

## Fact Sheet for “Growing Wise” Ecclesiastes 9:11-10:3

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Proverbs is largely a book of wise sayings, while Ecclesiastes is largely a book about wisdom itself. We have a tendency in our culture to think of wisdom differently than does God. The portion of Ecclesiastes we will consider today will put the lie to several of the ways our culture thinks of wisdom.

These verses do not have a clearly evident outline. This can be seen by the many ways commentaries and study bibles have dealt with them. However, they do have a great deal to say about wisdom and folly.

Let's now consider some of our culture's view of wisdom and folly in the light of God's view.

### Will wisdom lead to success?

It's easy to let yourself think along the following lines... “The wise will know what you have to do to accumulate wealth. “The wise will know how to campaign to get elected.” “The wise will know how to become famous in the music industry.” “The wise will know how to win the battle.”

There is a measure of truth in these, but there are also questions. What about ethics? What about honesty? What about morality? What about relationships? If you don't succeed does that mean you are foolish? Listen to Solomon on wisdom...

**ESV 11 ¶ Again I saw that under the sun (1) the race is not to the swift, nor (2) the battle to the strong, nor (3) bread to the wise, nor (4) riches to the intelligent, nor (5) favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.**

“Chance” is a word we don't like to see in the Bible because it hints that God is, at least in part, out of control. And every major translation uses that word here. Solomon has used that Hebrew word for chance elsewhere (1 Kings 5:4). Solomon is viewing chance/misfortune from a human perspective in Ecclesiastes. With God nothing is out of His control. The outcome of our lives ultimately depends on God's choice for us, not on ourselves.

Now wisdom does give advantage (Ecclesiastes 10:10). However, our lives are always subject to God's will. And it is a will that we don't know. We should always thank God and give Him the glory for any measure of success we might have.

**12 For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.**

“Time” = can refer to the day of his death, but it can also refer to the misfortunes of life because this is the same word used in the previous verse.

*A Better view of wisdom is that wisdom gives advantage, but it is the blessing of God that results in success.*

### Does wealth indicate wisdom?

We as people have a tendency to connect the two, but again consider Solomon's words.

**13 ¶ I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.**

Those in the city listened to the wisdom of this poor man and delivered the city from an attack by a strong king. What does it mean that his wisdom was despised? And they obviously listened to his words. What does it mean that his words were not heard? This verse means that he remained poor and unrewarded. And it was likely that his fellow citizens would not ask his advice in the future. If this man were wealthy he would have been viewed differently. But it was the poor man who had the needed wisdom and not his fellow citizens.

*A better view of wisdom is that it is not indicated simply by having having wealth.*

## Will the loudest voice be the wisest?

**<sup>17</sup> ¶ The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.**

I like the opening words of the book of Proverbs (1:1-6). I like having the time to carefully think through what someone says. I dislike being pushed to make a decision before I have any time whatsoever to think it through. This is consistent with, “the words of the wise heard in quiet.”

Think about how our political parties choose a nominee. For the Republicans who has the loudest voice? Who seems to be the wisest? They are possibly not the same person.

And there is a secondary indictment in this verse... “the shouting of a ruler among fools.” Do you respond to thoughtful wisdom or the presentation? (Example: There are many loud voices in theology, with many followers, that are just dead wrong.)

*A better view of wisdom is that it can be thoughtful and quiet.*

## Is Wisdom Bullet Proof?

**<sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.**

The answer to my question is “No!” Think about any group of people who have acted with wisdom, and then it is reported that one of their number has acted foolishly. What happens to the reputation of the whole group?

**10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.**

This was certainly true of Solomon. It can be true of us too. When we really take a look at it we all are in constant danger of letting the foolishness we have in one area discredit the wisdom we have in another. All of us are a mix of wisdom and foolishness.

Here is a problem I have seen (and I am talking to myself as well). I have seen those who have exercised a measure of wisdom in one area of life, but have not exercised Godly behavior in another area of life. This may call for confession and repentance on our part. *It may call for repeated confession and repentance on our part.* And this will certainly mean change on our part. We need to be constantly seeking to grow and mature, no matter what our physical age is. One of the things I say is “Adults are just grown up kids.”

One of the best things I can hope for is to finish well (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

The next two verses I have included for fun.

**<sup>2</sup> A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.**

**<sup>3</sup> Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.**

What should you take away from these verses today?

1. God's view of wisdom is often different than the world's view of wisdom.
2. Wisdom does give an advantage in life.
3. We should constantly seek God's wisdom for every area of our lives.
4. God is in control of the details.