

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Analysis

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily—the Hebrew 'pitgam' (פִתְגָם, sentence) refers to judicial verdict, while 'maher' (מָהֵר, speedily) means quickly or promptly. God's judgment often delays, creating a gap between sin and consequence. This divine forbearance, intended to produce repentance (Romans 2:4), paradoxically emboldens sinners.

The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil—the phrase 'male libam bahem' (מַלְאָה בָהֵם, fully set) indicates complete resolve and determination. Delayed judgment doesn't produce grateful repentance but presumptuous wickedness. Humans interpret divine patience as divine indifference or impotence. This verse diagnoses a fatal misreading of providence: God's patience isn't approval but opportunity for repentance before inevitable judgment (2 Peter 3:9-10).

Historical Context

Israel's history demonstrates this pattern repeatedly: extended periods of covenant unfaithfulness preceded judgment (the 400-year delay before Egyptian exodus judgment; the centuries between Israel's founding and exile). Prophets warned that delayed judgment didn't mean cancelled judgment (Habakkuk 2:3; Ezekiel 12:21-28). In Solomon's era, prosperity created complacency—people assumed God's blessing indicated approval despite increasing idolatry (1 Kings 11). The

New Testament confirms this principle: scoffers in the last days will mock God's promised judgment precisely because it has delayed (2 Peter 3:3-4). Church history shows the same: extended periods without visible divine intervention produce spiritual presumption rather than grateful faithfulness.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. In what areas has God's patience with your sin produced grateful repentance versus presumptuous continuation?
2. How do you interpret unanswered prayer or delayed consequences—as divine approval, indifference, or patient forbearance?

Interlinear Text

רְעֵב מִשְׁעֵשׁ הַעֲשֵׂה וְתַּאֲנִין אֲשֶׁר
H834 H369 in them to do Because sentence work
H6213 H6599
רְעֵב מִשְׁעֵשׁ הַעֲשֵׂה וְתַּאֲנִין אֲשֶׁר
H7451
H4639

בְּאֵיךְ מִשְׁעֵשׁ הַעֲשֵׂה וְתַּאֲנִין אֲשֶׁר
speedily H5921 H3651 is fully set therefore the heart of the sons of men
H4120 H4390 H3820 H1121 H120

רְעֵב מִשְׁעֵשׁ הַעֲשֵׂה וְתַּאֲנִין אֲשֶׁר
H0 in them to do against an evil
H6213 H7451

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 26:10 (Evil): Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.

Psalms 10:6 (Parallel theme): He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity.

Jeremiah 48:11 (Parallel theme): Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

Exodus 8:15 (Parallel theme): But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Isaiah 57:11 (Parallel theme): And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?

Jeremiah 42:15 (Parallel theme): And now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there;

Exodus 8:32 (Parallel theme): And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.