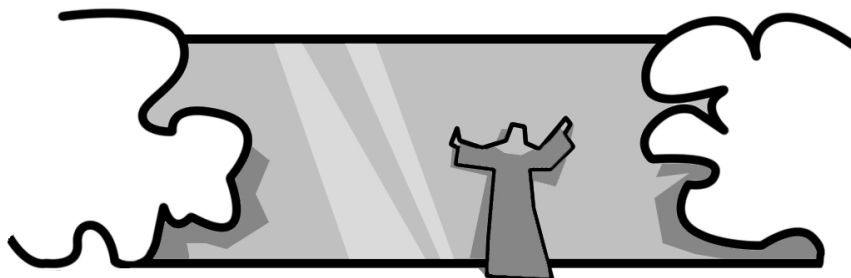


Seeing Through a Glass Darkly (Dimly)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ecclesiastes 8.

MEMORY VERSE: “An evil man may be guilty of a hundred crimes and still live a long time. But I know that things will go better with men who have great respect for God” (Ecclesiastes 8:12, NlrV).

IN ECCLESIASTES 8, SOLOMON CONTINUES TO EXPLORE MANY OF THE THEMES HE TOUCHED ON EARLIER. Again, it would be easy to be influenced by his negative complaints. It is easy to be negative about life on this earth.

But powerful examples of deep spiritual truth can be found in Ecclesiastes 8. For example, look at this week's memory verse. What a promise this verse is. It offers hope beyond this life. Solomon's thoughts may be negative, but he shows a sharp understanding of end-time justice and judgment. It does not matter how bad things are now. We are in the middle of the great war between Christ and Satan (Revelation 12:12). God's final justice will be done. That is one thing we can be sure of, even if we just have to wait. Maybe that is why the saints are said to have “patience” (Revelation 13:10; Revelation 14:12).

This week, we continue to explore more of the failures, fears, and hopes of sinful people from King Solomon's special viewpoint.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 25**KEEP THE KING'S COMMANDMENT! (Ecclesiastes 8:1-5)**

As Christians, we always face the struggle that comes from living in this world while accepting the fact that we belong to another kingdom. Augustine called it the difference between the City of God and the city of man.

How does Hebrews 11:13-31 show the real difference between the City of God and the city of man?



The difference between God's city and man's city is faith.

One reason for the struggle Christians face is how we relate to the government under which we live. We all live under a government that holds power. This government makes and enforces the rules and laws of our country. The Bible makes it clear that

¹principle—a basic rule of life.

²standards—levels of conduct.

Christians are to follow these rules and laws.

What is Solomon saying in Ecclesiastes 8:1-5? How do his words fit with the following verses? Romans 13:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

It is no surprise that Solomon would be saying this. After all, he is the king. But his words do bring out an important principle¹ of Christian citizenship. No matter where we live, we are to obey the law of the land. There may be laws some of us do not like. But we should obey them if they do not go against God's laws. There's a world of difference between obeying laws we might not like and obeying laws that break God's commandments. Laws that break God's commandments are laws against the basic principles of how God tells us we should live. The point is that God calls us to have higher standards² than the world's standards.

What would happen if everyone decided to obey only the laws they like? Why should Seventh-day Adventist Christians be careful about obeying God's law?

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 26**KEEP THE KING'S COMMANDMENT? (Ecclesiastes 8:1-5)**

Keep the king's commandment like

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3) or like Daniel (Daniel 6)?

As we said yesterday, it is not always easy living in one land while your heart is in another (Matthew 6:20, 21). What is a good Christian citizen to do?

What other examples can you think of from the Bible in which God's people had to disobey their country's government?

The Bible is filled with examples of people who have faced threats, jail, and death because they refused to obey earthly rules for God's sake. What makes this even harder is that many of these earthly rulers were leaders of God's chosen nation.

Meanwhile, we know that at the end of time, God's people are going to have to disobey the laws of earthly leaders if they want to be faithful to God (Revelation 13:12-16; Revelation 14). So we are to obey the king's commandment if it does not disagree with the King's (God's) commandment (John 19:19).

Disobeying the laws of the land when they disagree with God's laws is a very serious matter. We should ask for advice from others who are wise in the ways of God. We also should ask for God's guidance.

"The laws of the land at all levels may sometimes disagree with some of God's commandments. While judges carry responsibility for the law, each

citizen is responsible to God for the choices he or she makes. In such cases, Christians will explain their beliefs. They also will appeal to freedom of conscience,³ which is a God-given right, because He created us in His image. If the appeals are turned down, faithfulness to God first may result in fines, prison sentences, or other sacrifices that Christians had to make throughout history." —Adapted from *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12, p. 701.

Suppose you knew someone who challenged their government over a Bible command. What advice would you give? What principles would help guide this person in doing the right thing?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 27

TRUST AMID UNCERTAINTY⁴ (Ecclesiastes 8:5, 9)

Read Ecclesiastes 8:5, 9. Solomon is talking about the uncertainties of life. This means that sometimes things happen that we just do not understand. No matter how wise we are, or how much our hearts understand, there are things we just cannot understand. These are the things even the wisest among us cannot understand.

But we can trust God even when things make no sense. This trust does

³conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right; moral judgment.

