy judgment and chastisement which often presses heavy upon man. A wise man considers all of these things because he does not know what will happen, and there is none to tell him when it will happen. Consider this: no man has the authority to hold back the wind with the wind; no man has the authority to hold back the spirit of man in the time of death; neither can man claim immunity in time of war, nor be discharged from the battle; no man who practices evil or becomes involved in wickedness can expect to be delivered by such evil in his time of distress.

COMMENT 8:1-8

As noted in the outline, there are five distinct divisions in this section which relate to solving some of the problems of life. In each instance, *wisdom* is the guide which leads the reader to the correct solution. The first area of discussion calls attention to the authority in the land, suggesting that submission to the law will result in pleasant relationships between the king and his subjects. The heart of the discussion is summarized in the words, "He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 1 There is no man on earth who can compare with a wise

man. Such a man excels them all. It is evident that Solomon continues to extol wisdom. His emphasis is noted by his declaration that *only* a wise man can explain the difficult, and drive to the very foundation of things. There is more to the wise man's ability than that which equips him to be an interpreter of proverbs or an adequate manipulator of words. He can unfold the mysterious. He has the ability to draw back the veil and present a clear word picture of *why* things are.

This gift of understanding has a direct result on the wise man's heart which manifests itself immediately in his face. His knowledge has brought an inner awareness that he knows and understands both God's word and God's providential activities. His face literally shows it. He has a cheerful soul and his face shines. His face is but a reflection of his heart.

His face was formally "stern." This word is variously translated into "hardness," "harshness," "boldness," and "fierce countenance" (Deuteronomy 28:50). His wisdom transforms his face and causes it to beam. The marginal reading in the NASB reads: "causes his stern face to *change*." Examples of such changes of facial expressions are found in Exodus 34:29-30, Acts 6:15 and 7:14. Knowledge of the true God, and the awareness that one is keeping His commandments, results in both joy and happiness. Solomon's father had expressed it simply: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). Sin causes the "hardness of face," while righteousness drives out sin and welcomes peace and contentment. Jesus aptly struck at the heart of the matter when He said, "Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man" (Matthew 7:24).

v. 2 Two problems arise from this verse: (1) Who is the king? Is this a reference to God or to an earthly king? (2) What oath was stated before God by the people in Solomon's day? Authorities are divided on the first question but have generally agreed on the second. Let us consider the latter question first.

It is not so important that one determines the exact wording

of the oath as this is not the point of Solomon's argument. The point is that the oath was made "before God," and it stands as a reminder that (1) it was made before the highest authority, and (2) it pertains to submission to the rule of the king. One such oath is recorded in II Kings 11:17 where "Jehoida made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people, also between the king and the people." To be "the Lord's people" is tantamount to the submission to the rule or the authority of the Lord. It is further noted in this illustration that a distinction is made between the *Lord* and the *king*. Israel saw the king as God's representative who was appointed to carry out His will on earth. Thus, the oath was made to the highest authority and also bound the Israelites to the authority of their king. Instructions concerning such oaths are given in Exodus 22:11; I Kings 2:43; II Samuel 21:7 and Ezekiel 17:18.

To whom does the term "king" refer? Many commentaries view the king as God and suggest that the entire context must be interpreted as to our submission to "the heavenly King." However, the II Kings 11:17 passage makes a clear distinction between "the people," the earthly "king," and "the Lord." It appears that such a distinction would also capture the spirit of this passage. Everything spoken of in reference to the king could apply without difficulty to an earthly king. In forcing the meaning of the term king to refer to God, seems to be demanding more than either Solomon or the context intended to convey. New Testament parallels are found in Matthew 12:21; Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-17.

v. 3 To break the oath is equal to entering into an association with evil. Therefore, the subjects of the kingdom are admonished not only to keep the command of the king, but to refrain from joining in an evil matter. The "fear of the Lord" has previously been defined (Cf. 5:7, p. 117) as departing from evil and doing that which is good. Solomon isn't introducing new material. He continues to pursue the characteristics of a wise man. In this instance, a wise man is one who recognizes the authority of the king and lives within the

restrictions of the law.

“Do not be in a hurry to leave him.” The king is on the side of right; to depart from him would be to align oneself with evil. Cain is an example of one who because of his evil deed was forced to leave the companionship and security of the side of right. It is written of him, immediately after he had murdered his brother, that “Cain went out from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16). The relationship the kings of Israel enjoyed with God was unique in history. There was a much closer correlation between their laws and the law of God than has existed in any other period of time. However, the principle that authority is ordained of God is still true. On the whole, the admonition of this verse remains a valid one. Paul wrote: “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. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

“To do whatever he pleases” should be understood to mean that the king will inflict whatever punishment he wishes. It is the evil doer who draws the *wrath* of the king.

v. 4 The authority of the king has been established. On the basis of this conclusion, it must be admitted that none has the right to question the king’s decision or to question the punishment which he places upon the wicked. The verse is not to be taken as blanket approval for *all* the activities of the king. It is to be understood in the light of two things: (1) Disobedient citizens who depart from the presence of the king and stand in an evil matter deserve punishment; (2) the punishment appointed is the prerogative of the king—none has the right to question him on such a matter.

v. 5 For authority to be meaningful, there must be laws and subsequent punishment exacted upon those who break the laws. Who is the wise man? A partial answer is arrived at in this verse. A wise man is one “who keeps a royal command.” It is generally true that obedience to the law results

in peace. This principle is valid whether the law is God's law or man's law.

Another characteristic of the wise man is that he recognizes that judgment and punishment will fall upon those who break the law. He knows there is a "proper time and procedure." He practices patience and thus lives in peace. Sometimes such assurance is the *only* compensation for one who does right. Especially is this true when the authority is on the side of the oppressors (4:1), or when the law-abiding poor have their wages withheld and on occasion are put to death (James 5:4-6). Even in the face of such extreme punishment they are encouraged to retain their wisdom: "you too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). The lesson from Ecclesiastes, chapter three, had been that there is a time for everything under the sun. Now the Preacher is underlining his previous contention: "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and every deed is there" (3:17). Even God patiently waits until the sin has ripened fully on the vine. Man would like for punishment to fall swiftly as well as justly but life is not always this way. The wise heart recognizes that such judgment will come with certainty and thus tunes all of his thoughts and activities to this channel. It is at the fountain of patience and deep conviction in the justice of God that he drinks.

v. 6 The preposition "for" indicates that this is an extension of the line of reasoning established in verse five. The phrase restates the closing thought of the preceding verse. "A proper time and procedure for every delight" has been sufficiently demonstrated in chapter three. However, the statement, "when a man's trouble is heavy upon him," needs explanation. Who is the man who is under the burden of trouble? Is he the good, wise man or the sinner who has departed from the side of the king? If it is the good man, then evil men have afflicted him and he must learn to patiently wait until the time and seasons of God's providence bring about God's justice. It is considered a *heavy* trouble because he is required to bear it until the

appropriate *time*. On the other hand, if it is indeed the sinner who is under consideration, then the heavy trouble is just and he acquiesces beneath it because he knows it is of his own doing. He knows that the judgment of God will eventually fall upon him. He has broken all the rules and departed from the king's cause; he finds himself standing in an evil matter. Now he must subscribe to punishment decreed by the king. This latter interpretation is most tenable as it fits best into the total context of the passage. Such an argument presses upon the mind of the one who would choose the road of wisdom that there are rewards indeed! Additional proof for this contention is found in the major premise of the passage: "He who keep the royal command experiences no trouble."

v. 7 The evil man's suffering is compounded because he knows neither when he will be punished nor what will be his punishment. He knows only that it is due him and will be forthcoming. Behind the law in the land stands the authority of God. Kings exact God's punishment and are thus a terror to those who do evil. However, kings may be bribed or influenced to compromise or act unjustly. In such instances the justice of God overrides the injustices of men. If not immediately, in due season (Cf. 8:11). This awareness weighs heavily upon the mind of the evil doer. He lives in constant fear as he does not know when or how his punishment will come. Solomon is careful not to insert the conditional "if" in his declaration. He is pressing for the inescapable: judgment *is* coming!

v. 8 The preceding interpretation appears to be logical in view of the closing fourfold argument Solomon now presents. He has contended that a wise man will live in harmony with the law of the land; in doing so he will neither bring the wrath of the king nor the wrath of God upon him. He now offers the closing arguments to sustain his contention:

(1) "No man has the authority to restrain the wind with the wind."

