

Ecclesiastes 8:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

Analysis

Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? These rhetorical questions elevate the wise person above ordinary humanity. The Hebrew *pesher* (פְּשָׁר, interpretation) means to explain, solve, or discern meaning—particularly of difficult matters. The truly wise possess rare ability to understand what perplexes others.

A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. Wisdom transforms both inner character and outward demeanor. The 'shining face' (*ya'ir*, יָאֵר) recalls Moses' countenance glowing after encountering God (Exodus 34:29-30). Wisdom brings radiance, joy, and confidence. The phrase 'boldness of his face shall be changed' (*yeshuney*, יְשֻׁנֵּא) can mean either harshness softened into gentleness or anxious uncertainty transformed into confident composure. Wisdom produces visible transformation—both gravitas and grace, both authority and approachability. This anticipates New Testament teaching that transformation renews the mind (Romans 12:2) and Christ's glory transforms believers (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Historical Context

In ancient royal courts, interpreters who could explain dreams, omens, or complex problems held high status—Joseph (Genesis 41:15-16) and Daniel (Daniel 5:12) exemplified this gift. The 'shining face' metaphor appears throughout Scripture,

connecting wisdom with divine encounter and blessing (Numbers 6:25; Psalm 31:16). Solomon's courtiers would have witnessed how wisdom literally changed people's appearance—anxious petitioners relaxed when receiving wise counsel, troubled faces brightened when problems found solutions. The transformation from hardness to grace reflects covenant theology: God's wisdom softens hard hearts (Ezekiel 36:26). Early church fathers saw this verse as prefiguring how Christ's wisdom transforms believers from glory to glory.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How has wisdom—particularly knowing God's truth—visibly transformed your countenance, speech, and demeanor?
 2. What 'interpretations' or solutions to difficult problems has God's wisdom enabled you to discern that human cleverness alone could not grasp?

Interlinear Text

דָּבָר פָּשָׁר וְמִתְּמָרָה כְּפָה חֲכָם מִתְּמָרָה

H4310 Who is as the wise man and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing

H2450 H3045

פָּנִים וְאַדְמָן תְּאַרְבָּנָה וְעַלְמָן

wisdom a man's to shine maketh his face and the boldness maketh his face

H2451 H120 H215 H6440 H5797

וְיַעֲשֵׂה:

shall be changed

H8132

Additional Cross-References

Acts 6:15 (Parallel theme): And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Deuteronomy 28:50 (Parallel theme): A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

Acts 4:13 (Parallel theme): Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:29 (Parallel theme): And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

Job 33:23 (Parallel theme): If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness:

Proverbs 17:24 (Parallel theme): Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

2 Peter 1:20 (Parallel theme): Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

2 Timothy 4:17 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.