

Ecclesiastes 10:1-11

Introduction:

Although we are accustomed to see a chapter break as a definite change of subject, or at the least a completion of one thought and moving on to the next. But when we remember that the chapters and verses were not added to Scripture for over a millennium after they were written, we realize they are the work of men and not God.

Therefore it is always wise to carefully consider the relationship between the thoughts of a previous chapter and the opening verses of a subsequent one.

10:1-3

Koheleth has not completed the thoughts of the previous chapter. He continues to discuss the fact that wisdom “*under the sun*” does not always lead to the rewards and benefits it should.

In exactly the same way that the same event can come to the righteous and wicked, or to the good and the sinner, so also the same event can come to those who are wise and those who are fools.

All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. Ecc 9:2-4

Time and chance operate in the realm of wisdom “*under the sun*” just as much as the other things listed in chapter nine.

I returned and saw under the sun that — The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. Ecc 9:11

Just as the wise man’s wisdom did not lead to the end he desired, so also the great art of the perfumer can be marred by unintended events.

10:4-20

In the rest of Chapter Ten Solomon offers the same format as that in the book of Proverbs. Small tidbits of wisdom that will be of great help “*under the sun*.”

If any theme can be attributed to this section, it might be Koheleth’s summary of his miscellaneous observations that resulted from his deep inquiries. They were important to record but had not found any place in his main inquiry. It might be seen as appendix is today. It is important to remember that he had set forth several times in the book that its theme would be “*to seek and search out by wisdom..all that is done under heaven*.” (1:13) He then “*applied his heart to know, search and seek out by wisdom the reason of things*.” (7:25) Ecclesiastes 9:13-11:8 are therefore sundry thoughts he had pondered and sought out to teach us knowledge:

And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. Ecc 12:9

There is important wisdom to be gleaned in this chapter. Simple truths to help us live “*under the sun*.”

1. Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor;

Reading the final verse of chapter nine is very helpful to gaining the context and limitations of this proverb.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.” Ecc 9:18

While it is evident that the benefits of wisdom are tremendous, these blessings are exceedingly fragile! Wisdom is a powerful force for peace and safety. Caution in the way one conducts the affairs of a city or nation has greater power in keeping peace than weapons of war. Yet the sad reality is that one sinner can destroy that balance. One traitor, one hothead, one coward can destroy all the good wisdom would have bestowed. This is how life operates “*under the sun.*”

The perfumer’s ointment(oil) is the perfect example of this idea. Perfume is a work of art, taking spices and oils from “exotic” places and blending them in such a way that they give a pleasing odor. God had even given His own inspired recipe in Exodus for the oil the priests would use.

Moreover the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 23 “Also take for yourself quality spices– five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, 24 “five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. 25 “And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. Ex 30:22-25

“And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. 32 ‘It shall not be poured on man’s flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. 33 ‘Whoever compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.’” Ex 30:31-33

Though God had forbidden this particular mixture, anything else would be lawful. So they would take costly, and precious substances that had fragrant odors and mix them in ways that would please others. A great deal of time, effort and expense went into creating them.

Koheleth’s point is that like wisdom, precious ointment is very fragile. In spite of the precious nature of the ingredients and the wisdom and insight that went into making it, perfumes must be carefully protected. If the lid is left off and flies are drawn to it’s odor and become entrapped in the sticky solution, their rotting carcasses will soon lead to a complete undoing of its essential nature and value. If this occurred, its value would be lost and all the benefits of the wisdom and insight that went into its production would be lost. At that point, no matter what was paid for it and what went into it, it had all been undone.

A strong case is made in the Pulpit Commentary, Keil & Delitzsch, and Leupold’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes that this should read flies of death and viewed as poisonous flies carrying venom or poison which would bring death to one bitten or stung. If such a fly found his way into the ointment, it would cause it to give off a foul odor.

Although their arguments sound plausible the fact that the NKJV, KJV, NASB and even the NIV do not translate it so is strong evidence to the contrary. The word itself can be translated either way, and is so translated elsewhere. It seems obvious that whether a fly leaves its venom in the perfume, or dies in it, the ointment will begin to decompose and putrefy. As it rots and deteriorates the process of fermentation sets in and the good smell of the ointment slowly changes. It is ruined forever. Nothing can fix it and it can only be thrown away.

So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

The power of the above truth ought to be carefully considered by all who strive for wisdom and honor. It is also very fragile. The term “folly” captures those words and deeds that are show one to be acting “*stupidly,*” “*absurdly,*” or “*inconsistently.*”

“sīklūt... to act stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently; to be sottish, infatuated: it denotes any deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent...” (Wilson p 172; # 5531)

This term is only used seven times in the Bible, and all of them are in Ecclesiastes. The root from which it comes is only used eight times. The difficulty with this term, especially in the book of Ecclesiastes is whether he is speaking from a moral or practical application. Man can do something stupid, absurd, or inconsistent without becoming a sinner. It was this area that Solomon was

seeking in the first two chapters(see comments on 2:3.

*And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and **folly**. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. Ecc 1:17*

*I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on **folly**, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. Ecc 2:3*

*Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and **folly**; for what can the man do who succeeds the king?-- Only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels **folly** as light excels darkness. Ecc 2:12-13*

Yet folly also has a moral component because very few people who act stupidly and inconsistently stop before they move into sin.

*I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of **folly**, even of foolishness and madness. Ecc 7:25*

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; 13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness. Ecc 10:12-13

Both are true. A little bit of folly(stupidity) can severely damage the credibility of one who has a reputation for wisdom. But far worse is that little bit of folly(wickedness) that causes a man to succumb to sin. Yet the context of the previous chapter(9:18) specifically speaks of sin, and the context of this chapter(10:12-13) seems to be leading in the same direction. It seems best therefore to interpret the folly here to be the "deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent." In such a situation, God's forgiveness can change the eternal outcome, but seldom does it affects the here and now.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. Gal 6:7-8

A small amount of folly in the entire life of a respected person may ultimately cause his entire life to be adversely affected. The precious reputation of a man is therefore as fragile as a jar of ointment. Just as the ointment must be kept tightly closed in order to protect it from destruction, so also must a man's guard his reputation by being cautious. It takes years to build such a reputation, years of right answers and right living. Such success can be destroyed by a momentary lapse of folly. It is so critical for those who are living as God's people to keep this truth in their minds at all times. One lapse into a bad temper, or succumbing to a temptation can mar a reputation for life. It matters little how much respect ones has and how much honor they possess, it can all be lost just like a dead fly can get into ointment.

