

FACT QUESTIONS 9:13-18

483. How can one fortify himself against snares and calamities?
484. Why is the wisdom of verse thirteen different from redemptive wisdom?
485. Give the best interpretation of the parable. Explain your answer.
486. Why is it not important that an actual event be identified in the siege of the small city? (Cf. verse 14)
487. The "siegeworks" are symbolic of what threat to the church today?
488. Make a list of the things wisdom had to oppose. (Cf. verses 15-16)
489. What became of the little man who saved the city?
490. Explain the statement: "Wisdom is better than strength."
491. In what way does Herod illustrate "a ruler among fools"?
492. What does "much good" refer to in verse eighteen?
493. List the possible analogies the parable could have in the church age.

D. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THOSE WHO LACK WISDOM

10:1-11

1. The foolish worker is in trouble. 10:1-4

TEXT 10:1-4

- 1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.
- 2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.
- 3 Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.
- 4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

373. What lesson in 9:18 is illustrated again in 10:1?
 374. Where does a foolish man's heart lead him?
 375. What is meant by "toward the left" (verse two)?
 376. A fool demonstrates to all that he is a fool because he is lacking in what?
 377. A wise man should maintain his composure although the ruler does what?

PARAPHRASE 10:1-4

A large amount of perfumer's oil is ruined by a few dead flies. They send forth a vile odor, putrify and negate the value of the oil. So even a little foolishness may outweigh wisdom and honor. A wise man's mind will lead him to the right while a fool's mind will lead him to the left—as one thinks so he will act. Even the walk of a foolish man manifests his foolishness. His heart and understanding fail him and he demonstrates to all who look upon him that he is a fool. Suppose the ruler himself loses control of his temper, acts the part of a fool, and turns against you, do not flee from your position (the right side)—stand firm. Many great offenses have been diverted through patient resistance and a gentle spirit.

COMMENT 10:1-4

The unfortunate division of the chapter at this point suggests that the author is turning to a new subject. However, the following eleven verses are a series of sayings and illustrations which further demonstrate the principles set forth in the close of chapter nine.

v. 1 "Dead flies" are literally "flies of death." The statement at the close of the preceding chapter, "one sinner destroys much good," is metaphorically illustrated by the flies which

fall into the perfumer's oil. It is close to the statement of Paul that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (I Corinthians 5:6). A precious, expensive jar of mixed perfume can be ruined by the foreign influence of dead flies. So the most noble monarch or righteous person could be destroyed by one sinful act. The concept of "flies of death" is purposely intended to be much stronger than the fact that a fly falls into the oil. The flies are poisonous, destructive creatures which can potentially corrupt and destroy. One who is great in "wisdom" and "honor" may fall prey to evil and thus meet with destruction.

Even in life, how often does the one secret, unconfessed sin poison the mind until it renders the whole of man useless? Surely, "a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor."

The costly perfume is putrified and made to "stink." Thus the value of the perfume as well as its practical use is nullified. The lesson of the "flies of death" serve to remind one that there is no such thing as insignificant sins.

v. 2 The association of good with the right hand and evil with the left hand is nothing new. Pagans have long believed that the right is synonymous with *good luck*, while the left is identified with *bad luck*. Although the Christian disdains attributing the events of life to luck, he recognizes that a distinction is made in the Bible concerning right and wrong in association with the right and left hands. (Cf. Matthew 25:31-33, 41; Luke 1:11; Acts 7:56)

It is commonly said today that "his heart is in the right place." By this one means that his heart directs him toward the right. For years many considered left-handed persons sinister, shifty and generally distrustful. This was true because the majority of people were right-handed. Thus the association of foolishness with the left, and wisdom with the right, was a natural distribution. The right hand has always been a place of honor while the left is one of less importance. It is this and nothing more that should be made from the comparison.

