

Ecclesiastes 8:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

Analysis

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth—the Preacher returns to his key term 'hevel' (הֶבֶל, vanity/vapor), now applying it to moral incoherence in providence. What follows describes specific frustration: retribution seems inverted.

Just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous—the righteous experience what wickedness deserves (suffering, loss), while the wicked receive what righteousness merits (blessing, prosperity). This moral inversion appears absurd 'under the sun'—within temporal, earthbound perspective lacking eternal judgment. The Preacher doesn't explain away this reality but honestly names it as 'vanity,' driving readers toward faith that transcends present observation. Final justice awaits eschatological judgment when inversions are corrected (12:14; Revelation 20:11-15).

Historical Context

This theme pervades biblical wisdom: Job suffered despite righteousness while his false comforters prospered; Asaph nearly lost faith observing wicked people's

prosperity and righteous people's affliction (Psalm 73:2-14); Jeremiah questioned why the wicked prosper (Jeremiah 12:1); Habakkuk struggled with God using wicked Babylon to judge less-wicked Judah (Habakkuk 1:12-17). Post-exilic Judaism faced this acutely: faithful remnant endured hardship while surrounding nations flourished. Jesus himself—perfectly righteous—suffered criminal execution while his accusers prospered temporarily. Early Christians suffered martyrdom while persecutors advanced politically. Church history confirms the pattern: faithful believers often experience suffering while ungodly oppressors flourish temporally. This verse validates honest acknowledgment of moral incoherence within history while maintaining faith in ultimate justice.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do you respond emotionally and spiritually when you observe righteous people suffering while wicked people prosper?
2. What prevents this observable moral inversion from destroying your faith in God's justice and goodness?

Interlinear Text

אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא
There is	a vanity	H834	which is done	H5921	upon the earth	H834	There is	a vanity	H834	which is done	H5921	upon the earth	H834
H3426	H1892		H6213		H776		H3426	H1892		H6213		H776	
אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא
There is	of the righteous	H834	men to whom it happeneth	H5060	Alham	H413	There is	of the wicked	H7563	men to whom it happeneth	H5060	Alham	H413
H3426	H6662		H5060				H3426	H7563		H5060			
אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא
according to the work	of the wicked	H4639	There is	H3426	of the wicked	H7563	according to the work	of the righteous	H6662	men to whom it happeneth	H5060	Alham	H413
אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא	בָּאָרֶץ	עַל	נָעַשׂ	הַ	אָשָׁר	רָא
I said	that this also	H2088	a vanity	H1892	Shem	H1571	I said	that this also	H2088	a vanity	H1892	Shem	H1571
H559							H559	H2088					

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 7:15 (Righteousness): All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

Ecclesiastes 2:14 (Parallel theme): The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

Malachi 3:15 (Evil): And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Psalms 73:3 (Evil): For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Job 21:7 (Evil): Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

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