

Ecclesiastes

Dead Flies and Snake Charmers: More Life Under the Sun

Lesson #11 for March 17, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 10.

1. In this chapter we find more comments about:
 - The conflict between wise and foolish.
 - How to deal with a boss who gets angry with workers.
 - Good tools make work easier.
 - Dangerous jobs often lead to injuries.
 - The repeated theme: no one knows what is going to happen next, and no one knows or can tell us what will happen after we die.
 - Wise leaders will lead to a good country.
 - Money seems to be the answer to almost anything!
 - Gossip is dangerous: sooner or later it will get back to the one gossiped about.
2. How many of these apparently rambling comments do you think came from Solomon's own experience? Is there any obvious progression in his thoughts? How do these more or less random thoughts fit with your understanding of the rest of scripture?
3. Our lesson study guide suggests that this lesson discusses thoughts, words, and actions. Would it be fair also to say that it deals with consequences?
4. As you review another set of Solomon's proverbs, do you find a great deal of wisdom or a certain number of obvious conclusions? Is there anything Solomon says that you have not figured out in your own life already?
5. Read again Ecclesiastes 9:18-10:1. (Remember that there were no chapter or verse divisions in the original.) Would you agree that a little stupidity or even an intentional or unintentional mistake can lead to a lot of grief, even in the experience of an otherwise good leader? Consider some recent American presidents and their situations: Nixon and Watergate; Carter and the Iran crisis; Clinton and Lewinsky; Bush and Iraq. Do you agree with the lesson's conclusion: "No matter how much good one does, a stupid mistake can so spoil it all." (Sunday, 3/11/07)
6. Think of examples from scripture where otherwise good people in a moment of deception or weakness made serious mistakes: Eve and the serpent (Genesis 3:6); the children of Israel and the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4); David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-4). **If we were truly Christian, should we just forgive people who make that kind of mistake? Is forgiveness the real problem?** Are these sufficient examples to constantly remind us that we should carefully think things through before we act?
7. Think of examples in the scripture where people actually planned punishments for other people and ended up receiving those punishments themselves! Haman and Mordecai; Daniel in the lion's den.
8. Read Ecclesiastes 10:2 in several versions. What is the meaning of the "right hand" and "left hand" in more traditional translations? In scripture the right hand is clearly regarded as the side of favor. (Matthew 26:64; Matthew 25:31-34; Acts 7:55) It is interesting to note the connotations that have been suggested by the left hand in various cultures down through time. To the ancient Latins, the left hand was called *sinistra* and that forms the basis for our English word "sinister."
9. Is "left-handedness" related to the story of Ehud in Judges 3:12-30? In some modern societies, the left hand is always considered the evil and dirty hand. It is used for toilet purposes and is never supposed to be anywhere near food or on the table. All eating must be done only with

the right hand. Is Solomon suggesting that wisdom leads to right living and stupidity to wrong living?

10. Read Ecclesiastes 10:3. Would it be fair to say that this verse teaches that sooner or later, what is inside a person will make itself manifest by his/her actions, thoughts, and words?
11. How does one go about purifying one's thoughts? What is suggested by Deuteronomy 30:6 which says we should "circumcise the heart"? How about Philippians 4:6-8? If we made it a practice to ignore what is evil, immoral, or bad and to focus always on what is good, uplifting, and right, how would it impact our characters and our future thoughts and actions?
12. Read Ecclesiastes 10:4-7. What do these verses tell us about problems with governments? We should note that in the days of Solomon, only the very wealthy or privileged rode on horses or even mules! Why do you think the injustices noted in Ecclesiastes 10:4-7 took place?
13. **How should we respond when we see social injustice taking place? Should Christians become involved in civil disobedience? Should we march? Picket? Write to our congresspeople? Look at some Bible verses about social injustice: Isaiah 58:6,7; Matthew 26:52; John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Revelation 13:10.**
14. Do those verses suggest that Christians should never take up any kind of force? Do those verses forbid us from using political, social, or cultural weapons? These words come from the *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*:

Those who rule without listening to advice will make mistakes. The more power a ruler has, the more widespread are the miserable results of his errors. Poor advisors only multiply mistakes in judgment. (1 Kings 12:1-19) "Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 85.

