

02-02-03b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now. I always get inspired after I hear that particular song, so stand back. I may have to run off the tape here.

No, probably not. But in Ecclesiastes chapter 8, we have come down and we've seen that if nothing else sticks in your mind out of what we covered this morning, from Psalm 90 and from Ecclesiastes chapter 8, we will have achieved something that only a minority of believers ever manage if we can begin to or continue to, preferably both, set our daily tasks, our daily decisions, our daily operations in the context of eternal things, of God's plan and God's purpose. It is the most missed opportunity there is.

It is a common Christian misconception to think that you advance or make points at church. My spiritual life gets a boost at church. I gain at church.

I minister at church. And we have an advantage, I think, because it's not as easy for us to do that because we don't have as much infrastructure to fool us into thinking that we're doing a lot at church. And I think that's a blessing.

I think that's the reason that the New Testament church met in Holmes, because you can't go to a building and think that you have somehow gotten irradiated by something that glows out of the walls. You can't get a three or four or five times a week charge out of going in and looking through the stained glass windows or doing whatever it is that gets done in church. There are people who invest themselves in their church choir.

Nobody loves music and hymns more than me. But I will tell you that there are people who lose themselves because they make it an end in itself instead of the means to an end. I love the music in our church because God seems to weave every week the music that we have into the studies that we're undertaking.

We are God's people. Dan had no idea what this lesson was about, and it was suggested for us to sing this morning. We sung it and we heard it.

And it was great because that's what this lesson is about. We are God's people. We've been chosen.

He parked us in this particular generation, this particular country, this particular area with the opportunities that we have. And Solomon is saying, you've got to pay attention to where you are and what you're doing. And he's saying the same thing Paul says in the New Testament, redeem the time.

Buy up the time. The time is something that you can convert. I was looking, he's getting into this PDA thing, personal digital assistant or personal data assistant, whatever it is.

PDA, little handheld palm pilot, hand springs, that sort of thing. Almost all of them. I got one for myself to use for work, and got Patricia one as well.

And hers has a converter in it. It has a conversion thing. This is for people who travel in the world, and you can put in dollars and it will convert it to pounds or francs or lira or deutschmarks or whatever.

It does the conversions. Kroners and whatever it is that people are spending. But it converts.

You have dollars, but if you go to certain countries, maybe they won't take dollars. Most countries will take dollars, fortunately. Most of the ones I've been to.

But if you're in Japan, you want to be spending yen, so you've got to convert into something that is spendable. Well, in the eternal future, in the kingdom of the son, and after that the kingdom of the father, a lot of stuff that is spendable here is not spendable there. What we want to do is to take our currency here, which is time, and convert it, put it in the bank against the future.

People are so anxious to manage their 401K or their 403B or their IRA or their Roth IRA or their money market funds and this, that and the other and try to provide for the future. We're going to see this in our Luke study next time about the steward looking ahead and using his finances to think ahead and plan ahead and say, you know, I've got the ability to convert what I have now into something that will stand me in good stead in the future. And we need that viewpoint.

That's what Solomon is talking about here. He says, I myself guard the mouth of the king for the sake of the contractual promise of God. We reviewed that promise in the first session this morning.

God promised Solomon as he did David before him longevity of rule, length of days, a man on the throne. This is the calling for David and David's descendants. Lots of people have a different calling in life.

Some of us in the New Testament church, we have giftings, areas of ministry. The spiritual gifting has been so overworked that people have a hard time even thinking about it objectively anymore. But I like to think of spiritual gifts as talent for an area of ministry.

You just have a natural blessing from God in the area of perception and execution when it comes to a certain kind of ministry. There are people that you go to visit in the hospital, but that's somebody that has the gift of encouragement. They are an encouraging type of person.

And you've gone there to try to cheer them up or help their family, and you go and it's just the reverse. You went to cheer them up and you come away cheered and blessed because that's the way God made them. That's their function and their calling in the body of Christ is to lift the spirits of people who get in their periphery.

That's just the way God made them. That's just how they are. All of us have an area where God the Holy Spirit is able to use us to be a blessing to others.

