

# Ecclesiastes 9 Commentary

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THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES					
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Subject	Sermons		Summary		
Fickleness of Life Versus Fear of the Lord					
Place: "Under the Sun"					
Decades of Searching (in the days of King Solomon) circa 936BC					
King Solomon Author					

Ecclesiastes 9:1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:1 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:1 So I reflected on all this, attempting to clear it all up. I concluded that the righteous and the wise, as well as their works, are in the hand of God; whether a person will be loved or hated— no one knows what lies ahead.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:1 τι σ ν π ν το το δωκα ες καρδ αν μου κα καρδ α μου σ ν π ν εδεν το το ς ο δ και οι κα ο σοφο κα ργασ αι α τ ν ν χειρ το θεο κα γε γ πην κα γε μ σος ο κ σ τιν ε δ ς νθρωπος τ π ντα πρ προσ που α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:1 I saw that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: yea, there is no man that knows either love or hatred, though all are before their face.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:1 Indeed, I took all this to heart and explained it all: the righteous, the wise, and their works are in God's hands. People don't know whether to expect love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:1 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:1 This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God's hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:1 But all this I have laid unto my heart, so as to clear up the whole of this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God, neither love nor hatred doth man know, the whole is before them.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:1 Yes, I have applied myself to all this and experienced all this to be so: that is to say, that the upright and the wise, with their activities, are in the hands of God. We do not understand either love or hate, where we are concerned, both of them are

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:1 All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:1 All this I have kept in mind and recognized: the just, the wise, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Love from hatred man cannot tell; both appear equally vain,

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:1 Now, I have carefully thought about all this, and I explain it in this way: Righteous people and wise people, along with their accomplishments, are in God's hands. No one knows whether there will be love or hatred.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:1 All this I took to heart, and my heart saw it all: that the upright and the wise and their works are in the hand of God; and men may not be certain if it will be love or hate; all is to no purpose before them.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:1 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate man does not know. Everything before them is vanity,

- considered in my heart: Heb. gave, or set to my heart, Ec 1:17 7:25 8:16 12:9,10
- that the: Ec 8:14 De 33:3 1Sa 2:9 2Sa 15:25,26 Job 5:8 Ps 10:14 31:5 Ps 37:5,6 Pr 16:3 Isa 26:12 49:1-4 Jer 1:18,19 Joh 10:27-30 1Co 3:5-15 2Ti 1:12 1Pe 1:5
- no man: Ec 7:15 Ps 73:3,11-13 Mal 3:15-18

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

Psalms 31:15 My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who

persecute me.

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

## IN THE HANDS OF OUR SOVEREIGN CREATOR

This verse begins a new section in Ecclesiastes (chapters 9–11), in which Solomon reflects deeply on: The certainty of death, The unpredictability of life, and The call to enjoy God's gifts while we can.

**Warren Wiersbe** adds "In this chapter, Solomon drew two conclusions: death is unavoidable (Ec 9:1-10) and life is unpredictable (Ec 9:11-18). That being the case, the best thing we can do is trust God, live by faith, and enjoy whatever blessings God gives us." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**William Barrick** calls Ecclesiastes 9 **Imperatives for Living Wisely**. In conclusion, the Preacher determines to fear God, obey God, and enjoy life

(Eccl 9:1–12:14) Whereas Eccl 8 focuses on the work of God as one of its themes, Eccl 9 returns to an emphasis on the human condition. Solomon mentions God only twice in Eccl 9 (Eccl 9:1 and Eccl 9:7). However, those occurrences come "at crucial junctures in his argument." ([Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes](#)) Ec 9:7–9a provide the thematic core of the chapter. In fact, they present the most emphatic of the enjoyment passages in the book.

**For** Ecclesiastes 9:1 builds directly upon the theme of human limitation in Ec 8:16–17. After admitting we can't grasp God's works, Solomon now affirms that God holds our lives—but we still can't predict what will happen to us. **Glenn** feels that "This verse closely relates Ec 9:2-10 to the preceding section, as indicated in the NIV translation "So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands."

**I have taken all this to my heart** - Literally "I gave to my heart" which describes his deep reflection, meditation and contemplation. In other words, Solomon is saying, "I've carefully thought through everything I've just said."