“Heart” is equal to the judgment of the mind as used in verse three and also in Proverbs 2:2; 14:33 and 15:28.

v. 3 Verses two and three should be considered together. The grammatical construction of the sentences is such that it is more the idea of following a direction of duty of obligation than placing the emphasis upon the hands. The fool of this verse shows no sense of direction. It is said of him that even when he walks along the road, “he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.” “Along the road” suggests that in his simplist acts he gives evidence of being a fool. If the mind is filled with folly, it isn’t long until such evil finds expression. If he had learned wisdom at home (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) he undoubtedly would have manifested it in the way.

v. 4 The figure of a “ruler” rising against the wise is revived. When this happens, one should not move from his place or “position,” for truth does not change. (Cf. COMMENT 8:3) If one moves from his position of wisdom, his only alternative is to follow the behavior of the fool. Thus, the verse admonishes one to remain consistent in following the greatest of all qualities—wisdom! Such “composure” practiced by the wise will “smother in the birth” great offenses. Study Proverbs 10:12; 15:1; 25:15; James 5:6-10. Examples from Old Testament history are found in Jacob overcoming Esau (Genesis 32-33) and David who triumphed over Saul (I Samuel 26).

FACT QUESTIONS 10:1-4

494. The first eleven verses of chapter ten illustrate what principle?
495. Explain the lesson taught by the “flies of death.”
496. Explain why people have ascribed evil to the left hand and good to the right hand.
497. What is implied by “along the road”?
498. What single alternative does one face when he chooses to forsake his wise position?
499. What happens when power is intrusted to unwise men?

(Cf. verse five)

500. State the truth amplified by verses six and seven.

2. Foolishness leads to humiliation. 10:5-7

TEXT 10:5-7

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler—

6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.

7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

378. What is the reason given why “folly is set in many exalted places”?

379. Where did the “error” originate?

380. Identify the two illustrations of folly.

PARAPHRASE 10:5-7

When the ruler in the land makes a grave mistake, it results in evil doing under the sun. Folly itself is exalted in seats of dignity while the rich men sit in humble seats. Also, as a result of the error I have seen slaves riding on horses, and princes walking on the ground as if they were the slaves.

COMMENT 10:5-7

v. 5 The reader is now given a concrete example of the foolishness of the ruler. When power or authority falls into the

hands of unwise men, errors are committed and injustice reigns. In verse four the ruler is a man whose spirit or temper is raised against his subjects. Jerome has erroneously suggested that the Ruler is God. He did not hold that God is capable of error or sin, but that men *think* his judgments at times are unequal. The context, however, rules out this possibility. Those who argue that God is meant as the Ruler base their reasoning, partly at least, on the fact that the term for ruler in verse four is *moshel* but in this verse it is *shallet*. However, one literary technique of Solomon in Ecclesiastes is the interaction of synonyms: e.g., the use of *adam lo* (man) (Cf. 7:20; 9:14), and *ish lo* (man) (Cf. 6:2; 7:5; 9:15). Delitzsch says that the author wished simply to avoid repetition.

vs. 6-7 Words which capture the sense of both verses are found in Proverbs 19:10: "Luxury is not fitting for a fool; much less for a slave to rule over princes." Verses six and seven are intended as an amplification of the truth stated in verse five.

It has been suggested that "folly" is to be understood as an abstract term for the more concrete "fools." Thus the *fools* are in juxtaposition to the *rich*. The social order is out of joint. The incongruity is a result of an incompetent ruler (verses 4-5). It is not that the Preacher's own standard is violated or that His criticism betrays his prejudice. It is undoubtedly a violation of general principle. Folly should not be exalted, and the rich, most likely representing the godly of Israel (Cf. Deuteronomy 15:4) should not be humiliated. In addition, slaves should not rule over princes. The lesson before the reader teaches that when men fail to follow the direction of wisdom, folly reigns and injustice permeates the entire society.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:5-7

501. What two things happen when authority falls into the hands of unwise men?
502. Explain why "ruler" is not a reference to God.

503. What has happened to the social order? Is this good? Explain.
504. Identify the lesson taught in this section.

3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom. 10:8-11

TEXT 10:8-11

- 8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.
- 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.
- 10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.
- 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

381. The activities described in verse eight and nine are normal. The danger lies in the fact that what quality is missing in the activity?
382. A dull axe is symbolic of one who attempts to work without what?
383. When is it too late for a charmer: What lesson is taught by this illustration?