2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand,

Many times in Scripture the right and left sides are set forth as positions of honor and dishonor. Joseph was displeased with his father Israel because he placed his right and left hands on the heads of the wrong children(Gen. 48:12-20), and Jesus warned that at the end of the age the sheep will be placed on the right to be rewarded and the goats will be placed on the left to be cursed(Mt 25:31-46). When Peter preached the first gospel sermon, it was to reveal that Jesus was sitting on the right hand of God exalted(Acts 2:33).

This is not a derogatory comment about left and right handed people. It is simply a recognition that because most people are right handed, and the hand one favors is the hand that is honored, and that honor is bestowed by placing the people or thing we wish to honor on that favored side. Hence the things one honors are placed on the right and the things one does not esteem as much are placed on the left.

This proverb simply revealed that a wise man keeps his heart at his right hand. He deems his heart to be his most precious possession, and he honors it above all other things. This is therefore not much different than:

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Prov 4:23

The wise man sees his heart as something to be prized and cared for above all other things. It must be closely guarded and kept. Like Job(31:1), the eyes must be guarded lest they bring things into the heart that must not be allowed in. The Psalmist would set no wicked thing before his eyes(Ps 101:3). Jesus warned that we must use our ears to hear and our eyes to see the truth(Mt 13:15-16). The wise man sets his heart on his right hand and protects it!

But a fool's heart at his left.

The fool does not see his heart as being of much importance of significance to him. He does not protect it, does not care for it, does not guard or keep it from things of danger or folly. It is left to corrupt and be destroyed. Such people soon receive the woes of God for calling good evil and evil good(Isa 5:20-21). Truly the importance of one's heart is of the highest import as to whether one is a wise man or a fool.

3. Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, and shows everyone that he is a fool.

Like the ointment that puts forth a sweet smell that all can detect when it is still pure but puts forth a horrible stench when the dead flies destroy it so also wisdom and folly cannot be hidden. As the smell of a woman who would not waste a single drop of her expensive ointment that it had gone rancid, so also the folly of those who do not protect their heart and reputation.

The fool cannot hide his folly. Even when he is walking along the road in the presence of those who have never met him before. As he walks along the path, the little things that he does or does not do soon reveal that he is a fool. One of the humorous aspects of Cervantes, character Don Quixote, was the fact that he revealed his madness within a few moments of speaking to strangers.

This is what our author now revealed. The fool who does not keep his heart on his right hand and cautiously approach life will pay the price for it "*under the sun.*" Even while walking down the road what he says, how he conducts himself, what he does or does not do and even where he goes can reveal it to the discerning. Another proverb brings this out in a powerful way.

A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished. Pr 22:3

When someone says or does foolish things, others form an opinion about them immediately. It is an opinion that stays with them for the rest of their days. Sadly, there are multitudes of people who are like this. Some manifest this in the realm of politeness or kindness, by insulting and being pompous and arrogant. Others reveal it in the physical or monetary realm. Jesus spoke of them in the parable of counting the cost. When a man builds a foundation and has no money to complete it he is revealing himself to be a fool(Lk 14:28-30). Others like Cain, Korah, or King Saul reveal it in the spiritual realm. Their actions have ever been recorded as those who acted foolishly. Still others do it in the moral realm. They commit acts of sin while "walking along the way" unconcerned who sees or what they think about it.

Those who simply lack common sense can pray for wisdom and understanding, but those who refuse the wisdom that is from above have no hope.

"But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out. Num 32:23

Beginning with verse four, the random nature of these "proverbs" becomes more evident. It gets increasingly difficult to find a tie in this context, although everyone of them have been addressed elsewhere in the book.

4. If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post;

This observation is just sound and good advice. Nearly everyone is placed in the position of being under the authority of others. While in the position sometimes through their own folly, and other times through no fault of their own the anger and frustration of this ruler will direct itself upon them. Koheleth wants them to be very cautious in such a time.

The term “ruler” is much broader than that of a king. It actually describes one who has “*dominion*” or the right to “*reign*” over others.

mashal, “to rule, reign, have dominion.” It is found approximately 100 times in the text of the Hebrew Old Testament. ...*mashal* is used most frequently in the text to express the “ruling or dominion” of one person over another Gen. 3:16; 24:2. Cain is advised “to rule over” or “master” sin Gen. 4:7. ... As Creator and Sovereign over His world, God “ruleth by his power for ever” Ps. 66:7. (Vine’s #4910)

It is this term that is used when God tells the husband he will rule over his wife (Gen 3:16), of Abraham’s servant (steward) who ruled over all he had (Gen 24:2), and of Joseph’s reign over all Egypt (Gen 45:8). With these broad uses, it is clear that God is warning here about all the various types of rulers we might be under. Whether it is the master over a slave, the boss over an employee, the teacher over a student, the policemen over a driver, the judge over a defendant, a parent over a child, or a husband over his wife. No matter what type of authority it is, the truth of this statement will keep one from great harm. The term “post” is actually another very broad term describing a place where someone “stands,” “sits,” “dwells,” or “is.” It can also be a “task” or “office” (position).

maqom, “place; height; stature; standing.” ...which occurs 401 times in the Old Testament. It refers to the place where something stands 1 Sam. 5:3, sits 1 Kings 10:19, dwells 2 Kings 8:21, or is Gen. 1:9. ... A “place” is sometimes a task or office Eccl. 10:4.... (Vine’s #4725)

It is evident from the definitions and uses of these terms, that this is a very general statement that applies to every position or situation where someone is in the position of dominion and they have a problem with you. This is captured by the term “rises against.” Yet here again God uses a very broad and wide term. Anything that causes one’s spirit to “go up” or “ascend” “from a lower to a higher place” is here under consideration.

alah, “to go up, ascend, offer up.” ... The Old Testament attests it about 890 times. Basically, *alah* suggests movement from a lower to a higher place. ...*alah* may also mean “to rise up” or “ascend.” ... Not only physical things can “go up.” *alah* can be used also of the “increasing” of wrath 2 Sam. 11:20, the “ascent” of an outcry before God Exod. 2:23, and the “continual” sound of battle ... cf. 1 Kings 22:35. ...” (Vine’s #5927)

BDB has as one of its definitions “to rouse, to stir up (mentally).” This can be anger, enmity, jealousy, frustration or irritation. It can be deserved or undeserved. None of that matters. This is a general truth like:

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Pr 15:1

When you find yourself in a position where someone is upset, do not run away or move away from the place where you were.

