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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)**.<sup>310</sup>