**Donald Glenn** feels the **all this** "is human ignorance of the significance of righteousness and wickedness in God's sovereign disposition of adversity and prosperity (chaps. 7-8). Solomon "concluded" (lit., "my heart saw") from his prior reflections "on all this" that people are not masters of their own fate; people and "what they do" are subject to God's sovereign will (i.e., they "are in God's hands"; cf. Prov. 21:1 for a similar use of this figure). Since one does not know God's providence, neither does he know whether he will experience prosperity or adversity, or whether he will be the object of love or hate (for a similar use of these two nouns; cf. Mal. 1:2-3). (See [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 281](#))

**William Barrick** - The phraseology, "**I have taken . . . to my heart**" (Eccl 9:1), occurs also in Eccl 1:13, 17; 8:9, 16. In fact, Solomon opens his discourse with this kind of statement and then repeats it in the second half of the book. The presence of the phraseology in Eccl 8:16 and Eccl 9:1 furnishes a transition from chapter 8 to chapter 9. Similar phraseology appears in Eccl 7:2 and a negative form of it in Eccl 7:21 ("do not take seriously" literally reads, "do not give your heart to"). The "**heart**" involves his "total consciousness—not solely intellectual reason, but experiential insight that has been gained through the avenues and alleys of emotional, sensual, physical and spiritual experience." ([Fredericks](#)) Thus, Solomon applies more than his brain to his search for an explanation for life's paradoxes. That to which he applies himself in the search consists of "all this," which includes what has already been written as well as that which is yet ahead in the book ([Bartholomew](#))—in other words, the whole gamut of human existence and earthly life.

**And explain** (bur - make clear) **it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God**(see discussion of [Hand of the Lord](#)) - **Righteous men** are those who are morally upright. Wise men are those who know how to live skillfully in the fear of the Lord and the bounds of the Word of God. The phrase **In the hand of God** signifies [divine sovereignty](#), protection, and control. What better hands could a created being be in then in the omnipotent hand of God? Solomon is saying that the destiny of even the righteous and wise is ultimately in God's hands, not their own. This is both comforting and mysterious. And if you wrestle with the attribute of God's sovereignty, this truth ([sovereignty](#)) might "rub you the wrong way!" I find many people bristle when I speak about the [sovereignty](#) of God!

**Michael Eaton** on **their deeds are in the hand of God - in the hand** of is a well-known expression meaning 'at the disposal of' (Gen. 14:20; 16:6, etc.), 'under the supervision of' (Gen. 9:2, etc.), or 'in the care of' (best here; cf. Esth. 2:3, 8; Job 12:10; Ps. 31:5,

etc.).....the point is that the treatment the righteous will receive is unknown; who can tell what the future will bring? Righteousness and wisdom have no built-in guarantees of an easy life. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** emphasizes that "Solomon was not suggesting that we are passive actors in a cosmic drama, following an unchangeable script handed to us by an uncaring director. Throughout this book, Solomon has emphasized our freedom of discernment and decision. But only God knows what the future holds for us and what will happen tomorrow because of the decisions we make today. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*Our lives are marked by many uncertainties,  
but nothing surprises God.*

**Daniel Akin** points out that "Our lives are marked by many uncertainties, but nothing surprises God. This counteracts a recent view of God called "Open Theism," ([What is open theism?](#)) in which God may voluntarily choose not to know what we will do in some situations. Man is clueless, but God is all-knowing. Therefore, the only proper response to God is fear (Ec 12:13) and trust." (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary - Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** notes that "Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible does "explain" (bur) translate the word Solomon uses in verse 1. The word for "explanation" (cheshbon) in Eccl 7:25, 27 comes from a different root word (chashab - to think). The word employed here occurs only one other time (Eccl 3:18, "tested" **ED: CORRECTION - THIS IS NOT "BUR" BUT BARAR - TO PURIFY**). NRSV and ESV offer a better translation for Eccl 9:1 with "examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God." Solomon reminds his readers of the reason for examining life in such detail and with such intensity. Yet, he does not focus his search on man apart from God or an awareness of the presence of God, because he recognizes that God is in control of "the righteous and the wise and their deeds."

*Solomon reveals his conviction that the power of God  
controls the lives of the righteous/wise....  
Human beings do not exercise total control over their circumstances—  
they are not sovereign, God is.*

**William Barrick** on **righteous men, wise men** - Scripture pairs "righteous" and "wise" in only seven texts (Deut 16:19; Prov 9:9; 11:30; 23:24; Eccl 7:16; 9:1; Hos 14:9). Ecclesiastes 7:16–17 contrasts righteous and wise with wicked and foolish. The three texts in Proverbs juxtapose the two characteristics (righteous and wise) in a way that indicates that the righteous are the wise and the wise are the righteous. Such appears to be the understanding in the Law (Dt 16:19) and in the prophets (Hos 14:9). By stating that "**their deeds are in the hand of God**" Solomon reveals his conviction that the power of God controls the lives of the righteous/wise. His father, David, employed a similar phrase when faced with God's inescapable judgment on the nation of Israel: "**Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man**" (2 Sam 24:14+). The first enjoyment passage (Eccl 2:24+) speaks of "**the hand of God**" as the source for man's enjoyment of food, drink, and labor. Human beings do not exercise total control over their circumstances—they are not sovereign, God is. The righteous/wise, as servants (= slaves) of God, must recognize His Lordship and, like David, rest in His mercies even when facing the end of life "under the sun"—death.