And that's a spiritual gift. You don't have to know its name. You don't have to cultivate its function directly.

You cultivate its function by cultivating your overall health and well-being. It's just like body parts. The Bible refers to the body of Christ and talks about the whole body as not an eye or an ear or a hand.

But you think about it. What do all of those have in common? They all need nourishment. They need replenishment of oxygen and of nutrients, and they all get it the same way.

It's all the circulation system. The same circulation system powers the ear as powers the eye or powers the hand or any other part of the body. They have differentiated functions and specialized uses, but they are all fed and nourished and made strong to do their job the very same way.

And that's how believers are. We concentrate on the circulation, on receiving the nourishment, the spiritual nutrition that we're supposed to have. We will function.

You just can't help it. The ear doesn't have to say, well, now that I've gotten that oxygen and those nutrients out of the blood here, let me see if I can figure out how to hook together my anvil and my stirrup and all the different bones and things and figure out how to hear. It's designed that way.

God made the ear to hear. If it is nourished in normal circumstances, it's going to work great. It's the same with us.

So how do we redeem the time? Well, it has two components. First of all, we have to ensure that we are getting what we need as far as nutrition. And then secondly, we have to be objective.

The way to miss opportunities is to be subjective, to have your eyes on people, eyes on things, circumstances, or eyes on self. You can't play any kind of a game that uses a ball. Baseball, football, basketball, tennis, racquetball, handball, lacrosse, soccer.

We have so many games that use a sphere or spheroid as the main part of the game. What's the stock phrase? Keep your eye on the ball. If you're a bat, keep your eye on the ball.

If you're shooting baskets, you're trying to do offense and defense, run up and down the court, keep your eye on the ball. You've got to orient yourself to where the ball is on the court. If you want to catch a football, well, I learned that the hard way.

I tried to learn how to play football. We were so pathetic that the coach would basically try everybody out for every position to see if anybody had any natural talent because nobody had

any experience. When I played football, it was only the second year of the program, and nobody knew if anybody could do anything.

So the coach tried everybody out in line, tried everybody out as backs, and tried everybody out as ends and receivers. You played backyard football and tossed it back and forth, but there's a big difference in doing that and running a pattern and looking over your shoulder and continuing to run forward and catching a ball that has been thrown in front of you. That takes practice, unless you're just naturally gifted.

But even to do that, you have got to learn to look over your shoulder and keep your eye on the ball and look it into your hands. If you take your eye off the ball, you'll never catch it. Well, I never did catch it, and so they made me a defensive end.

I got to watch other guys catch the ball. So it's where we look. It's what we keep our eyes on.

We've got to be alert and be aware. That's how we redeem the time. How do you convert time into eternal weight of glory, into something that you take in your hand beyond the grave? That's been the subject of this entire book.

Solomon says, look, I guard the mouth or the word of the king, take it either way, because of the contractual promise of God. God has made a promise to me. What does that promise do? It gives him a future hope, doesn't it? He doesn't say, well, if you do these things, I'm going to drop... Every time you do this during the day, you're going to see a little gold coin drop into your treasury.

It's a future hope. He says, you will last. There will be things in the future for you.

Solomon believes it. He says, I do things today because of what God has promised me tomorrow. That is the pattern for believers.

That's why faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. A lot of Christian faith today, or what is labeled Christian faith, is actually focusing on things that are seen. I see that my car is not working.

I want my car to work. I'm going to pray to God to get my car to work. That's not faith, per se.

That's living in the present, living for the moment. Faith says, God knows I need transportation. I'm going to rely on Him.

I'm going to do the best I can with the stewardship I have to get my car fixed, to avail myself of whatever resources are there, and then I'm going to leave it in the Lord's hands because He knows, He has promised, and it's His concern at this point. I've done what I need to do. But as I deal with this problem of no car, I want to be pleasing in His sight.

I'm not going to worry. I'm not going to make flesh my strength. I'm not going to compromise.

I'm not going to steal someone else's car. And so on. You have all kinds of principles you can apply in any given situation that constitute faith and reliance on God and are not myopic and earthbound and self-centered and moment-centered.

