

## Fact Sheet for “Living in a Fallen World” Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

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Ecclesiastes is an OT book in a section called wisdom literature (Job – Song of Solomon). Wisdom is often seen not in the absolutes of life but in the patterns of life. For instance we have a saying... “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But as soon as we say this we can almost hear someone saying, “That’s not true because I knew a person who...” But it is true. Our saying is one that describes a very consistent pattern we see in life. Solomon describes in these verses patterns he that, in his wisdom, saw in life.

**ESV 10 ¶ Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.**

These wicked individuals had access to the temple in Jerusalem, and they were even praised in the city where they had practiced wickedness. Another way of putting it is this. Powerful oppressors who made a show of religious observances have had magnificent funerals and public speeches made in their honor. This was true in Solomon’s day as well as in ours. This has had its effect on society by encouraging the attitude, “If I can get away with it I will. It’s not going to be bad for me as long as I don’t get found out.” Why God allows this is puzzling, but we see it all the time. Solomon continues...

**11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.**

This word for “sentence” is only found elsewhere in the OT in Esther 1:20. Solomon saw in his time the same thing we see in ours. Sentences for crimes sometimes take a long time to be carried out.

In 2010, a death row inmate waited an average of 178 months (roughly 15 years) between sentencing and execution. Nearly a quarter of deaths on death row in the U.S. are due to natural causes. One prisoner was on death row for 39 years and finally died of a brain tumor.<sup>1</sup>

But Solomon is not only referring to the death penalty in Ecclesiastes 8:11. He’s referring to all matters of wrongdoing and justice. They had the same difficulty in Solomon’s day we have in ours... with the same results.

**11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.**

People then get the clear impression that they can do what is wrong with impunity.

**12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs (אָרָק aw-rak') his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.**

“A hundred times” simply is referring to a large number of times (see Proverbs 17:10). But, it will be well for one who fears God.

**13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong (אָרָק aw-rak') his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.**

New American Standard Version **Ecclesiastes 8:13** 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia.

Now, there is an apparent contradiction between the wicked of verses 12 and 13.

12 – prolongs his life

13 – he will not prolong his days

There is the thought here of our physical lives (compare Proverbs 10:27; Ephesians 6:1-3) but living a long time is not necessarily the same as prolonging one's days, particularly when you are thinking of eternity. That makes this passage a strong one that teaches life after death.

After Annas, Caiaphas, and the other members of the Sanhedrin, who condemned Christ, died... well let's just say that I don't think that any of us would like to be experiencing right now what they are experiencing right now. Although they lived in their physical life longer than did Jesus their days were not prolonged in the sense of eternal life. We have eternal life in Christ. And there are future rewards for holy living now.

Despite our sure and certain hope of eternal life and our dedication to Christ there is still an anomaly, and here it is.

**<sup>14</sup> ¶ There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.**

Our country has changed in our lifetime (florist, baker, 10 Commandments monument, February 8<sup>th</sup> at Evans pool in Seattle WA, marriage, creation/evolution). Virtue is not always rewarded. Perhaps the greatest example of this verse is Jesus Himself. He was entirely righteous and yet was condemned to death by the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. Remember these words that Jesus spoke in His first recorded sermon (Matt. 5:11-12). Given that we see this anomaly in life how should we seek to live?

**<sup>15</sup> And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.**

Having said that righteousness is not always rewarded and wickedness is not always punished, and sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous meet with disaster, Solomon again recommended the enjoyment of life. We cannot control whether we will experience adversity or prosperity, but each of our days should be received as gifts from God and should be savored as He permits.

Jesus also spoke of undue anxiety over the necessities of life (Matt. 6:25-34). But if you think about it this would also have application to the inequities of life that Solomon wrote about. Here is Solomon's wise conclusion.

**<sup>16</sup> ¶ When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, <sup>17</sup> then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.**

Notice the three negatives here. Even Solomon in all of his wisdom said that no one can understand God's ways. God has deliberately made life this way (Eccl. 3:10-11). He is showing that all things are in His hands, not ours.

The ability to know with certainty what actions bring prosperity, happiness, and a long life are always out of our reach. And unending anxiety over this is pointless. But our commitment to faith in Christ and living to please Him is surely the right path.

This is how to live life well in a fallen world.