For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

The Hebrew term that the NKJV translates “conciliation” is a difficult term to define. It is translated *gentleness* in the ASV, *yielding* in the KJV, *composure* in the NAS, and *calmness* in the NIV. It comes from a that is generally used of diseases from which one has been given a “cure,” or “healing.”

marpe' - health, healing, cure a) healing, cure b) health, profit, sound (of mind) c) healing incurable (with negative) (BDB #4832)

“healing, cure of diseases; tranquility, placidness of mind. (Wilson)

Though it is used a few times of physical disease, its primary use in the Bible is of emotional and spiritual health and healing. Note it’s use in Proverbs and Jeremiah.

*There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes **health**. 12:18*

*A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings **health**. 13:17*

*A **sound** heart is life to the body, but envy is rotteness to the bones. 14:30*

A **wholesome** tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. 15:4

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and **health** to the bones. 16:24

"We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of **health**, and there was trouble! Jer 8:15

The term stresses doing whatever is necessary to bring about healing. Running off when mistreated will not lead to a healing, but remaining and seeking to heal it will. Simply by staying, one is proving to the person that they care too much to just let things go. It is this attempt that leads the ruler being pacified. This is a picturesque term. The spirit of the ruler has risen up, by staying and soothing and calming back to health, the spirit of the ruler is caused "to rest" and "made quiet."

yanach- ... 1) to cause to rest, to give rest to, to make quiet ..." (BDB #3240)

This is sound advice for all of us who find ourselves under the dominion of another. Even if that dominion be one that we willingly take on. This has much greater power than we might think!

"But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Mt 5:39-41

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Rom 15:1

5. There is an evil I have seen under the sun,

This final time that he mentions "an evil" he has "seen under the sun." He has noted many such evils during the course of the book. Though he occasionally uses this term evil for moral wickedness, he uses it most often in the sense of "giving pain, unhappiness, misery." (7451 a'). This is another one of the unfair and incongruous things that the curse has allowed. It is another reason why all is vanity that lead to great sorrow or anguish, or to inequities and evil. The fact that such things can happen is an additional reason why all is vanity.

As an error proceeding from the ruler:

First it should be noted that though all the translations use the same term "ruler" in both 4 and 5, it is a different Hebrew term. This term is only used four times in Scripture. Yet it too has a general meaning that could take in both the king or others(boss, master, police, etc.). It refers to those who have "mastery."

*shaliyt-*having mastery, domineering, master a) having mastery; ruler (substantive) b) domineering, imperious (BDB #7989)

When a person who has mastery does an error, a severe evil that brings great unhappiness and sorrow. This strikes me as following the same line of reasoning as:

... For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. Luke 12:48(b)

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. James 3:1

When a person in a position of great authority makes a mistake, it leads to much greater and more severe consequences than for anyone else. It makes those who have not made a mistake have to pay for those who do. The term error has within it the idea of an inadvertent mistake.

shegagah- sin, sin of error or inadvertence, inadvertent sin; an error (BDB #7684)

The greater the ruler and the larger number of people who are under him, the greater the evil that is brought about when he makes a mistake. This can be as simple as a bus driver or an airline pilot who falls asleep at the wheel, or as terrible as a drug manufacturer who makes the wrong drug, or a ruler whose mistakes leads to the downfall of his nation. As examples of this type of evil, Solomon speaks of folly being placed in a position of dignity while the truly wealthy are sitting in low places, and servants riding on horses while the rulers walk the earth.

6. Folly is set in great dignity,

This is the same root as that brought out in verse one. It describes thoughts, words and deeds that are “stupid,” “absurd,” or “inconsistent.” When those in the position of authority in a nation, a business, a school or a family begin to do things that are absurd or inconsistent they are manifesting “folly.” Generally when we see such things we go to those in authority, bring it to their attention, expecting that they will do something about it. The great evil that Solomon speaks of occurs when they do not. When you show them that what they are doing is wrong, and they reject what you are showing them, and actually enshrine their folly in dignity, only grave consequences can follow. Folly is folly because it is stupid and absurd. But when enough people act in this manner, it is elevated(at least in their minds) to a lofty and elevated position.

We see this today in the lack of discipline of young people in schools and the attempt by our government to make corporal punishment into the crime of abuse. It is easy to see how such folly quickly leads to rebellion against God’s moral order.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; that justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! (Isa. 5:20-23).

When rulers exchange light for darkness, injustice for justice, mans ways instead of God’s ways, then folly will be placed in dignified garments but will still be folly nonetheless.

While the rich sit in a lowly place.

Though one is tempted to make the wealthy figurative, there is no other such use in the Scriptures. Say what you will about the dangers of wealth, a man who acquires his money lawfully and ethically has proven that he has wisdom in the way things work. When those who have tangible proof of their success(wealth) are treated by society with contempt then a grave error has occurred. When a society reaches the point where it treats its benefactors and wise men with contempt while at the same time treated the fools as though they have wisdom, then a terrible evil has been wrought.

7. I have seen servants on horses,

There seems little reason here not to take Solomon as being sarcastic. The people who had reached a level where society gave them the honor and the treatment reserved for those who are successful did not keep Solomon from seeing the truth. Just because they are riding on horseback does not mean that they are not really the lower person. “Life under the sun” might confer such honor upon them, but by the true standards that matter, Solomon saw them as servants. The real slaves, slaves to passion, lust, or folly, on the one hand or slaves to the whims of their age on the other. These often ride on horses and show all the trappings of being the great and the powerful. So are our Hollywood icons, our politicians, and news anchors. They ride the horses, but they are the servants.