We keep our eye on the future. Do not hurry to go from His presence. If we're in the light, we're in His presence.

Don't get in a hurry and stumble out. We remove ourselves from walking in the light. We remove ourselves from the presence of God when we act in haste, when we don't stop and think.

How many times have you said something that you wished you could catch the words in the air and bring them back before they hit the ear of the hearer? How many times have you done something on impulse and just closed your eyes and grimaced and thought, why did I do that? Why did I commit to this? Why did I say yes when someone asked me and I should not have? I've overextended, I've overcommitted, I've obligated myself and I shouldn't have. I didn't stop and think. How many times have you double-committed yourself? Somebody says something, you say, oh sure.

Somebody else says something, oh sure. Then you get to looking, looking in your PDA perhaps, trying to put that in. You say, oh wait a minute, but we do it in haste.

Haste makes waste, they say. But the biggest thing is, if we get in a hurry, we're going to exit the presence of God. That's the quickest way, because to apply principles, to observe priorities, and to operate in accordance with our values, we've got to think.

Life is a thinking process. Haste short-circuits the thinking process and that's where we walk out of the presence of God. Do not hurry and walk from His presence.

All of the translations, if you check them, they try to turn walk, halak, or go, into an infinitive. It says, do not hurry to go from His presence. It's not an infinitive.

It's an imperfect. And what it means is, do not hurry and go. The hurrying leads to the going.

It doesn't say do not hasten to go. Hastening is the causative thing that makes you go from His presence. If you don't hasten, then you won't go from His presence, is the idea.

Do not hasten and go from His presence. Do not stand or remain in an evil matter. So first of all, if we're in the right place, if we're in His presence, don't get in a hurry and move yourself out of that.

If you have somehow moved yourself out of that, you find yourself in an evil matter, outside His presence, don't remain there. Ahmad is the verb here. It means to stand or to remain, to continue.

Do not stand in an evil matter. The word evil here is ra. This is not just evil in the sense of moral wrong, but something that causes dismay or calamity.

And this is calamity to your life as a believer. You can stand in something and maybe it's not evil. I will never forget the first time this really became clear to me.

I was in a Bible church and a man was standing up. He was an admired man, very friendly man. Had a nice family, kind of a tall, lean guy.

Did a lot of different things in this church up in Tulsa. And he enjoyed playing tennis. And he started talking about how he really had an enthusiasm for tennis and he was good at it.

He became caught up in tennis and began to spend all of his time thinking about tennis, playing tennis, arranging to play tennis, improving, you know, shopping rackets and tennis balls and all this. And he suddenly realized the thing had kind of taken over his life. And it was interfering.

He wasn't spending much time at home. He wasn't really concentrating very well at work. I mean, it just kind of consumed him.

Well, is there any place in the Bible that says tennis is evil? Is there anything that says sports is evil? Or anything connected to tennis? There's nothing intrinsically wrong with tennis. It's when it becomes an evil. When it becomes a calamity in your life, it's evil.

When it becomes destructive to the things that God has called us to, family relationships, concentration on the things of God, moving forward in God's plan, it becomes an evil. We often, you know, an evil matter. Well, that means don't get into a conspiracy to thief or rob or some other thing.

A matter becomes evil if it is destructive. For everything which he, God, purposes, he, God, will do. I believe it's fairly easy to tell that this is talking about God in verse 3 and not the king.

Most of the English translations take this as being the king. But Solomon himself is a king, and he spent seven chapters telling us that he had all kinds of purposes that he was not able to accomplish. David at the end of his life said, I've had all these purposes that I could not bring to fruition.

And God is going to bring them to fruition. Remember that back in... I had that written down. I've forgotten where it is now.

Back when we looked at... Oh, here it is. The mighty man who raises up and declares, 2 Samuel 23, 1 through 5, the last words of David. And you get down to verse 5. God has said that his house is not like the light of the morning and a morning without clouds.

His house is not so before God. But God has set an everlasting covenant, a covenant promise, the oath of God, ordered in all and secure. It is for all my deliverance and every desirable goal that was not caused to sprout in this life.

