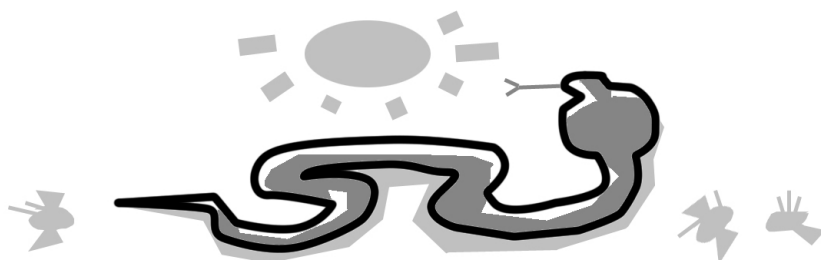


Dead Flies and Snake Tamers (Tricksters): More Life on Earth



SABBATH—MARCH 10

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ecclesiastes 10.

MEMORY VERSE: “Dead flies give perfume a bad smell. And a little foolishness can make a lot of wisdom useless” (Ecclesiastes 10:1, NIV).

WE HAVE STUDIED MANY THINGS IN ECCLESIASTES. So it should be clear that it is difficult to find a unified flow of thought. That does not mean there are no unified thoughts. It is just not easy to find the flow of those thoughts. But, important ideas and thoughts are in Ecclesiastes. And they are worth our study.

This week's lesson also could have been called “Thoughts, Words, Actions,” because it deals with all three. With his powerful poetic style, Solomon gives us more to think about. We have to work our way through the thoughts in Ecclesiastes 10. When we do, we can see that there is a lot here to think about. There is a lot of useful wisdom that we would be wise to listen to.

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SUNDAY—MARCH 11

DEAD FLIES (Ecclesiastes 9:18; Ecclesiastes 10:1)

We really need to read Ecclesiastes 10:1 with Ecclesiastes 9:18. Ecclesiastes 9:18 is not saying exactly the same thing. But it helps to make clearer the principle¹ found in Ecclesiastes 10:1. It shows that no matter how much good a person does, a stupid mistake can spoil it all.

Last week, we talked a little about how in this life we have to make choices that will decide our eternal² future. But many times our choices also make things happen in the present. How often someone can make a choice that brings sudden and painful results. What makes this even sadder is that often those who make the wrong choices are “good” people, who slip and fall as we all do. In one way, the more honorable and noble the person is, the more responsibility that person has to weigh his or her decisions carefully.

Below are a few Bible examples of good people making bad choices. What caused these people to fall? What were the results of their foolishness?

Genesis 3:6 _____

¹principle—a basic rule of life.

²eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

Exodus 32:1-4 _____

2 Samuel 11:1-4 _____



The Israelites made a bad choice.

A man or woman works many years for God only to make a mistake in a weak moment. Then suddenly their work is ruined or damaged. Whether right or not, this is a real warning to all of us to walk carefully. In all the Bible stories listed above, God clearly forgave these people. Then how much more we should forgive those who have broken a holy trust. But forgiveness does not mean there is no damage. How easily a few dead flies can stink up a whole jar of perfume!

Whoever you are and whatever position you have in the church,

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think about the negative results that could happen if you were to break a trust. Watch and pray before you act!

MONDAY—MARCH 12

THE FOOL'S HEART (Ecclesiastes 10:2)

Ecclesiastes 10:2 is poetic language picturing the difference between the heart (mind) of a wise person and the heart of a foolish person. The symbolism of the left hand and the right hand is found in different places in the Bible. The right hand is thought of as the side of honor, power, and favor. Jesus talks about sitting “on the right hand of power” when He returns (Matthew 25:31-34; Matthew 26:64; Acts 7:55). But the left side is considered the side of evil. The Latin word for left hand is *sinistra*. *Sinistra* is where the English word *sinister* (bad, evil) comes from. Even today in some countries, children who write with their left hand are made to use their right hand instead.

Keeping these points in mind, what is Solomon saying in Ecclesiastes 10:2?

The heart was thought of as the center of all thoughts, emotions, and plans (Genesis 6:5; Exodus 25:2; 1 Samuel 16:7). For this reason, Solomon's point is simply that the wise person guards the thoughts, feelings, and reasons. But the foolish person does not. Eccle-

siastes 10:2 shows how important it is for us to control what goes on inside us. This is because what is inside sooner or later becomes clear on the outside.

What does Ecclesiastes 10:3 teach us about having control of our thoughts?

Ecclesiastes 10:3 fits perfectly with Ecclesiastes 10:2. The fool's “wisdom,” which is on his left side, slowly shows that he is a fool. Sooner or later the evil side of your heart will become clear to others because you will, sooner or later, follow the influences of your heart. So it is very important to get control of our hearts! If we have our heart under control, the rest of our body will follow.

Suppose you are struggling with wrong thoughts. What does Deuteronomy 30:6 say? How does Philippians 4:6-8 offer us useful advice on how to have the promise in Deuteronomy 30:6 fulfilled?



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TUESDAY—MARCH 13

MORE EVIL (Ecclesiastes 10:4-7)

Ecclesiastes 10:4-7 presents some difficulty. It seems to be talking about the question mentioned earlier in Ecclesiastes about injustice.

What is some of the injustice Solomon talks about in Ecclesiastes 10:4-7? What are some other examples of injustice you can think of?

“In Solomon’s time, rich or important people rode upon horses or mules (2 Samuel 18:9; 1 Kings 1:38; 2 Chronicles 25:28; Esther 6:8; Jeremiah 17:25). People of lower classes used asses (donkeys) to ride on. In early Israelite history, even kings and princes rode on asses or mules (Judges 5:10; Judges 10:4; compare 1 Kings 1:33).”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1098.