While princes walk on the ground like servants.

Again Solomon sees through the veneer of worldly acclaim and honors conferred or denied based upon standards “under the sun.” He sees the truth. He sees the real princes of this world who are denied all the outward signs, but are still princes. They walk on the ground like servants, and may even be treated as servants by those of their foolish generation, but they are the true princes. This should not surprise us, it is even true in the greatest realm of all.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:37-39

Though those living “under the sun” may have their minds clouded and folly can be clothed in dignity, the truly royal of humanity walk the ground as slaves. This truly is a great evil. The wonderful thing is that God will fix this inequity some day.

The next three passages are so simple in their meaning that they have been subjected to a multitude of “deeper” interpretations. As one reads the ideas that men have devised to get as much as possible out of this passage, one begins to feel some alarm. Why is it that each person who seeks for deeper meaning ends up differing from all the others? In such a case, the safest approach is just to take the passage for what it says and forget about any deeper meanings. If they have not been understood by now, they probably do not exist.

So although there is a strong temptation here to look for more, one is warned away from it by the extreme divergence of all who have been here before us. Their efforts have dismally failed. There is little agreement once the surface is left and the “real intent” of Solomon is sought. Some retribution and evil. They are made into analogies or parables. This author does not dismiss the possibility, the reader is welcome to read the other commentaries and see the wealth of choices available (See Delitzsch Vol 6 p. 377ff), I simply refuse to endorse any of them or to add one of his own.

It seems that the overriding consideration is brought out in verse 10. **“Wisdom brings success.”** Though it is true that the race is not always to the swift, the battle to the strong, etc. It generally is true that wisdom brings a greater hope of success. When one sees all the facts clearly and then to make a wise decision on the basis of those facts. When one can clearly see all the dangers and difficulties to which they put themselves when they are involved in certain activities, they will think carefully before getting involved in them, and they will be cautious and careful while they do them. Either one of these things will enhance the possibility that they will be successful in these undertakings.

8. He who digs a pit will fall into it,

Though our English term “will” can be taken to its fullest extent as an absolute, generally when we use it in the future, it has only the possibility. The NAS and NIV have captured this by using the term “may.” The Hebrew has the same caveat.

“Vers. 8,9. ‘He that diggeth a pit may fall into it; whoso breaketh down walls, a serpent may sting him. Whoso pulleth out stones may do himself hurt therewith; he who cleaveth wood may endanger himself thereby.’ The futures are not the expression of that which will necessarily take place, for, thus rendered, these four statements would be contrary to experience; they are the expression of a possibility... The fut. ... is not here meant as predicting an event...” (Delitzsch, Ecc. p. 378)

These are not absolutes. The author is not stating such an obvious mistruth. Not everyone who digs a pit **will** fall into it, but everyone who digs a pit **may** fall into it. The possibility is definitely there for one to fall into the pit they are digging. Those who do not dig pits and stay away from them have no possibility of falling into one, while those who dig them have a much greater probability of such a mishap. The obvious meaning: When one is around places where they can fall, they must be careful! When one is digging a pit, he places himself continually in the danger of being near such a fall, and because he is digging it, he may become overconfident. Those who dig pits, or who engage in other dangerous occupations must be continually on their guard to the possibilities of danger they place before them.

It is simply a matter of wisdom and discretion to be aware continually of the dangers around one and be cautious. The moment one becomes so comfortable around their working environment due to familiarity and not due to safety, they become a fool, and the danger of falling into the pit become that much more real.

And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

In a way similar to that expressed above, those who break through walls may be bitten by a serpent. The term “wall” is defined:

“...to fence, to wall up; the word refers rather to a stone wall, as it is translated in Isa 5:5, than to a thorn hedge...” (Wilson p. 214)

This is not the wall to a house, but the wall around a city, or a wall around the home. It is more like

a fence. These walls made out of stone will have many cracks and crevices which sooner or latter become the home to various serpents. When a man makes it is business to disturb stones which have long laid a certain way, it is certain that sooner or later he will find a serpent under one of them. If he is aware of this and moves the rocks properly and carefully, then he is much more likely to avoid this danger. Again, wisdom will protect him from a grave danger that could shorten his life. In snake infested country, only a fool moves rocks around recklessly and without caution.

9. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,

The term “quarry” is defined is a term that means “*to pull up,*” “*out,*” or “*away.*”

“to pull up, out, away, e.g. a peg or pin from the wall, judg. 16:14; the posts of a gate, 3; oftener the tent pins or stakes, in order to take down a tent for removing; hence to remove, journey, migrate...” (Wilson p. 348)

This refers to one who pull up rocks in order to move them somewhere else. Someone who has the job of moving rocks from the ground (by cutting and breaking it loose, and then moving it from there to wherever it is to be laid).

Remember that some of the stones in the walls of cities were 6-12 feet thick, 15-30 feet long, and 4-8 feet high. Those who break loose and move such stones can very definitely be hurt by them. In the moving of such massive stones, great caution and forethought must be given. There is not much hope of stopping such a stone quickly once it begins to move in an unanticipated manner. People can be hurt if they do not use great wisdom in seeking to move them.

And he who splits wood may be endangered by it.

Splitting wood is also fraught with peril. Each strong swing of the ax can bring about a chunk of wood flying off into one’s leg, a splinter flying off and striking the face. The head of the ax can fly off, or glanced off the side of the wood and come crashing into ones foot or leg. There are many dangers to chopping wood. Dangers which one must be aware of and to treat with caution. Only a fool will rush into the wood pile with an ax and with no fear or concern about the danger. When one is heedless to such things, they are much more certain to happen.

If one sought for a tie that would bind these four admonitions together, it would seem to be the one brought out in the next verse. Take your time when you are doing a job. Think things through and be cautious and systematic in fulfilling them. When all the factors and possibilities are not weighed out carefully, and wisdom used properly, grave consequences can most certainly follow. No one can break out of the dangerous world we live in, all must learn to live within it or they will most certainly perish or serious harm themselves.

