

ECCLESIASTES 10: 1 Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to produce an evil odour; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour.

Observations on wisdom and folly, Ecc 10:1-3. Concerning right conduct towards rulers, Ecc 10:4. Merit depressed, and worthlessness exalted, Ecc 10:5-7. Of him who digs a pit and removes a landmark, Ecc 10:8, Ecc 10:9. The use of wisdom and experience, Ecc 10:10. Of the babbler and the fool, Ecc 10:11-15. The infant king, Ecc 10:16. The well-regulated court, Ecc 10:17. Of slothfulness, Ecc 10:18. Of feasting, Ecc 10:19. Speak not evil of the king, Ecc 10:20.

Verse 1

Dead flies - Any putrefaction spoils perfume; and so a foolish act ruins the character of him who has the reputation of being wise and good. Alas! alas! in an unguarded moment how many have tarnished the reputation which they were many years in acquiring! Hence, no man can be said to be safe, till he is taken to the paradise of God.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

Verse 2

A wise man's heart is at his right hand - As the right hand is ordinarily the best exercised, strongest, and most ready, and the left the contrary, they show,

1. The command which the wise man has over his own mind, feelings, passions, etc., and the prudence with which he acts. And,
 2. The want of prudence and management in the fool, who has no restraint on his passions, and no rule or guard upon his tongue. The right hand and the left are used in Scripture to express good and evil. The wise man is always employed in doing good; the fool, in nonsense or evil.
-

ECCLESIASTES 10: 3 Yes also, when the fool walks by the way, his understanding fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

Verse 3

When - a fool walketh by the way - In every act of life, and in every company he frequents, the irreligious man shows what he is. Vanity, nonsense, and wickedness are his themes: so that in effect he saith to every one that he is a fool.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 4 If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, don't leave your place; for gentleness lays great offences to rest.

Verse 4

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee - If the king get incensed against thee.

Leave not thy place - Humble thyself before him, that is thy place and duty; for yielding to him, and not standing stoutly in thy defense, pacifieth great offenses: and then, when his anger is appeased, he will hear any thing in thy justification, if thou have any thing to offer. This is good advice to a child in reference to his parents, and to an inferior of any kind in reference to his superiors.

Several of the fathers understood this differently, It the spirit of the ruler - the influence of Satan - hath risen up against and prevailed over thee, to bring thee into some sin; leave not thy place - do not despair of God's mercy; humble thyself before him, and seek pardon through the Son of his love, and this will be מרפא marpe, a remedy or cure even for חטאים גדולים chataim gedolim, great errors or sins. All this is true in itself, whether found in this text or not.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, the sort of error which proceeds from the ruler.

Verse 5

An error which proceedeth from the ruler - What this error in the ruler is, the two following verses point out: it is simply this - an injudicious distribution of offices, and raising people to places of trust and confidence, who are destitute of merit, are neither of name nor family to excite public confidence, and are without property; so that they have no stake in the country, and their only solicitude must naturally be to enrich themselves, and provide for their poor relatives. This is frequent in the governments of the world; and favouritism has often brought prosperous nations to the brink of ruin. Folly was set in dignity; the man of property, sense, and name, in a low place. Servants - menial men, rode upon horses - carried every thing with a high and proud hand; and princes, - the nobles of the people, were obliged to walk by their sides, and often from the state of things to become in effect their servants. This was often the case in this country, during the reign of Thomas a Becket, and Cardinal Woolsey. These insolent men lorded it over the whole nation; and the people and their gentry were raised or depressed according as their pride and caprice willed. And, through this kind of errors, not only a few sovereigns have had most uncomfortable and troublesome reigns, but some have even lost their lives.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 7 I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking like servants on the earth.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 8 He who digs a pit may fall into it; and whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

Verse 8

Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him - While spoiling his neighbor's property, he himself may come to greater mischief: while pulling out the sticks, he may be bit by a serpent, who

has his nest there. Some have supposed that שׁנַּח nachash here means a thorn; perhaps from the similarity of its prick to the serpent's sting. He who forces his way through a hedge will be pricked by the thorns.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 9 Whoever carves out stones may be injured by them. Whoever splits wood may be endangered thereby.

Verse 9

Whoso removeth stones - This verse teaches care and caution. Whoever pulls down an old building is likely to be hurt by the stones; and in cleaving wood many accidents occur for want of sufficient caution.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 10 If the axe is blunt, and one doesn't sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but skill brings success.

Verse 10

If the iron be blunt - If the axe have lost its edge, and the owner do not sharpen it, he must apply the more strength to make it cut: but the wisdom that is profitable to direct will teach him, that he should whet his axe, and spare his strength. Thus, without wisdom and understanding we cannot go profitably through the meanest concerns in life.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 11 If the snake bites before it is charmed, then is there no profit for the charmer's tongue.

