

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 10

The Power of Foolishness

Foolishness can be powerful, and with unintended consequences.

Chapter 10 includes proverbs, which could be picked up and dropped into the Book of Proverbs and we'd never be able to tell the difference.

Read 10:1 in conjunction with 9:18 (Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good). Same major point; a little foolishness destroys a whole lot of wisdom.

[Slide 2] Read Ecc 10:1-4

¹ Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

² A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

³ Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

⁴ If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

(10:1) Doesn't take much of anything to result in spoilage of the full amount, so too with foolishness.

(10:2) To have one's heart inclined to the right is to be upright, skillful and resourceful in one's daily life. Lefthandedness was linked to incompetence. (Latin: sinister, dexter)

(10:3) We can recognize a fool when we see his actions.

(10:4) Prov. 16:14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it. Stay the course.

Recall also the fate of Haman in the book of Esther. The gallows had been prepared for Mordecai.

[Slide 3] Read Ecc 10:5-7

⁵ There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶ folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

Wisdom and wealth are not interdependent. One can have one without the other.

As we see in v5-7, the rich and powerful are not immune to destructive power of foolishness.

People with resources (the rich) may lack opportunity; people with opportunity (princes) may lack resources.

[Slide 4] Read Ecc 10:8-11

⁸ He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

⁹ He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

¹⁰ If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

¹¹ If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

This section (stanza) has a construction theme, safety first, use caution. (Ever turned over rocks in the yard? Bugs, snakes, etc.) Dull tools require more effort, a wise worker attends to what he needs.)

Snake charming – neat trick, but risky (foolish?) to be playing with uncharmed snake.

Even in our physical labors, wisdom is necessary for best results.

[Slide 5] Read Ecc 10:12-15

¹² The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

¹³ The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

¹⁴ A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

¹⁵ The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

Speaking wisely can earn respect from others, speaking foolishly destroys any respect one might have. The people who talk the most have the least to say.

When foolish people work, they accomplish nothing because they work to no purpose.

[Slide 6] Read Ecc 10:16-18

¹⁶ Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

¹⁷ Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

¹⁸ Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

“your princes feast in the morning”

Not referring to chronological age but rather to maturity. If your land is ruled by immature people who party at all hours of the day, you are in trouble. Wise rulers feast at proper times.

[Slide 7] Child: na'ar (300 instances in OT) It's use:

- A Servant of Abraham (Gen 18:7)
- 17 year old Joseph (Gen 37:2)
- Baby Moses in basket boat (Ex 2:6)
- A Young priest (Judges 17:12)

- Absalom when he was old enough to seize control in Jerusalem (2 Sam 18:5)
- Jereboam when he rose to a position of prominence (1 Ki 11:28)

There is a handout on na'ar in the webspace.

Context here: as one who lacks experience and wisdom.

(10:18) Keep your house in order. While physical here, much of Ecclesiastes extols the need to keep our “house” in order.

[Slide 8] Read Ecc 10:19-20

¹⁹ Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

²⁰ Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

(10:19) God gives us good gifts to use. We need to keep those in proper perspective.

The verse can be read at different levels:

- A comment on human values.
- Sober advice to earn a good living rather than having a good time.
- Stating the versatility of money. It answers everything in that it can influence a situation – this too calls for wisdom. How we use it shows wisdom or folly.

(10:20) “A little birdie told me”. Actually is a proverb in many cultures, dating back at least to the ancient Hittites.