10. If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength;

How many have found themselves in this position at one time or another. There is a job that needs to be done. But when they go out to begin the job they find that the tools necessary to do the job are in a state of disrepair. At this point a difficult decision must be made. They can prolong the job by taking the time to go and fix the tool, or they can use the tool in its state of disrepair and prolong and make the job much more difficult and dangerous.

In this case it is a dull ax. When an ax is dull, time should be taken to sharpen it, yet most men will not take the time to do it. They would seek to beat the system and just use the dull ax. If they do not take the time to sharpen it, then certain consequences are going to follow. Generally it is going to take so many more blows to do the job, and the effort exerted will be so much more exhausting, that it would have been wiser to have taken the time right at the beginning to stop and sharpen the ax.

But wisdom brings success (Literally) “profitable to direct”).

The term “brings” is a term that takes in “*excellence,*” “*advantage,*” and “*profit.*”

“excellence; advantage, profit... gain; pre-eminence, advantage... abundance. “Wilson p. 329)

The term success simply adds strength and emphasis to it. It describes things that “*succeed*,” “*please*,” because they are “*proper*,” “*advantageous*” and “*right*.”

kasher- to succeed, to please, to be suitable, to be proper, to be advantageous, to be right and proper to a) (Qal) to please, to be proper b) (Hiphil) to give success 3787

This is what wisdom always brings. It leads to doing things right and properly hence they are successful and pleasing. Wisdom offers the right path and the prosperous and successful way. Those who seek to think things through and weigh out all possibilities before beginning any venture are much more likely to see it safely and prosperously through to its end. Only a fool rushes headlong into projects without weighing out the possible dangers and setbacks.

11. A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different.

The term translated “babblers” is defined:

“...master: Eccles 10:11, lit. master of the tongue.” (Wilson p. 26)

A look at 1167 in the Englishman’s Greek concordance page 262 offers the following information. It is nowhere else translated “babblers” but is translated “master” many times. In Ecclesiastes it is used in 5:11, 13 owners thereof; 7:12, them that have it; 8:8 those that are given to it, 10:20 that which hath wings (lit master of wings); 12:11 masters of assemblies. Under 3956 on page 651, the term tongue or language is the definition and most used translation. Hence this is a master of the tongues, a master of language that is under consideration. This has led most commentators and many of the later translations to see an entirely different idea in this verse.

If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer. ASV

If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is not profit for the charmer. NASB

“If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is not profit for the charmer. NIV

Both Delitzsch and the Pulpit Commentary utilize this thought even though both were written prior to any of the Newer translations. It seems best not only from a grammatical viewpoint, but also from context. If we view it as translated above then it contains another piece of wonderful advice for all who seek for wisdom in living in this life. Even though one have great skill in a matter, if they allow things to go too far before they use it then what value is there to the skill? If the serpent is allowed to bite a man highly educated in the ability to charm them and thus avoid being bitten, then what was the profit to being a “master of tongues”? If one is such a master, and the snake bites before he uses his ability, then his ability had no profit to him. That is a great and powerful question to meditate upon. People often see things with their minds when they are wise which make them better able to avoid dangers and live a higher quality of life. Yet if they do not act on that ability, if they do not use their wisdom for whatever reason, and the time passes when wisdom will help any longer, then what is the value to the wisdom? The Point? Use the information gleaned and gained by wisdom quickly. Do not see something clearly and then out of sloth or laziness let it go until you are no different than those who cannot see it at all.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-20

12. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious,

This passage is a helpful explanation on what a wise man needs to do to keep his heart always at his right hand. It also reveals how one can show everyone else he is a fool.

A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left. 3 Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool. Ecc. 10:2-3

By both words and conduct, those who are wise act entirely differently in the presence of others. A wise man makes himself known by his "gracious" words. This is both great advice to those who want to be wise and a caution to those who are listening to the words of others to determine whether they are wholesome words of wisdom or the prattling of the fool. It also offers a way of escape for the fool to correct his way. If we desire for the LORD to see us as wise, then we must be careful with the words of our mouth. Our words must be "gracious," they must be characterized by "whatever is pleasant and agreeable." The word is often used to describe the favor in the sense either of the words being favorable and bestowing favor.

chen, "favor; grace." The root with the meaning "to favor someone" is a common Semitic term. ... The Hebrew noun chen occurs 69 times, ... The first occurrence is in Gen. 6:8: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." ... The basic meaning of chen is "favor." Whatever is "pleasant and agreeable" can be described by this word. When a woman is said to have chen, she is a "gracious" woman Prov. 11:16; ... chen also denotes the response to whatever is "agreeable." The verbs used with "favor" are: "give favor" Gen. 39:21, "obtain favor" Exod. 3:21, and "find favor" Gen. 6:8, (Vine's #2580)

Words from the mouth of a wise man will carry the quality of kindness and favor, that will lead to his being viewed with favor and enjoyment. The term is used both ways in the proverbs.

*Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, 4 And so find **favor** and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Pr. 3:3-4*

*Good understanding gains **favor**, but the way of the unfaithful is hard. Pr. 13:15*

*He who loves purity of heart and has **grace** on his lips, the king will be his friend. Pr. 22:11*

*He who rebukes a man will find more **favor** afterward than he who flatters with the tongue. Pr. 28:23*

This concept is carried over in the NT:

*Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give **grace** to them that hear. Eph 4:29*

The words of the wise bring edification (strengthening and building up intellectually) and grace (kindness and favor emotionally). All the words that proceed from the mouth of the wise are carefully conceived and skillfully spoken to bring about this end. The words of the wise are helpful and bring success, they are words that soothe and calm, or even words that rebuke if the true need is there. But in either case they are words that have been thoroughly pondered and are delivered with great care and concern.