Most of us might not have a problem with a few rich people sitting in “a low place.” But the point is, things are not always as we expect. Foolishness wins a place of high honor, and wealth gets a low spot. Or faithful people suffer, evil is successful, and so on. Maybe this theme is repeated in Ecclesiastes because the problem is the same everywhere throughout all time. We cannot let these things work

against our faith in God. It is all part of what it means to live in a sinful world.

What should we do to make sure there are fewer injustices? Is it enough to say, “Well, that is what it means to live in a fallen world”? In what ways would our work for justice be different from the world’s? Isaiah 58:6, 7; Matthew 26:52; John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Revelation 13:10.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 14

THE SNAKE CHARMER (Ecclesiastes 10:8-11)

Ecclesiastes 10:8-11 is a series of short proverbs (wise sayings) about different parts of life. What principles³ can you find in them?

Ecclesiastes 10:8-11 are difficult verses. Many people see different things in them. *The SDA Bible Commentary* points out some of them.

Ecclesiastes 10:8 seems to be talking about what happens when we seek revenge⁴ or when we plan evil against someone. The hole that we dug for someone else, we end up falling into (Psalm 7:15; Psalm 57:6; Proverbs 26:27; Esther 9:23, 25). The same idea is found in the part about the “hedge” (wall). When you tear down someone else’s wall, a snake that lives in the wall can bite you.

³principles—basic rules of life.

⁴revenge—doing or saying something bad to someone who has hurt you.

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Seeking revenge is the same as falling into a hole we are hoping someone else will fall into (Ecclesiastes 10:8).

The exact meaning of Ecclesiastes 10:9 is debated. But Solomon simply could be saying that even when you do good things, bad results could come from them. This could fit in with his negative thinking.

Ecclesiastes 10:10 is clear. If you are using a dull knife, your work will be much harder. How much more profitable to sharpen the knife before you use it. In the same way, wisdom, (thoughtful preparation before you undertake anything) would be to your advantage. “The Christian should try to make use of the finest spiritual tools for the work of character building. Hard work alone is not enough. There must be both knowledge and hard work (Romans 10:2).”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1098.

Ecclesiastes 10:11 says that if the

⁵babblers—someone who just talks nonsense.

⁶contrast—show how things are different.

snake bites the man who tries to charm (trick) it before the snake is charmed, there is no sense in trying to charm it. The last part of verse 11 probably explains the meaning best. It is about the uselessness of a babbler.⁵ Charming a snake after it bites you, such as a viper (poisonous snake), is as meaningless and useless as someone who babbles (talks nonsense).

Which of these points speaks the clearest to you? What lessons can you learn from them that you could use? Are you looking for revenge? Do you babble too much? How much time do you spend preparing yourself spiritually for whatever trouble the day might bring?

THURSDAY—MARCH 15

THE FOOL'S LIPS (Ecclesiastes 10:10-20)

Ecclesiastes 10:10-20 touches on many different themes. Today, we will focus on Ecclesiastes 10:12-14, 20. These verses teach us how to speak wisely. How careful we must be with what we say!

Contrast⁶ the lips of the wise and a fool. Ecclesiastes 10:12. Also read Psalm 45:2; Proverbs 22:11; Luke 4:22.

The word translated “gracious” in the first part of verse 12 is the same

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word for “grace” (“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” [Genesis 6:8]). *Grace* means undeserved pardon. It means that we do not get the punishment we deserve. That is the important part of salvation: We are not getting the punishment we deserve. Jesus took that punishment upon Himself instead. But the words of the fool cause him to be swallowed (KJV). *Being swallowed* means being punished (Exodus 15:12; Numbers 16:32; Jeremiah 51:34; Lamentations 2:5).

How does Ecclesiastes 10:13 make clearer what verse 12 said?

How often we say that someone is “all talk and no action.” But, many times talk leads to action, because talk reflects what is in the heart. It would be bad enough if the fool did nothing but talk. Sadly, that is not always true. No wonder the Bible warns us in many places to watch our words.

What wisdom is in Ecclesiastes 10:20?

Wise people will choose their words carefully. But a fool will speak words that will bring unnecessary pain and sorrow to others.

Think about a time when your unnecessary words caused you trouble. What lessons did you learn? What advice could you give

to someone who has not yet learned to control their words?

FRIDAY—MARCH 16

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 323; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 337; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 302.

“It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened when we speak them. While words show thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would speak more of our faith and rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have, we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue and human mind can equal the blessing that comes from appreciating God's goodness and love. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring (fountain) that never fails because it is fed by the streams that flow from God's throne.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

“The words we speak today will go on and on until time shall be no more. The actions done today are being recorded in the books of heaven. They are the same pictures that are copied by the artist onto the polished plate. Our words will decide our future for eternal⁷ happiness or eternal loss and painful regrets.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 429, 430.

⁷eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Discuss as a class the power of words. Talk about whatever useful things we can do to help each other understand how important it is to carefully guard our words. List principles that could guide us in how we use our words.

❷ Because our thoughts are so important, what can you do as a class to help the young people in your church make the right choices about

the things they read or watch? Why is it so important that we be careful about what we put into our minds?

❸ As a class, talk about the question of anyone who has broken a holy trust. How have we as a church dealt with such people? What principles should guide us in these cases? How do we show mercy⁸ and grace toward those who fall? At the same time, how can we protect people who have broken the trust put in them?

⁸mercy—kindness we do not deserve.