Every desirable goal. All my deliverance. The oath of God is for deliverance and for the accomplishment of those desirable goals, the heptets that was spoken of in Ecclesiastes 3.1. Worthless ones, the sons of Belial, like thorns, will be cleared away, all of them, because they are not able to be taken in the hand.

They don't allow God to take them in hand and use them for His purpose. So that's the idea here. The departing from God's presence.

If you have found that you've departed, don't remain there. Don't stand there. Because what God has promised, He will do.

This is the oath of God. There are clear promises of God. Delight yourself in Him.

He will bring it to pass. They are untold promises. I won't even go through and quote them.

Think about Proverbs 2 that we studied a week or two ago. Then we get to verse 4 of Ecclesiastes 8. And literally it says, in which the word of the king is supreme. The New King James says where the word of the king is, there is power.

But the word translated power here means that it is supreme, that it's high, that there's nothing that supersedes it or nothing that outweighs it. So once again, he's using himself as an example. He said, I guard the mouth of the king, even though the king is supposed to be all-powerful and can do whatever he wants.

He says, there is something that limits me. There's something that determines what I say and what I do. And it is the oath of God, the contractual promise of God.

Even the king, with unlimited assets, unlimited power, guards his mouth because there is in fact, he's the highest authority on earth, but there is an authority that supersedes his that is above the earth. So he says, the word of the king is supreme. Who will say to him, what are you doing? And you find this similar language used over in Job chapter 9 and verse 12.

I can't remember if we looked at this last time or not, but we'll look at it again. I think we did. We were talking about the dialogue here with the various friends and Job is speaking in chapter 9 and crying out for someone to mediate between himself and God.

He starts out in Job chapter 9. He says, How can a man be righteous before God? If one wished to contend with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has hardened himself against him and prospered? There's no point to it.

You get down to verse 10, talking about how God has made the stars, the barren Orion and the Pleiades, the chambers of the south. When we were studying the layout of the camp of Israel in our study of the twelve tribes in Genesis, we looked at these constellations that are associated

with cardinal directions and with several other things in Scripture. God made those.

Verse 10, He does great things past finding out. Yes, He does wonders without number. If He goes by me, I do not see Him.

If He moves past, I do not perceive Him. If He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, What are you doing? God will not withdraw His anger. The allies of the proud lie prostrate beneath Him.

Well, here, normally on earth, the word of the King is supreme. Who says to Him, What are you doing? But, recognizing God at all times, not getting infatuated with the idea of being a king, Solomon says in verse 5, The one keeping the covenant command does not know an evil matter. He doesn't get on intimate terms with an evil matter.

And the time and the judgment, the wise heart knows. Your new King James says, He who keeps His command will experience nothing harmful. But it literally says, The one keeping the covenant command does not know an evil matter.

Earlier he said, Don't stand in an evil matter. If you have a wise heart, you won't even know the evil matter. You'll never even get entangled in it to begin with.

And the time and the judgment, the wise heart knows. That word translated time there is et, E-T. It's the same word that we saw back in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, where it says, To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

That second phrase, a time for every purpose, that is an et for every hepets. Hepets was the desirable goal that we saw over in Samuel, in the last words of David. A time for every goal, every purpose that people think is worth accomplishing.

There is a time for it. To everything there is a season, zemein, there is an et or a time for every purpose, every hepets under heaven. And of course we're very familiar with the content of the first part of chapter 3 there, time to be born and time to die and so forth.

There is an et for each of these. The word et occurs four times in each of these subsequent verses. There is an et for being born.

There is an et to die. Well, this is what we're talking about, isn't it? Perceiving the times. You remember in Luke recently when Jesus was saying, how can you look in the heavens and you see that the seasons are changing, you see that the weather is changing, how is it that you cannot discern the time? What does it mean to discern the time? Well, think about it now.

We're in a time right now, aren't we? We're in a time nationally, post 9-11 and in President Bush's administration and with the different things that are going on here in Dallas locally. We've got a new mayoral race going on. A lot of people are having to decide between two candidates in the

runoff election.