But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

This is the great gulf of distinction between the words of the wise man and the lips of the fool. While the words of the wise man bring him and give to others favor and esteem, words of the fool do exactly the opposite. Yet not only can these words hurt others, but they also hurt him. "Swallow up" has a very bad connotation "often implying destruction."

bala` "to swallow, engulf." ... occurs about 50 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. ... is first used in Gen. 41:7 in Pharaoh's dream of seven lean ears of grain "swallowing up" the seven plump ears. While it is used of the normal physical swallowing of something quite frequently, such as Jonah's "being swallowed" by the great fish Jonah 1:17, the word is used more often in the figurative sense, often implying destruction. Thus, the violent "overwhelm" the innocent Prov. 1:11-12; an enemy "swallows" those he conquers "like a dragon" Jer. 51:34; and the false prophet and priest "are swallowed up of wine" Isa. 28:7;

(Vine's # 1104)

Thus the seven bad ears *swallow* the good ears(Gen 41:7), Aaron's rod *swallows* those of the Egyptians(Ex 7:12), and the earth *swallowed* up the Egyptians(Ex 15:12) and the household Korah(Num 16:30-34). It is translated *destroy* in Job 2:3 where God tells Satan that he has incited Him to *destroy* him without a cause.

The lips of the fool have the power to destroy him. This is true both "*under the sun*" and in "*the presence of the LORD.*" While a soft answer can turn away wrath, many have been killed or maimed because of foolish words spoken at the wrong moment.

Through total disregard for others and complete selfishness toward themselves, they destroy and consume themselves. Their foolish talk makes this evident to all.

13. The words of his mouth begin with foolishness,

This is the reason why a fool will destroy himself. At the very beginning of his speech foolishness proceeds from his mouth. His every opinion based upon senseless things. There are so many in this world who simply "don't have a clue" as to what this life is all about and what is really going on. All that they say is based upon things that are so contrary to reality. Those who know God's will listen with amazement as the words come from the mouths of fools at how senseless they are. God reveals it in so many ways. Note one such example:

Professing to be wise, they became fools,... 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; Rom. 1:22, 28

When we hear people like this begin to speak, only silly and foolish words come out of their mouths. This is multiplied all over the world as the multitudes of foolish things that men have devised are contemplated and discussed. For although God made man upright, they have sought out many schemes and when these schemes are discussed only more folly is be created.

The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands. Pr. 14:1

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. Ps 14:1

This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings. Ps 49:13

A fool's wrath is known at once, But a prudent man covers shame. Prov 12:16

Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool lays open his folly. Prov 13:16

A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, But a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them. Prov 27:3

For the foolish person will speak foolishness, And his heart will work iniquity: To practice ungodliness, To utter error against the Lord, Isa 32:6

As soon as such a person begins to speak one can see the silly folly of their words. they are acting "*stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently.*" They have deviated from "*what is true, good and right, wise and prudent...*"

"to act stupidly, absurdly, inconsistently; to be sottish, infatuated: it denotes any deviation of the mind from what is true, good and right, wise and prudent..." (Wilson p. 172)

This is how it begins, but as it progresses it turns into something even more sinister and deadly.

And the end of his talk is raving madness.

The more they speak and seek to defend their actions, the more outlandish their words and ideas become. This is a madness that is "*mischievous*" (KJV ASV) "*raving*" (NKJ) "*wicked*" (NAS NIV) or "*evil*" (ESV). The term is used over thirty times in Ecclesiastes alone and has been translated "*burdensome,*" "*distressing,*" "*grave misfortune,*" "*adversity,*" "*wickedness,*" "*misery,*" "*hurt,*" "*cruel,*" but mostly it is translated "*evil.*" It is used of both moral(sin) and physical(misfortune) evil.

This madness is therefore leads to a moral or physically evil. Since it is Ecclesiastes, it obviously

takes in the misfortunes brought to those “*under the sun.*” But we must never overlook the moral element. It is a “*wicked madness*” just as the NIV and NAS translate. This is a madness that raves “*with foolish conceit.*” It “*implies so great a departure from wisdom that the mind, without any control, rushes on with a blind fury.*”

“*howleluwthto be foolish; to be puffed up with vain glory, to vaunt, to rave with foolish conceit; hence, to be mad, to rage... madness, implies so great a departure from wisdom that the mind, without any control, rushes on with a blind fury...*” Wilson p. 262; 1948)

These two terms together stress a fool who is not just simpleminded and therefore unable to think clearly, but one who is wickedly insane. Lust grown from the acorn into the oak. This is the fool who says there is no God, the fool who will not be faithful to his/her mate, the fool who becomes a drunkard, drug addict, or compulsive gambler. The fool who begins with foolish speaking and ends up rushing with a blind fury and no control whatsoever. When the earth was filled with violence and every imagination of the thoughts of mens hearts were evil, the talk must have been raving madness indeed. I Tim 6:9-10 speaks of such a fool in regard to money.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1Tim. 6:9-10

How it begins with plans and talk and ends in raving madness, in evil rushing in blind fury till they are drowned. So ended Balaam son of Balaak.

They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. 2Pet. 2:15-16

14. A fool also multiplies words.

Another clear distinction between the wise man and the fool. The wise and knowledgeable person spares his words This is the exact opposite thought of the Proverb quoted above.

He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. 28 Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive. Pr. 17:27-28

do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. Ecc. 5:2

As we grow in wisdom, we have less and less to say. We allow God to do all the speaking.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. 1Pet. 4:11

But the fool doesn't know how to spare his word, hold his peace, or shut his lips. He multiplies words. His words “become numerous.” They go on and on.

rabah “to multiply, become numerous, become great.”... Basically this word connotes numerical increase. ... God told the sea and air creatures to “be fruitful, and multiply” Gen. 1:22...” (Vine's #7235)

Either he likes to hear himself talk, or is convinced that he really has something to say. An example of such a fool and his multiplied words are found in Jude and in I Timothy.

*Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” But **these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Jude 8-10***

*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 For some men, straying from these things, have **turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 1Tim. 1:6-7***

A fool speaks on and on about things he does not know or understand. He doesn't really know what he is talking about, but he has no self restraint or wisdom to stop, and in spite of this lack of knowledge and understanding such fools confidently assert what they say as being true. Though such men multiply their words, when they are finished they have said nothing. They are simply idle words. Yet words nonetheless that they will have to give an account for saying. Yet even such a warning as this does not stop the wicked madness.

