

A Study of the Wisdom Literature

OT Survey Lesson 300—Eccl. 8:2-9:10

Introduction: The preacher’s observations of “life under the sun” now concern various sources of vanity—misuse of power, rejection of righteousness, inability to control our destiny, and the inevitability of death. Yet, these also serve to encourage us to the life of faith that the preacher is recommending in this book.

Lesson aim: To show the vanity of life and how faith responds in wisdom to this vanity.

The vanity that comes from misuse of authority—Eccl. 8:2-9

(It is helpful to remember here that the duty of the king in Israelite society was to enforce obedience to the Law of God—to reward the righteous and punish the wicked.)

1. How does the preacher summarize the vanity to which he responds in this section? (v. 9)

The theme in this section seems to be stated here, the vanity of being under the authority of others who may misuse their power or abuse others.

2. What wisdom does the preacher offer those who serve under a king? (v. 2) Why? What two things does he discourage? (v. 3)

It would appear that the “oath before God” is an oath of loyalty to obey him commonly made by the general populace. Also the king is able to do what he wishes and this makes his subjects vulnerable to his wrath.

3. Why does he recommend this approach? (v. 4) Those who respect the king’s authority will avoid what experience? (v. 5) Why? This is in harmony with what larger principle of life mentioned earlier in the book? (v. 6)

This section builds upon earlier statements about “times” for every event under heaven. The wise man is sensitive to how even an evil king might serve the purpose of God and learns to respond to him with wisdom.

4. What other thing about life makes it impossible to avoid life’s troubles? (v. 7) What things does the preacher say man has no authority to prevent? (v. 8)

The point is that there are events in life that no one can ultimately control. We are vulnerable to factors that are beyond us—the inner longings of the spirit cannot be imprisoned (they must find expression), death cannot be prevented, nor avoidance of involvement in war, nor deliverance from evil.

5. The preacher saw the wicked being honored how? (v. 10) Though wicked~ what had they regularly done? But now that they are gone, how do people respond to their wicked life?

Here Solomon describes hypocrites who did evil and yet were commonly in the temple pretending to be holy. They are buried with honor and their evil is forgotten (Or an amended reading says, “they are praised” in spite of their evil deeds. Vanity indeed!

6. To what did the preacher attribute the tendency of man to be attracted to evil and hypocritically engage in it? (v. 11) Yet, was he prepared to encourage a life of sin? (v. 12-13) What did he affirm instead’?

Improper execution of justice promotes evil. Yet, Solomon would not encourage sin though the sinner often got away with it. He will have to answer to the divine judge for his transgressions, whether men punish him or not.

7. In what other way did the preacher see vanity in life? (v. 14) What course of life did he consequently recommend again? (v. 15)

In life, retribution and reward are often reversed.

The vanity that comes from man’s limitations and his ultimate destiny, death—Eccl. 8:16-9:10

(The difficulties that man faces under the authority of the king may have prompted this broader discussion of the limitations he experiences toward life as a whole).

1. Even as a wise king, what had Solomon discovered about life? (v. 16-17) Solomon said this was true in spite of what two things?

The point is, no matter how wise we are, we will not know everything; consequently, the vanity of life will not be removed by wisdom.

2. What exactly had Solomon discovered? (9:1) Consequently, what did he affirm about the righteous man’s future?
3. What one fact did the preacher affirm about all men? (v. 2-3) This fate awaits all regardless of what? This fate is not only for the righteous but also for what other kind of men?
4. What proverb underscores the value of being alive? (v. 4) Why is this true? (v.

5)

5. What things are the dead incapable of doing from the standpoint of life on earth? (v. 5-6) Is this a denial of consciousness of the spirit after death?
6. So then, what thing does the preacher urge the man of faith to do? (v. 7) Why?
7. What else is he urged to do? (v. 8)
8. What special reward belongs to man? (v. 9)
9. Rather than live in inactivity, what does the preacher urge the man of faith to do? (v. 10) Why?