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A Third Summary: A Backward Glance Over Ecclesiastes 7:1 to 9:18



The Teacher's calling, like **Jeremiah's**, could be summed up as **to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant (Jeremiah 1:10).** By the end of **Chapter 9**, **he** has made **his** case against our self-sufficiency. In the first half of the book, whose progress we briefly recalled in the first (**to see link click Cm – The First Summary: A Backward Glance Over Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 4:8**) and second summaries (see **Cp – A Second Summary: A Backward Glance Over Ecclesiastes 4:9 to 6:12**), left us little reason to be complacent, and the past three chapters have been sharpening the issues.

Unlike their predecessors, **the Proverbs** and reflections in **7:1-22** brought us no rest from our main preoccupation. With few exceptions the sayings were harsh **(7:1-4)**; even, at one point, cynically asking, **"Who can be compared with a wise person (8:1)**; pushing the worldly up against the harsh implications of **death** (see **Cu – Love or Hate?**). **Chapter 2** had already made the point that **the wise man** is as mortal as **the fool** (see **Cd – The Search for Satisfaction**). But now comes the pressing question, whether **wisdom**, in any serious sense, is attainable at all. **Wise** as **a man** might be in the many details of life **(8:1-6** and **9:13-18)**, it became clear that **he** would never find **his** way through to the heart of the matter, never even be sure that the truth, if **he** ever did discover it, would be worth looking

at. **Who can discover it? (7:24); Who can tell someone else what is to come? (8:7); No one knows whether love or hate awaits them when they die (9:1).**

In other respects as well, the picture has darkened. Now there were glimpses of immorality: of injustice not only widespread, but admired **(8:10)**, and of humanity not merely being weak but fully **planning to do evil . . . with foolishness in their hearts (8:11** and **9:3).** And along with the ravages of **death** which had been emphasized throughout the book there emerged the hazards of **time and chance (9:11-12)**, to make further havoc of **man's** calculations.

Despite all of this, there were a few flashes of better things, keeping some hope alive in us, to be fostered and justified in the remaining chapters. For at last, **Solomon** has finished **his** work of **demolition**. The site has been cleared: now **he** can turn to **building** and **planting**. Whether we regard the next chapter as the modest beginning in that process, or as an interlude to relieve the tension, comparable with **4:9** to **5:12** and **7:1-22**, it will allow us to catch our breath before returning to the burning question of the book:

Does life have any point to it, and if so, what is it?

For starters, then, there are matters of common sense for us to take notice of, which are as much a part of **wisdom** and sound living as are the questions we must face to stretch our understanding of **God**. We steady ourselves with reminders to be sensible **(10:1-20)**, so that we may step out more surely upon the call to be bold **(11:1-6)**, joyful **(11:7-10)** and godly **(12:1-14)**.[310]