

Ecclesiastes 8:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

Analysis

But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days—this verse provides the counterpoint to verse 12. Despite observable exceptions where sinners live long (v.12), ultimate reality sides with justice. The phrase 'lo yitab' (לֹא-יִתְבָּ, not be well) indicates comprehensive ill-being, not merely premature death.

Which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God—the shadow metaphor (katsel, קָצֵל) depicts insubstantiality and impermanence. Even if the wicked lives long physically, his life lacks substance and permanence. The root cause is specified: 'he feareth not before God' (eino yare miliph'ne ha'Elohim, אֵינו־יָרֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים). Absence of reverential awe toward God produces life without lasting value. This verse teaches that true longevity isn't measured by biological years but by eternal significance rooted in God-fearing obedience.

Historical Context

Israel's Scripture records numerous instances of wicked individuals whose apparent success proved ephemeral: Pharaoh drowned despite decades of power; Haman was hanged on his own gallows; Herod Agrippa was struck down at his zenith (Acts 12:21-23). The shadow metaphor appears throughout biblical poetry depicting life's brevity (Job 8:9; Psalm 102:11; 144:4; James 4:14). Post-exilic wisdom reflected on how Babylon, despite conquering Jerusalem and prospering

for decades, ultimately fell to Persia—proving that ungodly empires prove transient 'shadows.' Jesus taught that those who gain the whole world but forfeit their souls lose everything (Mark 8:36). The Reformers emphasized that apart from covenant relationship with God, even the longest, most prosperous life amounts to substantial nothingness.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 – All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does viewing life 'as a shadow' without God-fearing obedience change your perspective on success, achievement, and legacy?
2. In what ways might your life have 'shadow-like' insubstantiality despite external accomplishments?

Interlinear Text

וְטוֹב	לֹא	יְהִי הָ	לְבָשׂ עָ	וְלֹא	יְאַכֵּל
But it shall not be well	H3808	H1961	with the wicked	H3808	neither shall he prolong

אלֹהִים:

God

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 6:12 (Parallel theme): For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

Isaiah 3:11 (Evil): Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Job 14:2 (Parallel theme): He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

Isaiah 57:21 (Evil): There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

Malachi 3:18 (Evil): Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.