"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgement. "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Mt. 12:36-37

Peter spoke strongly about such fools in the pulpit:

*These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when they **speak great swelling words of emptiness**, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 2 Pet. 2:17-19*

Only a fool would multiply words with such warnings as these. There are so many things we do not know about. A wise man recognizes his own limitation. After all Job's rash words spoken in bitterness of heart in response to the cruel errors of his three "friends," God asked him a series of questions calculated to bring him back to his senses. His attitude at the end of his book ought to mirror that of all wise men.

"Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. 5 Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." Job 40:4-5

If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. Ps 73:12

No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what we be after him?

Though this is the fifth time in the book that Koheleth has expressed this truth, the context here points to the application everyone should have made after reading them:

For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Ecc 3:22

Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? Ecc 6:12

so that man can find out nothing that will come after him. Ecc 7:14

For he does not know what will happen; so who can tell him when it will occur? Ecc 8:7

Only a fool multiplies words about the future. Only God knows and controls what will happen in the next moment of one's life.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. James 4:13-17

Those who seek to predict the future and speak confidently about it, whether in the plans they make, or in their attempts at predictions, are only revealing their own folly, arrogance, and evil.

Only the greatest fool speaks confidently about the future. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. Not even the wisest of the wise presume to speak confidently about tomorrow, but the fool will. Our own proverb puts it will

"Fools rush in where the wise dare not tread"

15. The labor of fools wearies them,

Solomon has used the term "labor" over twenty times now to describe both the benefits and the downside of work under the sun. He used it as the reason why life is vanity(1:2-3), and went on to explain exactly why(2:11, 18-23). Yet he also showed it was the main gift God has given to man

to make it exciting and enjoyable(2:10; 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:9-10). Hence the term itself is neutral. It can be either good or bad labor depending upon the way one goes about it and what one is seeking to accomplish.

After speaking of the qualities of the fool regarding his mouth, he now moves to his efforts and accomplishments. Solomon again uses “*stupid fellow*” or “*dull person*” who “*has knowledge, but does not properly evaluate or understand what they know.*”

The key to this passage centers on why the labor of the fool would weary them. Many reasons come to mind, in the context of the next clause which describes the fact that they do not have any sense.

It may weary them because seldom does anything get done right. When a fool tackles a job it can take three to four times longer than a wise man. Added to that the job is seldom not right, but patched together and often needs to be done again. This leads to it wearying them. They grow weary in the effort.

“*yaga` to labour, to toil, especially with wearisome and painful effort; it seems also to imply dislike or disgust;...*” (Wilson p. 477; 3021)

All jobs that are understood and done well lead to satisfaction and enjoyment while those that cannot be completed on time, or do not come together well and do not function after completion are frustrating and lead to becoming weary. Everyone dislikes things they cannot do well and create frustrations.

For they do not even know how to go to the city!

Since the context of the this section centers on the lack of sense of the fool that leads to him growing weary and frustrated in his labor. This was very likely a well known proverb/idiom of that day and language. We would say “***he doesn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain***” This was probably spoken derisively of those with little common sense.

Our understanding of the passage centers on the term city. This word describes a place that has walls for protection.

’ir ... refers to a permanent settlement without reference to size or claims. None of our modern terms such as city, town, or village adequately convey the meaning or the mental picture contained in this word. Not only is there a difference between the modern and ancient city, there were differences between the ancient cities themselves, making definition even more difficult. The primary distinction between a city and a village is that the former ’ir generally had a wall. ...Frequent reference to the “gate” of the city where governmental functions were held, underscores the walled nature of cities. Elders of the cities are often mentioned who had some governmental functions... The villages were in an adjacent agricultural area of a city and were in turn dependent on the city for protection. ... A familiar concept in the OT is the city of refuge. Six Levitical cities were appointed to receive and give asylum to the accidental manslaughter. (TDWOT #5892)

The term city as used in the time of Solomon would first take in a place of protection. If an army or danger was approaching, the city would be the place to flee. Second, the city was the place where the elders would sit at the gate and people could come for counsel and solutions. Third, the city would be the place where the farmer and others would take their produce to sell. Finally, the city of refuge was a place where people could flee for safety if they have involuntarily done something wrong.

Any of these things could be involved in this idiom. The fool doesn't know where to run for protection in times of danger. He does not know where to go for sound counsel and advice. He doesn't know where to take his produce to gain the revenue needed. He doesn't know where to run when he has done something wrong to safe himself.

Maybe it is none of these. But as today, the larger the city the bigger the roads that mark the way. Anyone with any common sense can find the road to the city, but these do not even have enough common sense to do that.

16. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,

Some general observations about the living conditions that are beyond the control of a people, but will lead to their happiness and prosperity on the one hand and to sorrow and troubles on the other. These are some of the things that often lead to the negative side of “*a time to...*” in Chapter Three.

Not everything is due to time and chance. Some things happen as the direct result of man’s intervention either for good or evil. This theme was taken up in much greater detail earlier in the book,

And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter — On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter. Ecc. 4:1

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Ecc. 5:8

Here Solomon returned one final time to this subject to make a few more points for our consideration about the futility of life under the sun.

When the king is a child, he is easily influenced, does not have his senses exercised to discern good and evil(Heb 5:14), and speaks understands and thinks as a child(I Cor 13:11) When the king is a child, can refer either to age or intellect. When the king is a child either in chronological age, or in mind and heart, The Holy Spirit here revealed the terrible woe upon to those who live under the sun when these events occur. This is why God wants us to pray for them so that our lives will not be negatively influence by them.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 1Tim. 2:1-2

When the king acts like a child, when he is selfish, short sighted, looking out only for his own needs and not accepting the responsibility for the welfare of his subjects, then woe be to that land. It will fall into disrepair, and will be open to being taken over by another.

It is important to see that though this is true, even under the worst injustices and troubles, those who are wise are urged to bear it in silence(v. 20).

And your princes feast in the morning!