The term translated "wind" in this first statement is also commonly translated "spirit." It is improbable that one can

arrive at sufficient proof to ascertain one or the other. It is obvious that the NASB translated *ruach* as *wind*. There is a rather equal distribution of views in both translations and interpretations. The primary purpose of the verse is best served when the *lesson* of the verse is determined, not necessarily whether the term is translated wind or spirit. On this same subject Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going" (John 3:8). At least the truth taught in the two statements is the same: one cannot see or control the wind. But what is the intent of the observation? One conclusion is found in the fact that only God has control of the wind, man cannot hold back or control the wind even with the wind. The wind moves about according to an appointed order. Solomon described it as "Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns" (1:6). Again he stated that "we do not know the path of the wind" (11:5). The lesson seems to be that the evil man has no more control over his inevitable punishment which shall come upon him than he does over the wind. Both are in the hands of God. One is carried out through the laws of nature while the other is arranged on the basis of compensating for evil and is determined by the authority of the king. God is the author of both! This lesson—God is in control of the laws of ultimate justice just as He controls the wind and other laws of nature—is in harmony with the immediate and greater context of Ecclesiastes. It also justifies this emphasis that Solomon places on the uncontrollable nature of the wind.

If one feels compelled to interpret the term "spirit" as "breath of life," rather than "wind," as many authorities do (Cf. A. R. Fausset, E. W. Hengstenberg, J. P. Lange, H. C. Leupold, Et. Al.) then this phrase is a parallelism with the following part and simply restates the same thought. If this is the preferred interpretation, then the following discussion will explain the parallelism.

(2) "No man has the authority . . . over the day of death."

What has been referred to in this discussion as the "ultimate justice of God" is the judgment facing every man when his spirit is finally released from his body. The Preacher knows that when this happens, the spirit will return to God (12:7). At that time, the unequal judgments of this earth, the suffering of the innocent, the apparent escape of evil doers, will be brought to light. The crooked shall be made straight. The New Testament is also explicit on this matter: "inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Many would restrain the spirit in the face of death if it were possible. Fortunes would be exchanged for a little more time. The epilogue of men's lives under such circumstances would see a rash of repentance and restitution. However, no man can decide to add a few days or years to his own life when death calls. It was true in Solomon's time and it is still true today. Once again the Preacher is bringing into focus the distinction between the wise man and the fool. The wise man has no more control over his time of death than the fool does, but the wise man is prepared. He keeps "the command of the king . . . and experiences no trouble."

It should be observed here for the Christian reader that Jesus teaches us to keep the command of *the King* and in so doing we shall find rest for our souls. (Cf. Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:29).

(3) "There is no discharge in time of war."

Just as one is bound by the rigors of death and must submit to its call, there is no escape from the demands of service placed upon one during the time of war. The analogy is made to illustrate once more that "a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure" (8:5b). The following excerpt from *The Pulpit Commentary* illustrates the principle Solomon refers to:

Thus we read that when Oeabazus, the father of three sons, petitioned Darius to leave one at home, the tyrant replied that he would leave him all three, and had them put to death. Again, Pythius, a Lydian, asking Xerxes to

exempt his eldest son from accompanying the army of Greece, was reviled by the monarch in unmeasured terms, and was punished for his presumption by seeing his son slain before his eyes, the body divided into two pieces, and placed on either side of the road by which the army passed, that all might be warned of the fate awaiting any attempt to evade military service (Herod., IV, 84; vii, 38).¹

Although there were exemptions prior to the battle (Cf. Deteronomy 20:5-8), none were made *during* the time of war. It is inappropriate to use this argument as evidence that Ecclesiastes had to be written late, during the Persian period, because Israel made some exceptions and there were none granted during the Persian rule. The point is not that every man had to be engaged in warfare, but once the battle is underway there is no escape or discharge. One is "locked in" as surely as he faces death and judgment. The lesson once again teaches that man should be on the side of "right" and refrain from joining in "an evil matter."

(4) "Evil will not deliver those who practice it."

The fourth and final reason stated in this verse has a parallel truth given in 8:13 where Solomon reminds his readers, "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God."

What wickedness or evil cannot do, wisdom can. Wisdom *does* deliver those who practice it.

The tragedy of practicing evil is not only its failure to deliver one from the judgment of the King or the Lord, but their own wickedness will stand against them in the face of that judgment. The rich oppressors mentioned by James are examples of the severity of casting one's lot with the wicked. He writes, "Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted;

¹ J. S. Excell, H. D. M. Spence (Editors), "Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," *The Pulpit Commentary* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1893), p. 201.

and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the Last Days that you have stored up your treasure" (James 5:2-3)!

The wicked could raise the question: "Deliver from what?" The inference is strong regarding the necessity of escape. Once again the reader is reminded of the law of retribution that has been presented in this section as a major theme: One *will* reap what he sows. The severity of their evil demands severity of judgment. They shall not escape!

FACT QUESTIONS 8:1-8

411. Identify the guide that leads the reader to solving the problems of life.
412. What will result in a pleasant relationship between the king and his subjects?
413. What specific ability on the part of the wise man causes his face to shine (verse one)?
414. What causes the "hardness" of face?
415. Identify the two problems of verse two.
416. Solomon is suggesting that the oath is a reminder of what two things?
417. Give evidence that the king could be an earthly king.
418. "Breaking the oath" is equal to what?
419. Explain what is meant by leaving the king.
420. What is the specific meaning given to the statement that the king will do whatever he pleases?
421. List the characteristics of the wise man found in verse five.
422. According to verse six, "trouble is heavy" upon a man. Is this man the wise man or the sinner? Discuss.
423. Who is it that does not experience trouble?
424. What compounds the evil man's trouble (verse seven)?
425. Give evidence that both Solomon and Jesus taught that the wind is not controlled by the power of men.
426. What lesson concerning the *wind* should the evil man learn? How will the same lesson comfort the wise man?

427. Explain what is meant by the "ultimate" justice of God.
 428. Were exceptions from battle granted certain Israelites in time of war? Explain.
 429. Could one be dismissed from battle after the war began?
 430. What double jeopardy does the wicked man experience (verse eight)?

2. Work even when one discovers the oppression of the righteous. 8:9-13

TEXT 8:9-13

- 9 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.
 10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.
 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.
 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.
 13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

236. Is the wise man or the wicked man the *primary* subject of this verse?
 237. What evil action of the wicked man is recorded in verse nine?
 238. Is there sometimes corruption of authoritative offices?