15. Solomon, who was no doubt the employer of thousands of people, developed a real disgust for laziness! Read Proverbs 6:6; 10:26; 20:4; 24:32; 26:13. Consider these comments: Even an untimely nap can lead to poverty! Lazy employees bring all kinds of trouble. If you're too lazy to plant there will be no harvest! Loafers even make up excuses such as, "It's a dangerous world out there!"
16. Read Ecclesiastes 10:8-11. What overall theme do you see in these verses? What lesson was Solomon trying to suggest? Would it be fair to say that these verses warn us to carefully plan before we take action? Ecclesiastes 10:8 seems to be a warning against trying to set traps for other people because we might fall into them ourselves! (Esther 7:10; 9:25; Daniel 6:24)
17. Solomon obviously took a lot of space in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes writing about fools. Was it because almost everyone else seemed like a fool compared to his wisdom?
18. How would you respond to these words regarding Ecclesiastes 10:14:

Fools babble about anything. They have no knowledge of the topics about which they speak. This probably means that "The more foolish a man he is, the more he will be inclined to make dogmatic statements in regard to the deepest mysteries." *SDA Bible Commentary* vol. 3, p. 1098.
19. Why do you think Solomon wrote, "No one knows what is going to happen next, and no one can tell us what will happen after we die"? (Ecclesiastes 10:14, *GNB*; compare 3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 9:12; and 12:14)
20. Why do you think the authors of the *Bible Study Guide* chose to skip over Ecclesiastes 10:15-19? Do the words in verses 16 and 17 ever apply to church leaders?
21. Read Ecclesiastes 10:18. Is that obvious or is that real wisdom?

22. **One of the most interesting verses in Ecclesiastes is found in Ecclesiastes 10:19!** Why do you suppose it is not even mentioned in the *Bible Study Guide*? Look at some of the interesting translations of this verse.

...καὶ τοῦ ἀργυρίου ἐπακούσεται σὺν τὰ πάντα. (LXX)

...pecuniae oboedient omnia (*Vulgate*)

...And the silver answereth with all. (*Young's Literal*)

...but money answereth all things. (*KJV*)

...and [depend on tax] money to answer for all of it. (*Amplified*)

...and bribes can buy everything you need. (*CEV*)

...But it's money that makes the world go around. (*The Message*)

...and money answers every need. (*Tanakh*)

How important is money to a Christian?

23. Does Ecclesiastes 10:19 suggest anything about our diet? What kind of wine is being discussed? This is grape juice either in its unfermented form or in slightly fermented form.
24. Read Ecclesiastes 10:20. Is that a general warning against gossip? Why were the king and rich people the only ones who were mentioned?
25. How often have you gotten into trouble because of something which you said? Look at James 3:1-12. Although the tongue may be only a small part of the body, it can cause a lot of trouble!
26. Do you think that our study in Ecclesiastes so far has made you wiser? How so? Would you agree with the general statement that getting wisdom is the most important thing to do?
27. How should we respond when friends or superiors give us advice that we know is foolish? Do you remember that famous charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War and Pickett's disastrous charge on Cemetery Ridge in the Battle of Gettysburg? Should someone have questioned the orders of those commanders?
28. Look at these comments from Ellen White:

It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. [252] While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have,--the great mercy and love of God,--we should have more faith [253] and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God. {*Ministry of Healing* 251.4}

29. How much influence does modern media have on the thoughts and characters of our youth? Is it impossible to raise a young person with a pure mind in our day? If by beholding we become changed, are we fighting a losing battle against our society today?

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