We have times in our families We have times in our individual life. We have times at work. We have times in different areas where it just means there's an occasion, there's an issue, there's something that requires perception and decision and action.

Well, that's where these things we've been talking about come into play. What are your principles? What are your priorities? What are your values? Those come into play every time we face an issue. Those are the times.

Let's take a look at some of the examples of these times in the Bible. I think this will become a little clearer. Take a look at Ezra 10-14.

Remember Ezra coming back from the captivity and the people who had remained behind had intermarried with foreign wives. So in Ezra 10-12, having addressed this, actually back in 10-10, Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have transgressed. You've taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel.

Now therefore make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and do His will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the pagan wives. What did Solomon just say? Do not stand in an evil matter because everything he has purposed he will do.

There are a lot of people who try to take this and say, Well, you know I married the wrong person and I don't want to take an evil stand so I'm going to divorce them. That is not a legitimate application to make. Certainly not in every case.

But in Israel's case, as the people of God with the promises and the covenant that they had with God, with the law of Moses, they did have to separate from these wives. It was a part of their national identity. God had said, Thou shalt not.

And there was not a way to legitimize these. Remember, people married foreign wives all the time. Ruth was a foreign wife, wasn't she? She was a Moabitess.

Why was her marriage legitimate? Why did Boaz marry her second marriage? And she's an ancestress of David. How is that possible? Well, if you become a proselyte, if you join yourself to Israel and become an Israelite, you're not a foreigner anymore. These pagan wives did not proselyte to Israel.

They had no truck with the things of Israel or with the God of Israel or the covenant of Israel. They clung to their pagan ways and their pagan gods. They did not become Israelites.

They married an Israelite. You've seen this where people, a Catholic and a Jew will get married and the Jew remains Jewish and the Catholic remains a Catholic and they go their separate ways. They go to synagogue on Saturday, go to mass on Sunday, type of thing.

Well, that's what was the situation here and that was forbidden in Israel. God specifically commanded against it. It was a part of the covenant.

So they were standing in an evil matter and Ezra stood up and said, you've got to confess this to the God of your fathers. Why does he say God of your fathers? Because the covenant was established with the fathers. It was forbidden in Israel to marry someone who did not worship the God of Israel.

Forbidden. And that principle pertains even today. Be ye not unequally yoked together with the faithless, is what the New Testament says.

And that's not just salvation status, by the way. Faithless. Be not unequally yoked together with the faithless.

You have transgressed, taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and do His will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the pagan wives.

By keeping these pagan wives who were not proselytes to Israel, this is the thing that happens in a marriage. You not only get the spouse, you get the in-laws. You have woven yourself into the fabric of a family of pagans by marrying a pagan.

And so, the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, Yes, as you have said, so we must do. But there are many people. It's a season for heavy rain.

We're not able to stand outside, nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. Please let the leaders of our entire assembly stand and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times. Et.

There will be a time when they're going to come and stand before the elders, the leaders of the assembly, and be judged. Make a judgment. Well, is this a case where you need to separate? It's not just a blanket.

Everybody that married a pagan, you've got to divorce them. They've got to come and be judged. They have to look into the circumstances.

Was she a pagan, but because she's been living with you now she's become a proselyte to Israel? Is she willing to worship the God of Israel? They have to come and be judged. It's not just to cut and dry black and white. People like to come to the Word of God and say, well, if there's been adultery, then you've got to divorce him.

Jesus said, you know, you're not supposed to divorce except in the case of... So if there's been, people actually hiring private investigators to see if their spouse or their ex-husband, you know, well, I can't remarry until my ex-husband sleeps with another woman. And once he's done that,

well, then it'll come under the... You wouldn't believe the weird stuff that has come out of people trying to turn the New Testament into the Old and trying to make some kind of a black and white blanket rule that always applies where you don't have to think. They recognized here.

They said, there's many of us and not all of these cases are the same. We need to have an adjudication. There's a set time in which this will come up and we'll get it resolved for each of these people.

Well, that's the word *et*. There in Ezra 10.14. And to give you a little background for that, you can go back. We won't turn there, but Exodus chapter 18, verse 22 and verse 26.