(Cf. 4:1; 5:8; 7:7)

239. What puts an end to the temporary oppression exercised by the wicked (verse ten)?
240. Give evidence from verse ten that the wicked made a pretense of worship.
241. Why do men indulge freely in sin (verse 11)?
242. What is meant by fearing God openly (verse 12)?
243. Why will it not be well for the evil man (verse 13)?

PARAPHRASE 8:9-13

All this I have seen. I thought about everything man does under the sun and I realized that there is a time when one man has the opportunity to exercise authority, and in doing so injures himself or another. I watched the wicked come and go from the temple. However such practice did not save them from the doom due them—they too were eventually borne to their tombs. They were both praised and then forgotten in the city where they did such things. I number these activities among the unfulfilling, fleeting experiences under the sun. These evil activities, which fill the minds of men continually, happen because men are aware that the judgment upon wrongdoing is not quickly executed. As a result, men are fully set to do evil. Since a sinner may do evil a hundred times, and find his life to be prolonged, I am still aware that it is the one who reverently fears God—the one who abides in His presence—who will survive in the end. This is because the wise man practices reverence for God. But for him who will not reverently fear and honor God, it will not be well for him. Such wicked men will not prolong their days but their days will be fleeting as a shadow.

COMMENT 8:9-13

This is the second division of this immediate section which offers guidance through wisdom for difficult or trying times.

More specifically, the admonition is to work and function as a wise person even when the wise or righteous are oppressed.

v. 9 Both translators and commentators manifest bias when translating or discussing this verse. Is the verse a summary, transitional or preparatory? Some maintain that it is a summary verse and include it as a terminating verse for the section including verses one through nine. Others say that " 'All this' points forward to the problem that is about to be stated and about to be solved."² A. L. Williams states that the expression "all this" is used to "introduce" not to "gather up." The NASB views it as a summary with a new paragraph starting with verse ten. "One man ruling over another" seems to reflect more on the content of the preceding verses than it does to the following arguments. However, it may be taken as simply identifying a point in history—a *time* when one man has power over another to his hurt. The primary theme of this section deals with the characteristics of a wise man and this theme is still under consideration here. The most satisfactory view may be that the verse is *transitional* as is 7:14; 9:1; 9:11 and 9:13.

It should be noted again that Solomon is *still* restricted by "under the sun" observations.

The latter part of the verse also offers some difficulty. It could mean that the injured man is the one being oppressed or it could mean that the one who is doing the ruling is the one who suffers hurt. *The Amplified Bible* incorporates both views with the translation, ". . . one man has power over another to his own hurt or the other man's." Usually it is understood to mean that it is the poor, righteous person who suffers the persecution.

v. 10 Once more this verse presents additional difficulties in determining the original meaning. But whatever it means, it is labeled as "vanity" and "futility." To make each of the activities in this verse refer to the wicked person makes for

² Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, p. 192.

better sense. It is the *wicked* individual who journeys to the "holy place" (the Temple). They are observed by those who live in the city as worshiping God, but their worship is meaningless. (Cf. COMMENT 5:1-7) Such hypocritical worship was meaningless because it would neither hold back their time of death nor would it fortify them against the inevitable certainty of God's judgment. They were able, however, to influence their peers and received respectable burial. They received the burial due the righteous. This Solomon says is vanity and futility. The despicable in Israel were to be ". . . buried with a donkey's burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:19). However, the wicked receive decent burial from their neighbors and friends.

Some of the living played along with their hypocritical game. They closed their eyes to the wicked deeds performed by those whom they had helped to bury. They praised their names in the streets. Some translations have "praised" instead of "forgotten." However, in a short period of time the dead were forgotten even by those of their own city. It is the wicked *rulers* who have died and receive burial. This makes the action more absurd and motivates the observation, "This too is futility." From the standpoint of the righteous, one of the most perplexing problems encountered is to observe the wicked go to their graves praised by the society whom they have maligned without any apparent retributive action to make the record straight. It is specifically to this problem of life that the Preacher addresses himself.

v. 1 The first observation in this verse suggests that sinners do *appear* to carry out their wickedness without just retribution. This is *not* the way wise men would prefer. *Punish the wicked and reward the righteous*. This would eliminate part of life's futility and bring immediate justification to the one who trusts God. However, the ultimate justice of God is one of the major themes of the Bible, and a wise man will accept the promise of the vindication of the righteous on faith. It was precisely this same problem which stimulated the words: "Surely in

vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning" (Psalm 73:13-14). The Psalmist felt the burden of the inconsistent justice of his world. He would have despaired in the face of it except for an experience which assured him that it *will not* be well for the wicked. His next observation manifests an assurance of God's justice and also how he came to that conclusion. He writes: ". . . when I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight, until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end" (Psalm 73:16-17). The Psalmist drew near to God and was able to place the apparent injustices of life in proper perspective. The following two verses in Ecclesiastes demonstrates that the Preacher has come to the same conclusion!

The second thought in this verse is a result of the first. It is because the justice of God does not demand immediate retribution for evil activities that the hearts of men are literally filled to overflowing with evil. One has said that "the same sun that hardens the clay melts the wax." The long-suffering of God has a positive effect on some hearts while it is the occasion of evil activity for others. It is not the wise man who is under consideration here. The wicked are the ones considered in verse ten and the conclusion drawn in this verse has the wicked as the subject. The Preacher has a keen eye to interpret human nature. He observes that since men do not pay immediately for breaking God's moral laws, that they are deceived into believing that such evil behaviour need never be recompensed. The "heart" is mentioned because it is the seat of both emotional and rational processes. The "given *fully* to do evil" suggests that the wicked feel secure in their present state and give themselves with fearless, shameless, boldness to the practice of evil. The fact that God is slow to anger and filled with grace and mercy is clearly set forth in Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4 and II Peter 3:9. Many misinterpret God's mercy and conclude that pay day for them will never come. The Preacher only states that God's judgment is not "executed speedily," he does not imply that it will not be.

Christians are not such fools. They can rejoice because Christ has made them "wise unto salvation" (II Timothy 3:15). He has taught that although the wise man is a sinner, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). The wise Christian is thankful that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, and not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

vs. 12-13 These two verses demonstrate the final vindication of God's ways. It is an open message to both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are assured that a temporary extension of the life of the wicked is not tantamount to God's approval of their evil deeds. He is also given assurance that his own allegiance to purity of life and obedience to right will be rewarded. On the other hand, however, the sinner should take heed. There are forceful, declarative warnings. "It will not," "he will not," and "he does not" are statements which ring with certainty. They leave nothing to the imagination of the wicked. They close off all possible exits which could have served as a refuge from the wrath of God. There is no comfort in the Preacher's message for the one who has been deceived to believe that God will not execute justice.

The sinner "does evil a hundred times." He goes unchecked in his evil rampage. The idea that "his days are lengthened" is best understood to mean that his evil activities are prolonged. He has neither found the meaning of life nor are the *number* of his days prolonged because of his wickedness.

It is well for the one who *fears* God. He is the exact opposite of the sinner. The term fear has been sufficiently defined. As it appears here, it represents the abhorance of all that appeals to the sinner and it encompasses all that is worthy of the wise. The fact that sinners often live to old age should not be taken to mean that they have received God's approval. The fact that the righteous sometimes die young should not be

interpreted to mean that God is uninvolved in His world and lacks empathy with His own. The Preacher declares: "I know it will be well for those who fear God." The details of *how* God will vindicate His own are hidden from the eyes of the Preacher. He has observed enough, however, to know that someday, sometime, God will have the final word and justice will triumph. One must keep in mind the purpose of the book and also the restricting limitation of "under the sun."