PARAPHRASE 10:8-11

The one who attempts to dig a pit for others will fall into it himself, and he who breaks down a stone wall will be bitten by a snake. The one who removes stones or hews out new stones will be hurt by them, and he who splits logs or fells trees will

suffer hurt. When one fails to sharpen the cutting edge of the axe, he will have to work doubly hard to accomplish his work. However, if he demonstrates wisdom in his action he will have great success. Why call in a snake charmer and pay him to charm the snake after it has already bitten. What wisdom is there in this?

COMMENT 10:8-11

The following four illustrations demonstrate further the foolishness of working without the aid of wisdom. In the midst of the illustrations the Preacher pauses for a moment to make clear the emphasis he wishes to make: He says, "Wisdom has the advantage of giving success."

v. 8 In a similar passage in Proverbs 26:26-27, the context suggests evil activity. If such is the case in this verse, the digging of a pit would be an effort to try and snare another person or do him harm. In like manner, breaking through a wall would imply that one would be making an effort to steal from his neighbor. In both instances wisdom would be lacking as it directs one in the path of righteousness. Consistent with this interpretation is Psalms 7:15-16; 57:6 and Amos 5:18-20. The principle of retribution, taught clearly in the verse, also fortifies the argument that the activity is of an evil nature. The one who digs a pit will fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. *The Amplified Bible* translates the verse: "He who digs a pit (for others) will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a fence or a stonewall, a serpent will bite him." Although most snakes in Palestine are harmless, there are some which are deadly.

v. 9 This verse does not suggest retribution as did the former verse. Rather, it speaks to the accidents which may result from common everyday work when wisdom is not employed. One does not have to work long in a stone quarry or logging camp until the potential dangers are evident. To quarry stones and split logs suggests building something new. Wisdom is an

essential element in such an enterprise.

v. 10 The "axe" may be symbolic of all implements used by men in the activities of their work. When wisdom is not employed the maximum benefit of all implements is lessened. One must exert much more energy when the edge of the ax has not been properly honed. The latter part of the verse may be translated, "Wisdom is profitable to *direct*." Perhaps more time would be consumed in planning the work and sharpening the tools, but such purposeful *direction* pays dividends in both the energy exerted and the amount of work accomplished. Once again the value of wisdom is demonstrated.

v. 11 This final illustration demonstrates the foolishness of neglecting opportunities. In this instance wisdom would have directed the one responsible for charming the snake to employ a charmer (one who tames or controls the snake) before he had displayed the snake. Eastern cultures have practiced snake charming for centuries. References to the practice are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. (Cf. Exodus 7:11; Psalms 58:5-6; Jeremiah 8:17) If one has the secret to charm the snake, but does not use it and is bitten by it, what benefit does he gain from such wisdom? To be bitten by a poisonous viper which spreads its destructive venom throughout the body, is likened unto a slanderer who by his words destroys the character of another. Note *the Amplified Bible* where the verse is rendered: "If the serpent bites before it is charmed, then it is no use to call a charmer, (and the slanderer is no better than the uncharmed snake)." Wisdom teaches that both the serpent and the slanderer be controlled before they have an opportunity to destroy. A similar analogy is made by Jesus in Matthew 23:33. It is one thing to possess wisdom, it is something else to use it to advantage.

FACT QUESTIONS 10:8-11

505. What emphasis do the four closing illustrations have in common?

506. The fact that one will be bitten by a serpent or fall into a pit suggests the activity described in verse eight is good or evil? Explain.
507. Why do the accidents recorded in verse nine happen?
508. If the axe represents all implements, what lesson is taught by the fact that it is not properly sharpened?
509. If one were wise, he would have done what with the serpent?

E. THOSE WHO WORK CONTRARY TO WISDOM
ARE REPREHENSIBLE. 10:12-20

1. Talkers and workers 10:12-15

TEXT 10:12-15

- 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;
- 13 the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness.
- 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?
- 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to the city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 10:12-15

384. How dangerous are the lips of a fool?
385. The fool's words start out as folly and end up as what?
386. What effect does this have on the fool?
387. What effect does a fool's work have on his direction?

PARAPHRASE 10:12-15

The words of a wise man bring him honor and respect while a fool is actually consumed by his own words. The fool begins