This is an additional thing that often occurs when the king is a child. Since wise and intelligent kings looking out for the needs of his subjects would not tolerate such things, he bears a part in these events. He is now elaborating on “*as an error proceeding from the ruler,*” discussed earlier in this chapter.

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place. 7 I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants. Ecc. 10:5-7

These are examples of the kinds of things that can occur during the times when “*folly is set in great dignity*” and “*servants are on horses.*” The real import of this is seen by comparing it to the next verse where its opposite is described. These are feasts that lead to drunkenness and debauchery. Such power corrupts very quickly when the princes begin their feasting in the morning and do nothing in regard to the proper ruling and restraining of their subjects which God gave them to do. When the princes have no more concern for their nation and its subjects, than to simply leave them to their own devices all the day long with no guidance and no justice being put forth then it will be an evil time.

17. Blessed are you, O land when your king is the son of nobles,

When the king has experience in working and laboring among people. When he is the son of a noble father who has trained him well in how to rule and guide a people, and he makes it his business to care for the needs of his people, then the land will be blessed. When the king has the

best interests of his subjects and the business of ruling in a wise way are his chief concerns then the land will have peace and prosperity.

And your princes feast at the proper time- For strength and not for drunkenness!

With such a king princes are forced to keep themselves in check or risk being removed from their position. They cannot allow their power to corrupt them. They will instead feast the proper time and even the character of their feasting will be different. They are not eating and drinking to gluttony and drunkenness. They will eat for strength. They will eat for the purpose for which God gave it. To enjoy and gain strength, not to over imbibe and become soft, lazy and indolent.

As we read the history of the Patriarchs and the time of Israel, we find them living under both types of government. Some like Lot were vexed with the lawless deeds they saw and heard (II Pet 3:8), others like Paul were even killed by them. The lives of both saint and sinner were held under the whims and caprices of those who had been given the sacred trust of ruling over them. When God selected Jeroboam to rule over the 10 tribes taken from Solomon, he had the potential for good or evil. Woe to that land for what he did.

18. Because of laziness the building decays,

We are therefore faced with the same dilemma as found in 10:8-11. Should these verses be understood only in their most simple and obvious form, or should they be used to further expound on the theme of the two kings of verse 16 and 17? Although they could be interpreted to stand on their own, the context here seems to indicate that 10:16-20 is a unit. The nation whose king is a child and whose princes feast in the morning bring woe to the land, but God warns in verse 20 that no one is to curse them. Hence though this is a truth that applies in the most simple of circumstances, it also explains the woe of a king who is lazy.

Laziness will lead to the decay of any building. The natural order of "life under the sun" leads toward decay. What trees will do naturally in the forest, wood will also do in the home. When one is not diligent about the upkeep of their home, it naturally begins to decay. When one does not paint, fix the leaks in the roof, pull the weeds and prune the trees away from the house, then the building will decay. One doesn't have to do anything. As a matter of fact, one must do something to prevent it.

Yet there certainly could be a deeper thought here. This could also be the reason why the woe was pronounced on any land whose rulers are lazy and slothful. Just as a home will decay without diligence so also will a nation. Yet it doesn't stop there. So also will the soul.

'Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. Mt. 25:28-29

"Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him." Lk. 8:18

And through the idleness of hands the house leaks.

The roof is a critical part of the home and must be continually monitored. With the passage of time and the decay of the materials, it will happen everywhere and to everyone. The wise man is diligent and properly prepared to deal with this. If the owner is industrious and a hard worker, then such leaks are fixed the moment they appear, thus water is kept out and the natural process of decay is thwarted again. But if one is lazy and idle, and does not take care of these things, then it continues to leak, and the problem becomes worse and worse with the passing of each day.

This too is true of a country. When the king and the princes are lazy and idle, even the most obvious problems are not resolved or taken care of, and they lead to deeper and more serious problems that cannot be easily fixed.

19. A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything.

These three statements may have been the proverbs of the king who is a child to justify his

conduct. Even our own culture has it “wine, women, and song,” crowd who proclaim that “if it feels good do it,” and that “you only go around once in life so grab all the gusto you can.” He has already spoken of these three things earlier in the book and denied all three of these conclusions. Unless these things are used with great care and moderation, they can quickly and easily lead to ruin. Feasting is where the heart of the fool is(7:4-6), any use of wine takes a heart guiding wisely(2:3), and wealth only led to an increase of sorrow and troubles(5:10-12). As a matter of fact, these three things have the same ability to decay a heart that the previous verse warns regarding a house. They require the same diligence and upkeep as the things in a home.

There are seeds of truth in these three things, and used in careful moderation, each can be enjoyed. But too often man has been ensnared by them.

20. Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom;

The rich and the powerful are not to be cursed. They are not to be made “*little or contemptible*” nor are the to be “*belittled*.”

qalal, “to be trifling, light, swift; to curse.” This wide-ranging word ... occurs about 82 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. As will be seen, its various nuances grow out of the basic idea of being “trifling” or “light,” with somewhat negative connotations involved. *qalal* frequently includes the idea of “cursing” or “making little or contemptible”: “And he that curseth [belittles] his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” Exod. 21:17.(Vine’s #7043)

The description of the king as a child and nobles as slothful and selfish could easily lead for the wise to hold them in contempt. Yet God warns us not to do it.

Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" Acts 23:5

"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. Ex 22:28

Vengeance belongs to God he will repay(Rom 12:19). It is futile for the wise to grumble, complain or belittle and hold in contempt such people. In truth it only hurts those who do it.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. James 3:8-10

But even more troubling than this are the ill affects that it can lead to “*under the sun*.” When such people are in power, it is perilous to do such things.

For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

It is interesting to note that this proverb has stayed active right up to this day. Parents still tell their children that a little bird told them the secret things they find out without the child’s ever knowing how.

The sad truth is that our words can be overheard when we think no one is listening, or the friend or loved one was are confiding in or speaking foolishly to may not be trustworthy. Every word we speak we should be speaking in such a way that even if those we are talking about were listening we would not be embarrassed or ashamed. It is always best for such things never to be spoken. The do no good to speak of them, but can lead to great harm.