The NASB translates the first part of verse thirteen to read, "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow." The idea here is understood to mean that a shadow lengthens and the evil man will not experience length of days. Although this appears to contradict the statement concerning the fact that the evil man "may lengthen his life" (verse 12), it need not. First of all, it has been pointed out that verse twelve could mean his activity in sin is lengthened although his actual days of life need not be. Also, some sinners do live a long time but such longevity should not be understood as a product of their wicked activities. The message to the wise man is that he should not despair if he observes a wicked man living a long time in spite of his wickedness. Leupold translates the first part of this verse differently. He writes: "But it shall not be well with the wicked, and being like a shadow, he shall not prolong his days." This conveys just the opposite meaning of lengthening and implies a fleeting, transitory existence as a shadow. In 6:12 the comparison between life and a shadow is made to illustrate how fleeting man is and this truth corresponds to Leupold's translation. The use of the shadow to represent the shortness of life is also supported by Luther, Vaihinger and Hengstenberg.

It will not be well for the wicked and the reason is clearly stated: "He does not reverently fear and worship God" (*The Amplified Bible*). Once again the practice of the fear of the Lord is the distinction made between the wise man and the wicked. One should not be surprised to see this theme occur (Cf. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12, 13) or to discover that when the conclusion of the "whole matter" is drawn, it is once again

“the fear of the Lord” which remains as the one distinction which sets a man apart as the one who shall stand in the final day (Cf. 12:13).

FACT QUESTIONS 8:9-13

431. Identify the general admonition offered in this section.
432. What three possible functions could verse nine serve?
433. Give evidence from verse nine that Solomon is still laboring from the standpoint of restricted information.
434. Who is to be understood as the injured man (verse nine)?
435. Is it the wicked, the wise, or a mixture of both under discussion in verse ten? Defend your answer.
436. More specifically, who are those who are buried?
437. What experience did the Psalmist have that gave him courage in the face of the prosperity of the wicked and oppression of the righteous (verse 11)?
438. What is the occasion that gives rise to the statement, “men . . . are given fully to do evil”?
439. What two possible effects on the hearts of men can the long-suffering of God have?
440. What is meant by “given fully to do evil”?
441. Identify the messages for both the wise man and the wicked man found in verses 12-13.
442. What is meant by saying that the sinner’s days are lengthened?
443. What characteristic must the wise man possess if it is to be well with him?
444. What two meanings are given to the term “shadow” as it is used in verse thirteen?
445. What theme, which occurs in a number of verses, is also the distinguishing mark of the one who will stand in the final judgment?

3. Work even when one cannot understand
the working of God. 8:14-17

TEXT 8:14-17

- 14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.
- 15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.
- 16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),
- 17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

344. What two events which take place upon the earth does Solomon identify as futile (verse 14)?
345. If a man is without revelation from God, what is the best thing he can do (verse 15)?
346. Who gives both the wise man and the wicked man his days to live?
347. How extensive or intense was Solomon's pursuit to see the "task which has been done on earth"?
348. Can man discover all the work done under the sun?
349. When a wise man has observed all that he can, he should be able to say what?

PARAPHRASE 8:14-17

There are some threads of life which are difficult to unravel. The world is filled with many anomalies. Note these two: a wicked man continues in his wickedness and prospers as if he were a wise, righteous man; a righteous man, who does the right thing and acts wisely suffers as if he were a sinner. I say that this is certainly empty and unfulfilling. In my search under the sun, apart from God's revelation, I have decided what is good for man. There is no better thing for him to do than to eat, to drink, and to be joyful. These are the things which will stick with a man and warm his heart in the short time God gives him to live upon the earth.

Man is busily engaged in the sorry and difficult task of business under the sun—to the degree that some men never close their eyes day or night—and I joined the endless round of activity, and gave myself to know wisdom and see all that it was possible for me to see. I saw that such activity is the work of God and man cannot discover all that is done on the earth. A man can toil to discover but he will not find it out. A wise man should, after living his life seeking after wisdom, be able to say that he has found it out, but even he will not be able.

COMMENT 8:14-17

In this third division, one is instructed to work although he has limited resources under the sun, and although he discovers that God's ways are past finding out. In addition, he is deeply troubled because on numerous occasions the events of life are opposite from what they should be: wicked men prosper as though they were the righteous, and the righteous suffer as though they had committed grievous sins.

The two most common factors which color the writing of the Preacher are evident in this section. Both the "vanity" and "under the sun" concepts limit his observations. From

the purely earthly point of view he has drawn his conclusions. His conclusion found in verse fifteen is a reasonable one to him. Especially is this true in the light of his restricted knowledge as he observes the activities of the wicked and the righteous.

v. 14 Is there an issue on the face of the earth that is more perplexing to the one who does good than that presented in this verse? It is the basis for much of what has been identified as a "grievous, sorry task" that has "afflicted" the sons of men. This issue, the inequitable correspondence between the righteous and the wicked and their deeds, serves as a potential stumbling block even to the Christian who has the *full* revelation from God. How difficult it would be for one to understand when all he has to work with are the tools of observation. This explains the Preacher's rather matter-of-fact and limited conclusion.

He equates the activities with "futility." Since the mark of vanity rests upon all creatures "under the sun" then, to a degree at least, one could almost expect some imbalance in rewards and punishments. In other words, the shock need not be so severe when one realizes that the world too travails beneath the curse of sin and decay. However, even such an admission does not dissuade the searching mind. The Preacher's conclusion is still valid—there should be a closer, observable correlation between the righteous and his rewards and the wicked and his punishment. But it is not the case, so he marks the whole experience as false and empty.

v. 15 In the face of his observation, Solomon returns to his previously stated conclusion (Cf. 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18). He commends the enjoyment of the primary resources of living: eating, drinking and merriment. He also qualifies his commendation twice in this one verse by the phrase "under the sun." He is not encouraging one to a life of greedy abandonment or wanton hedonism. He offers more the idea of quietly sharing in the blessings of life which are obviously placed here by God for one's enjoyment. Man is going to have to "toil" through life and his memory will serve him best if it contains these fundamental joys upon which he can reflect. He admits

to the truth that it is God who gives man his days to live. It is true that God gives the "wicked" his days too. Solomon is arguing that a wise man will recognize them as a gift from God and although he is often bewildered by what he sees to be unfair balances of life, he will nevertheless resign himself to living each day to its fullest.

v. 16 This verse is a summary of the two previous proposals: (1) From 1:16-17, he declared that he would "know" wisdom. He recognized that such wisdom would enable him to succeed in his second proposal. (2) He also proposed to see the business activity that is done upon the earth. (Cf. 1:13)

The closing thought in the verse has been interpreted two different ways. It may suggest that Solomon is the one whose eyes cannot close in sleep. This would be due to the intense study of that which he desired to know. Or it could have reference to the ones he observes who are so engaged in the activities of life, especially in business enterprises, that *they* do not even take time to sleep. "To see sleep" is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament and means to *enjoy* sleep. Once again it could apply either to the one who tries to discover the solutions to the problems of life, or to the ones who are engaged in endless labor to increase their wealth. Neither will discover satisfaction and thus will never "enjoy sleep." Almost all authorities admit to the hyperbolic use of the expression "one should never sleep night or day."

v. 17 If Solomon could have reached beyond his time and selected any verse from the New Testament to state succinctly his closing thought, it undoubtedly would have been: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Romans 11:33)! Solomon wanted to discover the work of God—that which is done upon earth through the providential ordering of things—but it was far from him. Even though man "should seek laboriously" he will not discover it. A wise man should say "I know," but he cannot. This double emphasis on man's desire to know and his willingness to expand his energies without restraint, speaks

to the gravity of the subject and the intensity of Solomon's quest.