You remember when Moses' father-in-law said, you're trying to do all of this judging in the land yourself and it's too much for you. Get some elders from each of the tribes and let them do the judging. At appointed times, they will sit and take these things in judgment.

Exodus 18.22 and 26. The word *et*. is used there for the times that these men will come and judge matters in Israel.

And Ezra is a case where they were actually putting that into practice. Hosea 10.12 is a great example of this. So for yourselves righteousness, reap in mercy.

Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you. So for yourselves righteousness, reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground.

All of us have fallow. What is fallow ground? Fallow, if it lays fallow, that means it's not in use. You've got ground that could be producing a crop, but it's neglected.

Break up your neglected ground. Sow righteousness. Reap in mercy.

It is time to seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you. He goes on to say, you have plowed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lies. Why? Because you trusted in your own way.

That same book, Hosea 2.11, says, talking about the different times in Israel, because of unfaithfulness, because of apathy and indifference, God says, I will return and take away my grain in its time, my new wine in its season. I will take back my wool and my linen, given to cover her nakedness, the nakedness of Israel, represented as a young woman. And in the English here, this is Hosea 2.9. I will take away... There is a time when God would be giving the grain.

It ought to be there, and it's not, because of disobedience. I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers. No one shall deliver her from my hand.

I will cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, her Sabbaths, all her appointed

feasts, all of her times. You know, there's a time for good things as well as a time for bad things. We saw the positives and the negatives when we went through Ecclesiastes 3. There's a time for something that is thought to be good, a celebration, and there's a time for things that are sobering, and not a time for celebration.

Well, all of the times for celebration are going to be taken away, Hosea says, because of this disobedience. The word time, we have a euphemism talking about ladies and their monthly discomfort. We say, well, it's her time.

And that goes all the way back to Leviticus chapter 15 where it's used multiple times, beginning in verse 25, talking about issue of blood and that sort of thing, and talking about a woman and her time. There is an appointed time during childbearing years where this process takes place. What we begin to see as we look at the biblical concept of times is there are some times that come and go based on attitudes, based on responses and reactions.

In other words, they are not fixed and they're not set. You could say, well, when is this time going to come? It depends. There are other things that are fixed.

There are seasons. There are feasts. The reason I bring this up, nobody's favorite subject is going to be the menstrual cycle.

But I'll tell you the reason I bring it up. There is an either conscious or unconscious get-out-of-jail-free card that comes with the hardship associated with the fluctuation of hormones. People say, well, it's her time of the month.

It's PMS. It's this, that, and the other. And people sort of give themselves a pass on mental attitude sins or on sins of the tongue.

And there are always going to be times. There are fixed times. There are times in God's plan where there's going to be pressure.

And there are other times when there's not. Same thing with children. We set standards of obedience.

And then I never forget when I first... I never really thought about it until I had children of my own. But when we had very small children, it seemed like sometimes there would just be this unreasoning behavior on the part of my girls. And I figured out that sometimes this was happening because we had missed a mealtime or we were off our schedule and they were hungry.

But they didn't say, Dad, I'm hungry. Or, Mom, I'm hungry. But their behavior got bad.

And we'd get to looking and, oh my, we've been shopping. We've been out here at Walmart an extra hour or something. And they're starting to act all weird.

And it's because they're hungry. Well, then your next thought is, well, it's my fault that they're misbehaving because I didn't make sure they got their food. And I thought about that for a little bit.

I thought, well, should I give them a pass on this bad behavior because they're under pressure from feeling hungry? And then I thought, no. The whole purpose in life is functioning under principles and behavior under pressure. God puts us under pressure to teach us obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ learned obedience in suffering, and that's what we have to do. So the menstrual thing, people at work say, well, PMS is my time of the month and I can't be held accountable for what I did because I was under pressure. That is not a biblical principle.

The times happen. Look at Leviticus chapter 15. It's going to happen and the Bible says, deal with it.

You've got to function according to right principles whether you're under pressure or not. And that's the standard that we have to set for ourselves. Take a look at 1 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 32.

