–Save This Page as a PDF–

Interlude: Be Sensible
Ecclesiastes 10: 1-20

Interlude, be sensible DIG: What two things are contrasted in verses 1-3? What is the main point here? What is evil in verses 5-7? Where is it found? In 10:6-11, where do you see poetic justice? Random events? Cause and effect? Dry humor? What makes a good leader? What application is there between secretly talking about the king and today's society?

REFLECT: How skilled are you in the various areas of life? In which areas do you need to develop greater skills? How can this best be done? How has something foolish you said affected others and yourself? To whom do you need to apologize because of it? What practical steps can you avoid such "foolish" conversation? What is the duty of a leader?

A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

This chapter takes a calm look at life, sampling it at random, so as to help us to keep our own standards high, without being too surprised at the oddities of others, or taken off guard in our dealings with the powerful people of this world.



The fool: Just as dead flies make perfumed oil stink, so a little folly

outweighs wisdom and honor (10:1). This verse pictures the principle on which the previous chapter ended; that it takes far less to ruin something than to create it. This, incidentally, is part of the advantage enjoyed by evil, and of its appeal to the vicious side of us. To put it bluntly as **the Teacher** does, it is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness. But in this verse, it is the sudden lapse or **foolish** impulse that is the trouble. There are endless examples of prizes forfeited and good beginnings marred in a reckless moment – not only by the irresponsible, such as Esau, but also by the greatly tried, such as Moses and Aaron.[311]

A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left (10:2). This verse has a typical proverbial form that looks at the same truth from two different directions. **The wise** go to **the right** and **the fools** go to **the left**. **The right hand** is the place of protection **(Psalm 16:8, 110:5, 121:5)** and honor **(Matthew 22:44)**. After the Great Tribulation **the Judge**, the judgment and those judged are identified in **Matthew 25:31-33. When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne** as **the Judge in heavenly glory. All the** Gentiles still living on the earth **will be gathered before Him** for judgment**, and He will separate the people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats** based on their treatment of the Jewish people during the Great Tribulation**. He will put the** pro-Jewish **sheep on His right and the** anti-Jewish **goats on His left.** As far as the anti-Jewish **goats**, **Matthew 25:41-45** states that all who aid the antichrist in the Jewish destruction will be killed and sent to hell. **Then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.** They will lose out on the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom.

And when a fool travels, he has no good sense, thus showing everyone that he is a fool (10:3). Comedy breaks through here, as it has often done in **Proverbs** of this theme. To the sharp eye of **Solomon**, **the fool** has no way of disguising what **he** is, except perhaps by total **silence (Proverbs 17:28).** Even then, his general bearing would probably give him away. But, in fact, **he** is too full of **himself** to stop from running his mouth to everyone **he** meets. To judge from **Proverbs**, **his** fine phrases will sound odd **(Proverbs 17:7)**. **his** tactless remarks are hostile **(Proverbs 18:6)**; and when you talk to **him**, **he** is not really listening

(Proverbs 18:2). If **he** has a message for you **he** will get it all wrong, and if **he** comes out with a sage remark, it will backfire **(Proverbs 26:6)**. Fortunately, you can sense **his** approach and get away from **him** as fast as you can **(Proverbs 17:12)**.

The social tightrope: If a ruler gets angry at you, stay at your post, because calmness soothes great offenses. The Teacher, here, advises those who serve **the king** to counter **his** anger with gentleness. **Solomon** offers another example of how **foolishness** can wreak havoc in society, the placement of **fools** in positions of authority. This practice has not stopped and we can see evidence of it even today. **The Teacher** describes **it** as being **evil**. **Another evil I have seen under the sun,** cutting God out of the picture, **the kind of mistake rulers make, is that fools are promoted to high positions, while the rich occupy low places.** This thought continues as he presents us with a vivid picture of this social tightrope. **I have seen servants riding horses, while princes walk on foot like slaves (10:4-7).** Usually, the most important and privileged people **rode horses (Second Chronicles 25:28; Escher 6:8-9)**, while **slaves** or **servants** walk alongside to tend to **their masters'** needs. Here, however, we have the exact opposite, **the ruler's** simple **mistake** results in a totally chaotic society.[312]