FACT QUESTIONS 8:14-17

- 446. Identify the inequity revealed in this section.
- 447. Name the two oft-appearing concepts which qualify the Preacher's remarks.
- 448. What has been the primary cause of the imbalance in rewards and punishments (verse 14)?
- 449. What conclusion does Solomon state that he has previously observed (verse 15)?
- 450. Explain what Solomon means and also what he doesn't mean by "eat," "drink," and "be merry."
- 451. Verse sixteen is a summary of what two proposals Solomon has made from the beginning of the book.
- 452. "To see sleep" refers to whom? Discuss.
- 453. What was Solomon's objective which he found impossible to fulfill "under the sun"?

- 4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly. 9:1-10

TEXT 9:1-10

- 1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred, anything awaits him.
- 2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

- 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.
- 4 For whoever is joined with the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.
- 5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.
- 6 Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.
- 7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.
- 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.
- 9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.
- 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

350. What is it that Solomon takes to his heart, and then explains (verse one)?
351. Who holds the destiny of "righteous men" (verse one)?
352. Identify the "one fate" which comes to the good man as well as to the wicked man (verses two-three).
353. List the characteristics of the sinner set forth in verses two and three.
354. What advantage does the living have over the dead (verse four)?
355. According to verse five, what knowledge possessed by

- the living could cause them to turn from evil to good?
356. List the seven characteristics of the dead (verses five-six).
357. Why should the living be happy and cheerful (verse seven)?
358. "White clothes" and "oil" could be symbolic of what (verse eight)?
359. Man's reward is identified as what (verse nine)?
360. With what spirit should man work (verse ten)?

PARAPHRASE 9:1-10

So I thoughtfully considered and reflected upon everything I had observed—I took it to heart, examining and exploring it all. I discovered that righteous men, the ones who are wise and whose activities are in harmony with God's will, are the ones whose deeds and works are in the hands of God. However, that which is ahead for the wise man, whether love or hatred, he will have to wait to find out as no man can foresee the future. The same thing happens to the innocent as well as to the guilty. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. Anything may happen to anyone whether they are submissive to authority or defiant of the law; whether they swear by an oath or are afraid of an oath. Yes, one event comes to all regardless of their moral behavior. I concluded that this is a terrible thing that happens under the sun. It causes some men to be filled with evil and behave wickedly. Their lives are actually governed by insane impulses while they live. Afterwards they die too. As long as there is life, there is hope! Surely to be a live dog is better than being a dead lion. Why? Because the living at least know they will die while the dead know nothing. There is nothing left for the dead in this life; even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hatred and their warm emotion have vanished into the dark past; they can no longer participate in the work or joy of the activities of those who still labor upon the earth.

Since you are one who is righteous, wise, and in the hand of God, go on your way. Eat your bread with joy and drink

your wine with an untroubled mind, for you are one of whom it can be said, "God has already accepted and approved of your works." Because this is true, you should demonstrate God's acceptance and approval of your works by wearing white garments which indicate your pure life. You should also anoint your head regularly with oil which is a sign of your genuine joy and gladness. In addition, you should make the most of your marriage. You do not have many years upon the earth, so live joyfully with the wife of your youth. Remember, God has given you the few years you will have on the earth. This joy and happiness you experience will be your reward in life. Such joy will also be the reward of all your toil and hard work which your hands find to do under the sun. Everything your hands find to do, do it with all your might. Such industry will bring you satisfaction during your few years here upon this earth. Remember, there is no industry, work, knowledge, or wisdom in the place of the dead where you are going.

COMMENT 9:1-10

The first ten verses capture the despair, resolve and encouragement of the Preacher. They begin with the age-old problem of the similar fate of both the godly and the ungodly. This, however, is not to become a basis for pessimism or inactivity on the part of the godly. As long as one is still alive, he has hope. The Preacher's conclusion is simple: Do not waste your opportunity. His advice is to gain as much as possible from each day. His formula for daily activity states that one should give himself whole-heartedly to his work. In addition, his life should be filled with happiness and cheer as he lives it with the wife whom he has chosen and whom he loves.

The explanation found in these verses sustains his previous contention (8:14-17) that men cannot find out the work of God. The future is veiled from men, but known to God. His conclusion is the same here as in the previous discussion. He

suggests industry and joy in one's daily task.

v. 1 The "all this" refers to the preceding discussion concerning the inability of men to know what the future holds for them. He admits to God's control of the future activities of men and the fact that *everything* is in His hand. The fact that man does not know what the future holds is of grave importance to Solomon, and he gives himself completely to explain it.

The "love" and "hatred" which will come to even wise men represents the broad scope of experiences of life. While the context suggests these are deeds "in the hand of God," one need not conclude that God is the author of evil. He permits or allows evil to come upon the godly but only so far as He chooses not to intervene in the activities of ungodly men. Neither should one think that determinism, as a doctrine, is supported by this verse. God does affect the activities of men when His plans or purposes are involved. The important lesson in this verse is that outward signs of prosperity and success are not necessarily indications of God's approval; neither should suffering or poverty be interpreted as a sign of His disapproval. The "love or hatred" which befalls the wise man come to him because he is an intricate part of the total experiences of life, they are not contingent upon his moral character or lack of it.

The argument which states that "love and hatred" comes from others, rather than God, is supported by verse six. Here Solomon specifically refers to "*Their* love, *their* hate, and *their* zeal." The distinction between what God wills, or desires, and what He permits must constantly be made. It is precisely this point that Solomon makes. God is in control of His world, but He, at times, permits or allows the flow of history to ebb and tide unobstructed, and thus the events which fall to the godly should come to the wicked and those which fall to the wicked should come to the godly. One thing is certain even as Solomon says, "anything awaits him," or "is before him."

v. 2 What is the *one* fate? The verse begins with, "It is the

same for all." This undoubtedly refers to the observations in verse one which speak to the many facets of life. This fact has been clearly demonstrated. *Death* is often understood to be the fate or event which comes to all men. (Cf. 2:14; 3:19) While this is true, the term in Hebrew translated "fate" suggests more of a "meeting with" or "happening," and most likely includes all of the events of life spoken of in the preceding verse. This would not *exclude* the death event. The message clearly states that whether one is godly or a sinner, he will be caught up in the activities of hatred and love. None escapes. The following list of contrasts illustrates that all men experience the same fate. It is true even as Solomon says. Whether one is righteous or wicked, clean or unclean, a sacrificer or non-sacrificer, good or sinner, honors an oath or is a profane swearer. All receive the same fate.

It is not important to decide if these are individuals or classes of people the Preacher has observed. The fact that he has extended the list to include variations of good and bad people enforces his argument that *no man* knows what the future holds and all men are caught up in the innerplay of life's struggle.