Verse 11

The serpent will bite without enchantment - בְּלֹא לַחֵשׁ belo lachash, without hissing. As a snake may bite before it hiss, so also will the babbler, talkative person, or calumniator. Without directly speaking evil, he insinuates, by innuendoes, things injurious to the reputation of his neighbor. Gif the eddir bite in silence, noyhing lasse than he hath that privily backbiteth - Old MS. Bible. "A babbler of his tongue is no better than a serpent that styngeth without hyssynge." - Coverdale. The moral of this saying is simply this: A calumniator is as dangerous as a poisonous serpent; and from the envenomed tongue of slander and detraction no man is safe. The comparing the serpent, שׁנַּח nachash, to a babbler, has something singular in it. I have already supposed that the creature mentioned, Gen 3:1, was of the genus simia. This has been ridiculed, but not disproved.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but a fool is swallowed by his own lips.

Verse 12

The words of a wise man's mouth - Every thing that proceeds from him is decent and orderly, creditable to himself, and acceptable to those who hear him. But the lips of the fool, which speak every thing at random, and have no understanding to guide them, are not only not pleasant to others, but often destructive to himself.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 14 A fool also multiplies words.

Man doesn't know what will be; and that which will be after him, who can tell him?

Verse 14

A man cannot tell what shall be - A foolish babbling man will talk on every subject, though he can say as little on the past, as he can on the future.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 15 The labour of fools wearies every one of them; for he doesn't know how to go to the city.

Verse 15

He knoweth not how to go to the city - I suppose this to be a proverb: "He knows nothing; he does not know his way to the next village." He may labor; but for want of judgment he wearies himself to no purpose.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 16 Woe to you, land, when your king is a child, and your princes eat in the morning!

Verse 16

Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child - Minorities are, in general, very prejudicial to a state. Regents either disagree, and foment civil wars; or oppress the people. Various discordant interests are raised up in a state during a minority; and the young king, having been under the tutelage of interested men, acts partially and injuriously to the interests of the people when he comes to the throne; and this produces popular discontent, and a troubled reign.

Thy princes eat in the morning! - They do nothing in order; turn night into day, and day into night; sleep when they should wake, and wake when they should sleep; attending more to chamberings and banquetings, than to the concerns of the state.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 17 Happy are you, land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Verse 17

When thy king is the son of nobles - uiof eleuyerwn, the son of freemen; persons well acquainted with the principles of civil liberty, and who rule according to them - Septuagint. Such a one as comes to the throne in a legitimate way, from an ancient regal family, whose right to the throne is incontestable. It requires such a long time to establish a regal right, that the state is in continual danger from pretenders and usurpers, where the king is not the son of nobles.

And thy princes eat in due season - All persons in places of trust for the public weal, from the king to the lowest public functionary, should know, that the public are exceedingly scandalized at repeated accounts of entertainments, where irregularity prevails, much money is expended, and no good done. These things are drawn into precedent, and quoted to countenance debauch in the inferior classes. The natural division of the day for necessary repasts is, Breakfast, eight, or half after; Dinner, one, or half after; Supper, eight, or half after. And these, or even earlier hours were formerly observed in these countries. Then we had scarcely any such thing as gout, and no nervous disorders.

In ancient nations the custom was to eat but once, and then about mid-day.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 18 By slothfulness the roof sinks in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaks.

Verse 18

By much slothfulness - This is remarkably the case in some countries. Houses are not repaired till they almost fall about the ears of the inhabitants. We have an adage that applies to all such cases: "A stitch in time saves nine."

ECCLESIASTES 10: 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes the life glad; and money is the answer for all things.

Verse 19

A feast is made for laughter - The object of it is to produce merriment, to banish care and concern of every kind. But who are they who make and frequent such places? Epicures and drunkards generally; such as those of whom Horace speaks:

Nos numerus sumus, et fruges consumere nati.

Epist. lib. i., ep. 2, ver. 27. "Those whose names stand as indications of men, the useless many; and who appear to be born only to consume the produce of the soil."

But money answereth all - This saying has prevailed everywhere.

Scilicet uxorem cum dote, fidemque, et amicos,

Et genus, et formam Regina Pecunia donat;

Ac bene nummatum decorat Suadela, Venusque.

Hor. Ep. lib. i., ep. 6, ver. 36. "For gold, the sovereign Queen of all below,

Friends, honor, birth, and beauty, can bestow.

The goddess of persuasion forms her train;

And Venus decks the well-bemomied swain."

Francis.

ECCLESIASTES 10: 20 Don't curse the king, no, not in your thoughts; and don't curse the rich in your bedroom: for a bird of the sky may carry your voice, and that which has wings may tell the matter.

Verse 20

Curse not the king - Do not permit thyself even to think evil of the king; lest thy tongue at some time give vent to thy thoughts, and so thou be chargeable with treason.

For a bird of the air shall carry the voice - Does he refer here to such fowls as the carrier pigeon, which were often used to carry letters under their wings to a great distance, and bring back answers? The Targum turns it curiously: "Do not speak evil of the king in thy conscience, nor in the secret of thy heart, nor in the most hidden place in thy house, curse not a wise man; for Razel calls daily from heaven upon Mount Horeb, and his voice goes through the whole world; and Elijah, the great priest, goes, flying through the air like a winged eagle, and publishes the words which are spoken in secret by all the inhabitants of the earth."

Civil government is so peculiarly of God, that he will have it supported for the benefit of mankind; and those who attempt to disturb it are generally marked by his strong disapprobation. And though there have been multitudes of treasons hatched in the deepest secrecy; yet, through the providence of God, they have been discovered in the most singular manner. This shows God's care for government.