⁴uncertainty—not being sure.

not happen automatically. We just do not wake up after a life of faithlessness and suddenly start trusting God. Instead, we learn to trust God by reading the Bible, claiming His promises, and living by faith and obedience. We do these things when we surrender our will to God. Then we learn to trust Him no matter what we face.

Below are verses that deal with faith and trust in God. After each verse, write what that verse means to you and how you have experienced the promise in that verse. Also, write down your favorite verses not listed here. Explain what these verses have meant to you. Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

Psalms 118:8, 9 _____

Psalms 34:8 _____

Proverbs 3:5,6 _____

Isaiah 12:2 _____

Romans 8:28 _____

James 2:22 _____

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 28

TRUST AND JUSTICE (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

What point is Solomon making in each of the following verses?

Ecclesiastes 8:11 _____

Ecclesiastes 8:12 _____

Ecclesiastes 8:13 _____

Solomon is working on the painful question of injustice (also read Ecclesiastes 8:14). He notices that the wicked often seem to get away with their actions. At times, we do see the wicked suffering from the results of their actions. But they do not always suffer. That leads to the questions, Why do they not suffer? Why is there no justice?

Solomon does not have the answer, but he does have a powerful warning. *Do not worry about evil people. Be faithful to God. He will reward you.*

Solomon is calling us to live a life of faith and trust. Yes, there is injustice on earth. We all know that. And, certainly, God knows it too. But God has not explained all these things to us. Instead, He has called us to live a life of faith and obedience. He encourages us to trust Jesus as our hope of salvation. These are the truths God has shown to us in verses such as John 14:9; Galatians 3:21, 22; Hebrews 1:1, 2; 1 John 5:3.

Are you troubled by the injustice you see in this world? Think about the injustice of the Cross, which is the greatest injustice ever. How should the fact that Christ was the victim of injustice help you trust in God's goodness?

THURSDAY—MARCH 1

THE BUSINESS THAT IS DONE ON EARTH (Ecclesiastes 8:16, 17)

What point is Solomon making in Ecclesiastes 8:16, 17? How does this fit in with verses 1-15? Why is this point so important?

In the past years, there has been a great growth of knowledge. We know more about our world than ever before. Every day, new discoveries are made in all areas of knowledge. But the more we learn, the more we realize our ignorance (lack of knowledge). The "simplest" things turn out

to be full of mysteries. There is always something deeper that we cannot understand. God's work and power in nature alone is something we can only begin to understand. And, of course the plan of salvation is the greatest "mystery" of all (1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 2:2).

Perhaps the book of Job is one of the best examples of how we are to deal with things we do not understand. Terrible things happened to Job. But when God appeared to Job at the end of the book, He did not give him any reason for the things that ruined his life.

What is the point of God's answer to Job's troubles? Job 38–42.

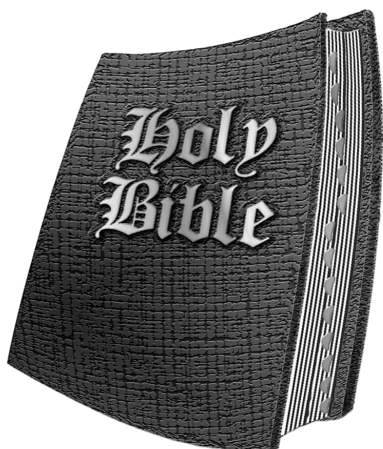
God said nothing about Satan's challenge (Job 1:9) or about God's answer to Satan (Job 2:6). God did not explain anything that happened to Job. Instead, He asked Job questions about His creative power and Job's weakness. For Job, those questions were enough to help him understand that his complaints about his dead children, ruined health, and destroyed property were not very important (Job 42:3).

Job was satisfied with his view of God as Creator. We have a view of God as both Creator and Savior. How should the example of God at the Cross teach us to trust Him even in the worst situations?

FRIDAY—MARCH 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, pp. 203–205; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 602, 603; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 699; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 203.

“We are to recognize that human government has blessing. So we must obey such government as a holy duty if that government follows God’s laws. But when any government disobeys the commands of God, then we must obey God rather than that government. The Bible must be recognized as above all human laws. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be put aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state.’ The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the crowns of earthly law makers.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,⁵ p. 69.



The Bible is above all human laws.

“No human can fully understand the character or the works of the Eternal⁶ God. We cannot by searching find out God. To the strongest and most educated minds as well as to the weakest and most limited minds, God must remain a mystery. ‘Clouds and thick darkness surround him [God]. [But] His rule is built on what is right and fair.’ Psalm 97:2, NIV. We can so far understand God’s dealing with us as to see unlimited mercy⁷ united to endless power. We understand as much of His purposes as we can. Beyond this, we may still trust the hand that is all-powerful, the heart that is full of love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 169.



We can trust Jesus’ hand, because His heart is full of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① “There is, it seems to us, At best [most], only a limited value

⁵apostles—Jesus’ disciples who preached the gospel after He returned to heaven.

⁶eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

⁷mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

In the knowledge derived [received]
from experience.”

—T. S. Eliot, “East Coker.”

Compare⁸ this quote with Ecclesi-

astes 8:16, 17.

② As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s lesson. What can you learn from one another’s answers?

⁸compare—show how things are the same.