The characteristics of those who have been approved of God indicate a general attitude of submission to God's will. The "righteous" are those who behave correctly toward their fellow man, while the "wicked" would violate proper relationships. The "clean" would refer to those who are ceremonially clean as Solomon speaks next in sacrificial language of the one who follows the levitical rules, or fails to do so. However, the use of "good" which qualifies "clean" suggests acceptable *moral* activity as well as clean in the levitical or externally legal sense. There were those who were careful to sacrifice according to the laws. Such are called "good" in contrast with the "sinner." The final comparison is made between those who see the value of the use of an oath before God, and those who fail to reverence an oath. Zechariah 5:3-4 refers to the evil of swearing (oath taking) with an irreverent attitude. Isaiah 65:16 speaks of the solemn act as acceptable to God.

The point of the many contrasts is stated at the beginning of the verse where it reads: "It is the same for all."

v. 3 The first half of this verse is a summary statement. The one fate for all men is looked upon as an "evil under the sun." The fact that Solomon states that all "go to the dead" does not have to be understood that *death* is the one event or "fate" he has in mind. Death simply terminates the fate of men. It is the final exercise of all the futile and transitory activities of men upon this earth.

He observes that because the godly suffer as if they were the wicked, and wicked people prosper as if they were the godly, that two things result. First, the righteous should recognize that their deeds are in the hands of God and unfortunate calamities should not move them from their pursuit of good and righteousness. Second, the wicked sinners because they prosper and their wicked deeds often go unpunished, are self-deceived and believe there will never be a day of judgment before God. As a result of this deceitfulness, the hearts of wicked men are set to do evil continually. Solomon says, "Insanity is in their hearts." This strong affirmation of the intensity of their sin is in contrast to wisdom and reason which are characteristic of the godly. If men respected the moral laws of God as they do the physical laws, there would be less sinning in the world. Wise men refuse to violate laws when they recognize the reciprocating, sudden recompense for their folly. Because God is long-suffering and desires that no man perish, He postpones or defers punishment of sins. This act of grace is often misinterpreted by wicked men to mean that no judgment will be forthcoming.

Thus the inability of righteousness to protect or deliver one from evil is occasion for doubt and despair. At the same time the apparent lack of judgment against an evil deed encourages participation in wickedness. Of such activities, Delitzsch has written: "It is an evil in itself, as being a contradiction to the moral order of the world; and it is such also on account of its demoralizing influences. The author here repeats what he had already, viii. 11, said in a more special reference, that

because evil is not in this world visibly punished, men become confident and bold in sinning."¹

"The dead" is mentioned here as the end of those who hold disregard for God's government and laws. It is the end or final resting place where all activities are thought to cease. The godly also partake in this event. (Cf. 4:1-2)

vs. 4-6 For the true sense of the passage, these three verses must be considered together. Each verse is an extension, an observation, based upon the declaration of verse three. Solomon observes that so long as there is life there is hope; death closes the door permanently to all activity; even the memory of the dead is soon obliterated. Finally, the contribution of love, hatred and energy can no longer be made as the dead no longer share in the transitory futility of life on the earth.

The comparison of a dog with a lion was much greater in Solomon's day than it is with one who lives in American culture. The lion was the most noble of beasts. (Cf. Proverbs 30:30; Isaiah 31:4) Dogs were not treated kindly and held as pets, but were considered scavengers of the streets. (Cf. I Samuel 17:43; 24:14; II Samuel 3:8; 16:4; Matthew 15:26; Luke 16:22) The meaning is obvious; the most despicable or undesirable *person* who still possesses life is better off than the finest individual who has already gone to the grave. The reason? Because as long as there is life there is hope. "The living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything." Since one knows he will die, he should so order his life as to come into a proper relationship with God. This is the hope of the living. One is reminded of the Preacher's admonitions in 7:1-4 where the living are directed to seriously consider the fact that death is the end for every man. Obviously the result will be a re-ordered and improved life.

The "reward" lost by the dead refers to their consciousness. They no longer share in the knowledge, love, hatred, or events upon the earth. Their memory is even forgotten.

¹ F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 357.

This is not a denial of God's retributive action after death. It is just that such activities are not under consideration here. His conclusions are based upon his observations made "under the sun." The Preacher does not approve of the activities of despicable men, and neither does he suggest that sinners who are alive are of greater value than godly people who have already died. His emphasis is simply on the fact that life affords opportunities which the dead cannot experience. Death terminates all activity under the sun. Therefore, one's reward is gained on the earth: to be cut off from the earth is to be cut off from one's reward. Solomon had written: "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my *reward* for all my labor" (2:10). He adds that man should find happiness in his activities (3:22); that he should enjoy his life as well as his riches (5:18-19); and to live joyfully with the wife of one's youth is reward indeed (9:9)! It is to be noted that these rewards are experiences which take place among the living. None of these will take place in the grave. Therefore, his emphasis upon the living is clear. One must not conclude that Solomon did not have some insight as to activity beyond the grave. (Cf. 12:7) He is writing with a self-limiting focus which qualifies his observations by the closing thought of verse six which states, "they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun."

v. 7 The Preacher has already established both principles that are expressed in this verse: (1) Enjoy life (Cf. COMMENT on 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15); (2) God's approval of your labors (Cf. COMMENT on 3:13; 5:19). The admonition to enjoy life is not in contradiction to 4:2 where Solomon said, "So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living." On the one hand life could be filled with joy and merriment while on the other there was sorrow, oppression and bitter experiences. When God approves one's works, life is enjoyable even "under the sun."

"Works" are to be understood in the context of this chapter, and would refer to all the godly, righteous acts of the good

man. God has no delight in the sinful acts enumerated in the preceding verses but approves or accepts the works of righteous men. The fact that God approves of their works implies that their labors are in God's hands (verse one) and negates the idea that the "love" and "hatred" come from God. It is obvious that such activities come from the hands of men with whom one lives and works upon the earth.

v. 8 "White" in the Bible signifies glory, purity and joy. The Preacher is arguing for a full, happy life to be lived by the ones who labor through life with God's blessing. The white attire of angels (Mark 16:5) and of men (Acts 1:10) represents messengers of God who have His approval. In addition the glorified saints are dressed in white apparel manifesting both joy and righteousness. Jesus said to the church in Sardis: "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels" (Revelation 3:4-5). The people in Solomon's day were admonished to wear white as a sign of God's approval. They were also to keep oil on their heads as a sign of joy. (Cf. Psalms 45:7; Isaiah 61:3) The oil was to be perpetually worn upon the head representing the constant joy of the one whose works are approved of God.

v. 9 Solomon compounds his admonition to be happy with still another injunction: "Enjoy life!" The literal meaning is "*look upon life.*" This suggests turning away from the scenes of sadness and experiences which would rob one of joy. Fix your eyes on the hope of joy—on those things which will result in God's approval and subsequently your own happiness. You should share your joy with your life. Although the monogamous ideal is out of harmony with Solomon's polygamous practice, he is keenly aware that genuine joy in marriage is experienced between husband and wife—not multiple wives or concubines. Jesus gave the order which receives God's approval when He said, "He who created them from the beginning made them

male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.' Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). (Cf. Proverbs 5:15, 18, 19; 18:22; 19:14)

Your wife is intended to make this toilsome life more bearable. Do not long for the past or wait expecting to find joy tomorrow. Live for today. Realize that God has approved your works and it is He who has also given you the few years you have to work upon the earth.

v. 10 This section is summarized by two observations: (1) Work with great industry; (2) Remember that today, in this life, one is afforded his only opportunity to work. You cannot redeem lost opportunities in the grave. Solomon has clearly demonstrated that it is the righteous, godly person who is under consideration. He is to find renewed determination in the truth that God approves of his work and gives him time to labor. Similar instruction is found in John 9:4; II Corinthians 6:2; Galatians 6:10 and II Thessalonians 3:10.