Plain facts of life: He who digs a pit may fall into it; he who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may get hurt by them, he who chops wood puts himself in danger (10:8-9). If the hatchet's iron blade is blunt, and its user doesn't sharpen it, he will have to exert more effort (10:10); but the expert has the advantage of his skill. If a snake bites before it is charmed, the snake-charmer has no advantage (10:11). The outlook behind these pointed remarks is not fatalism, as **verses 8** and **9** may suggest on their own, but elementary realism. The blinding glimpse of the obvious in **verse 10**, backed up by the dry humor of the next verse, dispels any doubt. We are asked to use our minds, and to look a little way ahead. For there are risks in any vigorous action and **the person** we call "accident-prone" usually has **himself** to blame, rather than **his** bad-luck. **He** should have known; **he** should have taken care. But **Solomon** drops a hint of a parable by talking of **a pit** and of a **serpent**; for **the pit** that traps its maker was a proverbial picture of poetic justice, and the unnoticed **serpent** was the very image of lurking retribution. This is how the prophet **Amos** saw it **(Amos 5:18-20** and **9:3)**; so too did the witness of **Paul's** encounter with the viper **(Acts 28:4)**.[313]

Sense and nonsense: Solomon has stated elsewhere **his** belief in the relative

superiority of **wisdom** over **folly**, though such sentiments are usually accompanied by an indication that **wisdom** itself is not ultimately to be prized. Such qualifications are not found here; these proverbs are remarkably similar to those found in **Proverbs 10:8 and 21, 15:2** and **18:7**. While **the words** of **the wise** result in positive effects, **the fool's** speech ends in disaster. **The words spoken by the wise bring them favor, but the lips of a fool swallow him up (10:12).** Using a merism, a figure of speech in which polar opposites are chosen to indicate totality, **Solomon** characterized **a fool's** speech as **starting with foolishness and ending with wicked madness (10:13).** While **the fool's** speech might seem insane or silly to start with, the end result is insanity. **A fool keeps talking and talking, yet no one knows what the future will bring – can anyone tell a person what will happen after he's gone (10:14)?** In other words, **the fool** is going on and on about something for which **he** has no information and about which **he** can gain no knowledge **– the future**, a subject about which **the Teacher** has already told us that is no knowledge **(6:12, 7:14, 8:7)**. **The efforts of a fool wear him out; he doesn't even know the way to town (10:15)!**[314] This is a proverbial expression for extreme ignorance, like the modern proverb, "He doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain." This is why **the fool** finds his work such a chore.

The immature ruler: **Woe to you, land, when your king is immature, and your leaders start their parties in the morning!** Such **a land** is in trouble. It is not only **the king** who lets the nation down, however, it is also **the leaders**. In contrast to the gluttonous **leaders, happy are you, land, when your king is well-born, and your princes eat at the proper time, in order to stay strong, not to get drunk!** In good, practical wisdom, **Solomon** warns against **laziness** by pointing out the consequences. **When the owner is lazy, the roof sags; when hands are idle, the house leaks (10:16-18).** People who sit around and do nothing will end up with disaster on their **hands**. The book of **Proverbs** considers such sluggards, at least implicitly, to be fools **(Proverbs 6:6, 26:16)**.[315]

In the proverb of **verse 19**, the first two lines may tie in with the **feasting** scenes, good and bad, he opened the paragraph in **verse 16**. **Parties are made for having a good time, wine adds cheer to life, and silver has an answer for everything (10:19).** The point is not that every man has his price but that every gift has its use – and **silver**, in the form of **money**, was the most versatile of all. **Feasting** for happiness is a good thing, but excess is pointless. **God's** wholesome gifts are good, and their proper use is delightful. Then, we are back at it again with

men of power and intrigue. **Don't insult the king, not even in your thoughts; and don't insult the wealthy, not even in your bedroom; for a bird in the air might carry the news, a creature with wings might repeat what you said (10:20). They** are not comfortable company. To the twentieth-first century reader there is something familiar in their too-sensitive ear for whispers, but they need no electronics for their espionage. They would not have reached their dizzying political heights, and stayed there, without a sixth-sense for dissidents. Practical as ever, **Solomon** sees this as a fact of life, and ends the chapter with advice on managing to live with it. To survive is the first step, even if it is by no means the last. Now **the Teacher** can lead us on towards the climax of the book (**to see link click Cy – The Conclusion of the Matter**).[316]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You, Almighty God,** are the most powerful **Ruler** in the universe. **You** are also totally holy. **Seraphim . . . called out to another, and** said: **Holy, holy, holy, is ADONAI-Tzva'ot! The whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:2a, 3).** The **wise** person is the one who **fears** and **love**s **You**! **The fear of Adonai is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline (Proverbs 1:7).** Thank **You** that in **Your love** and **Your** wisdom you choose to adopt as your children **(Ephesians 1:4-5)** those who **fear** and **love You (John 1:12)**. We **love** to worship and follow **You**, our wonderful and wise **Heavenly Father**. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*