1 Chronicles 12, 32. They're choosing individuals in Israel. Talking about David's army when he's at Hebron.

Talking about the divisions that were equipped for war and came to David at Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to him according to the word of the Lord. This is 1 Chronicles 12, 23. Of the sons of Judah, bearing shield and spear, 6,800 armed for war.

The sons of Simeon, mighty men of valor, fit for war, 7,100. Of the sons of Levi, 4,600. Jehoiada, the leader of the Aaronites and with him 3,700.

Zadok, a young man, a valiant warrior, and from his father's house, 22 captains. Of the sons of Benjamin, relatives of Saul, 3,000. Until then, the greatest part of them had remained loyal to the house of Saul, which is understandable.

Verse 30. The sons of Ephraim, 20,800, mighty men of valor, famous men throughout their father's house. Of the half-tribe of Manasseh, 18,000, who were designated by name to come and make David king.

Of the sons of Issachar, who had an understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. Their chiefs were 200 and all their brethren were at their command. What an odd thing to say in a roster of army men who are coming to David to invest him as king of Israel that in the sons of Issachar they had understanding of the times.

And this is the word et. It's actually in the plural here, etot. Understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.

Their chiefs were 200. And you want to talk about a time of pressure in the land, think about the Benjamites. Their favored son, first king in Israel and the heirs to the throne slain on the slopes of Gilboa.

Various divided loyalties throughout the land, but when David becomes king, the sons of Issachar had an understanding of the times. And they had 200 chiefs who understood the times. Those are the ones that came to David.

And then they went back and commanded all the rest of Issachar. All the troops of Issachar didn't come, but the 200 who had an understanding did. And they would go back and dictate to the rest of the tribe what needed to happen.

That's why you have 20,800 and 18,000 and all these others. And yet from Issachar you have the 200. So how do you discern the times? How do you discern the seasons? Isaiah 33.6 addresses this in the very same language, using the very same vocabulary word.

Isaiah 33.5 The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high. He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times and the strength of salvation.

The fear of the Lord is His treasure. So wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times. Wisdom and knowledge will be the strength of your salvation.

It's one thing to be saved. It's something else to have a strong deliverance, to have strength in your salvation. Where does that strength come from? It's wisdom and knowledge.

It stabilizes us in whatever times come. There are times of prosperity. There are times of adversity.

God doesn't say, Thou shalt if... The commands of God are not conditional. He doesn't say, Be strong in the Lord if... He doesn't say, You have need of faith and patience if the test is not too hard. But if the test gets too hard, then don't worry about faith and patience because I understand the test was too hard.

No temptation has befallen you, but such as is common to man. And with everyone, there is a way of deliverance. What is the way of deliverance? Wisdom and knowledge.

Wisdom and knowledge are the stability of your times, the strength of your deliverance. The fear of the Lord is His treasure. That is Isaiah 33, verse 6. Psalm 9, verse 10.

Those verses in the English are numbered a little differently because the superscription gets verse 1 in the Hebrew. So in English, this is Psalm 9, 9. Once again, it's talking about the Lord. Look at verse 7. Psalm 9, 7. The Lord shall endure forever.

He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness and shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

All those who know Your name will put their trust in You. For You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You. Refuge in times of trouble.

How do we take that refuge? It's the wisdom and knowledge that God provides. I'll just go down to the next psalm. Psalm 10, verse 1. Why do you stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor.

The wicked boasts of his heart's desire, in verse 3. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God. God is in none of his thoughts, in verse 4. That's why God hides Himself in times of trouble. For God to be there, we have to be open and seeking.

That goes back to values. That goes back to priorities and principles. Psalm 31, verse 15.

My times are in Your hand, He says to God. As for me, I trust in You, O Lord, verse 14. I say, You are my God.

My times are in Your hand. Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me. Whether it is a time of prosperity, whether it is a time of adversity, there is a purpose in it.

And we don't abdicate the purpose just because the time is tough, just as we should not abdicate our purpose when we're in a time of prosperity. We just saw this up in chapter 7, didn't we? We just saw Solomon say when it is a day of benefit or a time of benefit, be in the good. If it's a day of calamity or a day of evil, look at this.

God is at work.