"Sheol," or grave is used only this one time in Ecclesiastes. It means a shadowy region or place of the dead. Such a dark, shadowy region where there are no activities is contrasted to life "under the sun." It is today upon the earth that one is instructed to seek joy and work diligently.

FACT QUESTIONS 9:1-10

454. Identify what causes some godly people to grow pessimistic and inactive.
455. What advice does Solomon offer in view of the fact the future is known only to God?
456. The "all this" refers to what? (Cf. verse one)
457. "Love" and "hatred" will come to whom? They will come from whom? (Cf. verse six)
458. Are outward signs of success indicators of God's approval?

Discuss.

459. What is the *one fate*? Explain. (Cf. verse two)
460. The godly are identified by what five terms?
461. What general truth is demonstrated by such a long list of characteristics of both the godly and the ungodly?
462. Explain the "evil" under the sun. (Cf. verse three)
463. Write in your own words the inequity that exists between the godly and the ungodly.
464. What is meant by "insanity is in their hearts"?
465. Explain why God withholds *immediate* punishment against some sinners.
466. Why should verses four through six be considered together?
467. Explain why the contrast between a dog and lion would be greater in Solomon's day than today.
468. Identify the lesson taught in verse four.
469. What is meant by "hope" in this verse?
470. Explain what the "reward" is which the dead loses. (Cf. 2:10)
471. State the two lessons found in verse seven.
472. God approves what kind of works?
473. The people of Solomon's day were to wear "white" as a symbol of what? (Cf. verse eight)
474. Where does Solomon admit that genuine joy is experienced? (Cf. verse eight)
475. What is a wife intended to do about her husband's toilsome life?
476. The godly person finds renewal of his work in what two truths?

5. Work with the awareness that God will control the final outcome. 9:11-12

TEXT 9:11-12

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread

to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

- 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

361. What reason is given in verse eleven for the many inequitable situations found in life?
362. Where do these unfair situations take place?
363. What is it that man does not know? What is meant by this statement?
364. Identify the lesson taught by the fish and the birds.

PARAPHRASE 9:11-12

Once again I took a hard look at things done under the sun and I found that many things are not as they appear. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the battle is not always won by the best trained warriors; the wise are not always the ones who have bread; the intelligent ones do not always hold the wealth; the skillful are not always the ones to win favor. Time and chance will catch up to them all. Neither does a man know when his time of misfortune will come. His moment of disaster will fall upon him like fish caught in an inescapable net, or birds trapped in a snare. Even so men are ensnared in such an evil time.

COMMENT 9:11-12

The truth of the advice offered in these two verses could be easily observed and is not dependent on divine revelation.

We are confronted with five illustrations which demonstrate the lack of consistency in life. The effort exerted by the swift, the warriors, the wise, the discerning, and the men of ability should produce expected and predictable results. However, in each situation the opposite of that which one anticipates actually happens. This is the way life is "under the sun." In addition, two illustrations of netted fish and trapped birds demonstrate that not only is the outcome of man's efforts unpredictable, his time of death falls upon him suddenly and without warning. The transitory nature of life is once more impressed on the minds of the readers. The Preacher has previously explored the injustices of life which on occasion discourages the godly and leads them to despair. He now assures his audience that it is *wisdom* that protects against despair and fortifies the godly against the contradictions of life.

v. 11 "The race is not to the swift." The idea here is not that the swift loses the race to the slower runner because he is diverted from his goal by some lesser attraction or activity. Neither does it mean that the fast runner is over confident in his ability. The incident that causes him to lose the race is not of his doing. The closing thought in the verse qualifies all five of the illustrations—"time and chance overtake them all." The term "chance" does not mean something gambled or that one has "fallen down on his luck." It is best understood as an "incident," and means a calamity or an unfortunate experience that one encounters in the pursuit of goals or objectives. Unavoidably tragedies occur among men as well as in nature which necessitates the changing or readjusting one's plans. The reason for this is that both man and his world labor under the mark of vanity. Paul argues for this same premise when he states, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Romans 9:16).

A similar explanation is given to the remaining four illustrations. One would expect a different result than the one stated in each example, but the events of life often curtail the detailed and carefully laid plans. In the Christian age the lesson is

the same, but there is the added act of trust which leads to the spirit of submission, goes beyond "time" and "chance" and leads one to pray, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that" (James 4:15).

v. 12 We have just learned that great talent and planned activities do not guarantee success. "His time" may well mean one's hour of death, but it should also allow for calamitous events which hinder planned activities. Thus man's life and daily activities are out of his own hand. The events are not controlled by some sinister force, competitive with God, known as "time" and "chance." Rather, in the exchange of love and hate as one lives his life out on the earth among the sinners and the righteous, he will come to realize that no guarantee of the fruition of any earthly activity is given. The two following similarities are offered to illustrate this truth. Just as "fish" and "birds" follow the course of daily routine and innocently go about searching out that which is essential to their livelihood, so man is engaged in similar activities. Without warning the fish and birds are trapped and their future is sharply altered. Just like the "fish" and "birds" the Preacher declares, "so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them." "Evil" means a time of misfortune and could refer to numerous events which befall men. Jesus used a similar figure of speech when he warned his generation of great calamity with the words, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth" (Luke 21:34-35). Even when God is directly involved in the *sudden* judgments upon evil men, the image of a *net* is often used. (Cf. Hosea 7:12; Ezekiel 12:13; 32:3)

FACT QUESTIONS 9:11-12

477. What do the illustrations in this section demonstrate?
478. What protects and fortifies the godly?

479. Why does the swift lose the race? (Cf. verse 11)
 480. In what way does Romans 9:16 explain verse eleven?
 481. Identify the two meanings which could be attributed to "his time" in verse twelve.
 482. What is the specific lesson taught by the "fish" and "birds"?

6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in our work. 9:13-18

TEXT 9:13-18

- 13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.
 14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it, and constructed large siege works against it.
 15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.
 16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.
 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

365. Solomon said he was impressed with what (verse 13)?
 366. What kind of wisdom was it?
 367. Give three reasons why the small city should not have been delivered.
 368. What was the poor, wise man's reward for delivering the city?

369. Does Solomon prove by this parable that "wisdom is better than strength"? Discuss.
370. How should wisdom be communicated?
371. What should be heeded in time of trouble?
372. Identify the two lessons taught in verse eighteen.

PARAPHRASE 9:13-18

The following parable on wisdom, which I have observed under the sun, made a genuine impression on my mind. There was a small city with only a few men in it and a powerful king surrounded it with his army. The king also built overpowering bulwarks which towered above the city. The king cut off the small city from all exchange of goods and communication. However, there was a potential deliverer within the city. He was poor and insignificant but he was very wise. He was wise enough to deliver the city by his wisdom even in the face of such overwhelming obstacles. Yet no one thought of that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is far better than the strength of an army." The wisdom of the poor insignificant man is despised and his words, which delivered the city, were soon forgotten. The quiet words of wise men, even when the wise men are poor, should be heeded rather than listening to the shouting of a great king who labors in the midst of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons but one sinner who acts foolishly can destroy much good.

COMMENT 9:13-18

The central subject of this section is *wisdom*. A parable is clearly evident in verses 13-15 while the interpretation of it is found in verse sixteen. Two final observations on the value of wisdom are given in verses 17-18.

How can one safeguard himself from the treachery of snares and traps? Is there any way one can find encouragement in

the midst of calamity? The answer is found in securing wisdom and practicing it. One should not despise such a valuable possession as wisdom though it be in possession of a servant—this would not diminish its worth. One should not only enjoy life, and work with great industry, he should also employ wisdom.

v. 13 One should not attempt to equate this wisdom with the wisdom revealed in the New Testament which is *complete* in Christ and wonderfully *redemptive* in nature. The wisdom the Preacher discusses is qualified at the outset as earthy “under the sun” wisdom. Such an example of wisdom as set forth here “impressed” Solomon and was “great” to him. This is true because of what it did.

Varied interpretations of the parable are offered. Among the notable views are: (1) Israel is represented as the possessor of true wisdom, and although she was small and despised, she was accepted by God and delivered by his hand. (2) The true church is besieged from generation to generation. However, she has Jesus Christ, once Himself poor, to deliver her. (3) The event in Bible history which most nearly parallels the story is recorded in II Samuel 20:15-22 and Judges 9:53. (4) Imaginative interpretations include cities such as Dora, besieged by Antiochas the Great and Athens which was delivered by Themistocles from the hand of Xerxes. (5) Luther and Mercerus both held that no actual historical occurrence is intended.

The most natural interpretation would be that which elevates wisdom. The emphasis on the “great” king and the “poor” wise man heightens the contrast and increases the odds. Thus, the fact that the city is delivered from such overwhelming strength elevates wisdom and makes it the true hero.

v. 14 “A small city” indicates a lack of military resources. “A few men” in the city implies a minimum number of men to defend the city rather than the number of non-fighting personnel. The plight of the city is magnified by the fact that a “great” king surrounded it with his soldiers. In addition, he built “large siegeworks against it.” One need not search for such an actual event in history as the emphasis here is to

demonstrate that *wisdom* can deliver from insurmountable odds.

The "siegeworks" are also called "palisades" (Septuagint), embarkments or mounds. Sometimes wooden towers were used whereby the enemy could catapult heavy rocks against the wall or into the city. From such strongholds towering over the city, the enemy could spy out the weak areas of the beleaguered city so as to assail it. (Cf. Deuteronomy 20:20; II Samuel 20:15; II Kings 19:32; Jeremiah 3:4; Micah 4:14)

The comparison is reminiscent of the powers of darkness which are set against the church. However, just as wisdom had the capabilities of delivering the city, even against such overpowering odds, so Christ has given the victory to the church. (Cf. I Corinthians 15:55-57; I John 5:4)

vs. 15-16 "Wisdom is better." Wisdom is better than strength (verse 16). Wisdom is better than weapons of war (verse 18).

On the one hand wisdom stands in bold relief against the great king and military might of the enemy. Within the city it emerges as the hero against the fact that it was insignificantly contained in a small city and a poor man. Wisdom had everything going against it and nothing in its favor. Wisdom was sufficient to deliver the city, however, when everything was going against it. The tragedy came after the victory. The one who through his wisdom delivered the city was forgotten. It is sometimes argued that since the verb is pluperfect it should be rendered "no man *had remembered* that poor man" and thus would change the emphasis of the text. The meaning then would be that none remembered him until the *need* for deliverance was keenly felt and then they turned to him. This interpretation would clarify the verse but would complicate the meaning of verse sixteen where the Preacher declares, "But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded."

The *Anchor Bible*² takes an altogether different approach:

² R. B. Y. Scott. *The Anchor Bible: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 247.

"Now there was in it a man who was poor but wise, and he might have saved the city by his wisdom. But no man thought of that poor man. So I said, 'Wisdom is better than might!,' yet the wisdom of the poor man was despised, and his words went unheeded." On the idea of "might have saved," the editors comment: "Literally 'he saved.' The former sense is implied by the comment in verse sixteen. The point is that no one remembered the wise man because he was little regarded, rather than that men were not grateful for his advice which saved the city."³

Still a different view is explained by Hitzig: "In this particular case they had, it is true, not despised his wisdom, and they had listened to his words. But it was an exceptional case, necessity drove them thereto, and afterwards they forgot him."⁴

The latter view most clearly states the intent of the passage. The rulers of the small city were forced to listen to the wisdom of the poor man and they heeded it. Because he was poor and the crises facing their city was over, they soon forgot the poor man. In a similar way, Joseph was treated by the Chief Butler (Genesis 40:23); and Jesus was temporarily forgotten after His death upon the cross where the wisdom of God was revealed (I Corinthians 1:24).

The lesson is obvious. Solomon observed the incident—whether real or imaginary—and then reflected on the observation with the statement that "wisdom is better than strength." If the man had not *actually* delivered the city, Solomon would not have been impressed with the parable.

v. 17 The contrast between wisdom and strength continues. Jesus demonstrates perfectly the principle set forth in this verse. It was said of Him that He did "not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:2). On the other hand, the pompously dressed Herod assumed the role of the shouting ruler among fools at Caesarea when Luke wrote of him: "And on an appointed day Herod, having

³ R. B. Y. Scott. *ibid.*

⁴ Hengstenberg. *op. cit.*, p. 220.

put on the royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering the address to them. And the people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten with worms and died" (Acts 12:21-23).

The quiet tranquility could belong to the wise man himself. If so, such an attitude toward life would be an indication of his wisdom. Or it could refer to those who are so disposed as to quietly listen as they recognize the strength and power of his words.

v. 18 The first half of this verse has been sufficiently explained. The above example has shown that wisdom accomplishes more than weapons of war (7:19). The new thought introduced here is in antithesis to the former truth. Just as wisdom is better than weapons of war so one foolish act can undo the fruit of wisdom. The "much good" could refer to the present or potential good a nation accomplishes. The fact remains that it may all be lost if the ruler is a fool and engages in foolish or evil deeds. The "good" would not refer specifically to moral good but possessions, properties, prosperity, etc. This theme is taken up more fully in 10:1.

As an aside, it is interesting to observe how the preceding story has a counterpart in the Christian age. It is to be noted, however, that such a comparison is *not* to be interpreted as the original meaning of the author of Ecclesiastes. It does demonstrate, however, both the universal and spiritual application of the principles involved. The analogies are: (1) *Wisdom* would be the New Testament entrusted today to the church; (2) the *small city* would be the church (Luke 12:32; Hebrews 12:22-23); (3) the *great king* refers to Satan who sets himself against the chosen of God (John 12:31); (4) the *poor wise man* would represent Jesus Christ whose wisdom was, by some, forgotten (Isaiah 53:2-3; Mark 6:3; II Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 2:3).

FACT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

483. How can one fortify himself against snares and calamities?
484. Why is the wisdom of verse thirteen different from redemptive wisdom?
485. Give the best interpretation of the parable. Explain your answer.
486. Why is it not important that an actual event be identified in the siege of the small city? (Cf. verse 14)
487. The "siegeworks" are symbolic of what threat to the church today?
488. Make a list of the things wisdom had to oppose. (Cf. verses 15-16)
489. What became of the little man who saved the city?
490. Explain the statement: "Wisdom is better than strength."
491. In what way does Herod illustrate "a ruler among fools"?
492. What does "much good" refer to in verse eighteen?
493. List the possible analogies the parable could have in the church age.

D. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THOSE WHO LACK WISDOM

10:1-11

1. The foolish worker is in trouble. 10:1-4

TEXT 10:1-4

- 1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.
- 2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.
- 3 Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.
- 4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.