**Man does not know** (repeated in Ec 9:12, 10:14, cf Ec 11:2,6) **whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him** - Solomon is saying that even the most faithful person cannot predict whether their future will hold affection or animosity, blessing or adversity. The future of all men under the sun is entirely uncertain. Even the righteous do not get to control or predict the circumstances of the future. Of course, for believers we know that after our time "under the sun," our future is secure in Christ, for in His hands there are pleasures forever (Ps 16:11).

*No one can tell just by God's treatment of particular individuals  
whether they are objects of God's love or hatred (Ec 9:1)*

-- [Walter Kaiser](#)

**David Hubbard** - "Love" and "hatred" describe God's disposition, not human attitudes: we cannot look at what happens to us in the ups and downs of life and tell from them how God feels toward us. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** To what does "**love or hatred**" refer? **Fredericks** takes the view that these two actions relate to mankind's actions, not God's. His primary argument relates to the inclusio formed by the two words in Eccl 9:1 and Eccl 9:6. Eccl 9:6 adds "their zeal," perhaps a reference to jealousy, making the overall reference mankind rather than God. In other words, people have no clue regarding how others might receive them day by day. The wise and righteous encounter love in some situations, but hate in others. They have no prior knowledge of how people will treat them in the future. ([Ecclesiastes](#)) A different understanding of the meaning of "**love or hatred**" arises with the Old Testament's association of God's **love or hate** with acceptance or rejection in Malachi 1:2–3. In the light of such references, Ecclesiastes 9:1 would seem to refer to the unpredictability of God's favor. Such favor might be

restricted to some form of prosperity. (Reichart and A. Cohen, Ecclesiastes) Lack of favor indicates adversity of some sort. Since the deeds of righteous people “**are in the hand of God**,” all His people are subject to Him. (The following commentators opt for the divine view as opposed to the human view: Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 299; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Ecclesiastes: Total Life, Everyman’s Bible Commentary, 94; Philip Ryken, Ecclesiastes, 204; Tremper Longman III, The Book of Ecclesiastes, 227) With God’s control in mind, Solomon speaks of the inability of people to know whether God’s **love or hate** awaits them. ([Bartholomew](#)) After all, divine control dominates the context, making it unlikely that the reference would be to human emotions. (Roland Murphy, Ecclesiastes)

**Anything awaits him** - *the idea throughout the variety of translations is that the events yet to come in a person’s life “under the sun” remain unknown to the individual.*

**Anything awaits him** - [Barrick](#) says “**Anything awaits him**” (literally, “the all before them”) closes this first verse. Variety in the English versions reflects the translators’ uncertainty: “anything awaits him” (NASU, NASB) “Everything that confronts them” (NRSV) “Everything before them is vanity” (RSV—representing an addition to the text) “by anything they see before them” (NKJV); “by all that is before them” (KJV) “all is before them” (NJPS, JPS, ASV) “both are before him” (ESV) “Everything lies ahead of them” (HCSB) “no one knows what lies ahead” (NET—connecting the phrase more closely with what comes before it; cp. NIV). Based upon the preceding statement regarding ignorance about whether one will encounter or receive **love or hatred**, the idea throughout the variety of translations is that the events yet to come in a person’s life “under the sun” remain unknown. Meanwhile, the righteous/wise will rest in the confidence that God controls what happens.

**Philip G Ryken** adds that “As the Preacher struggled with this question—is God for us or against us? (**ED**: SEE MY NOTE AT END OF THIS PARAGRAPH)—he discovered that it was virtually impossible to answer this question simply by looking at people’s circumstances. Many people assume that if there is a God, he will reward his followers with earthly prosperity. If we want to know whether God is for someone or against someone, therefore, all we have to do is count their earthly blessings. This is not how God operates, however. As far as the Preacher could tell, he seems to treat everyone more or less the same, which makes it hard to figure out whether he “loves” us or “hates” us.” (See [Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters](#)) (**ED**: I MUST INTERJECT THAT FROM A NT PERSPECTIVE WHICH SOLOMON DID NOT HAVE, AS A BELIEVER, WE CAN KNOW WITH CERTAINTY THE TRUTH OF Ro 8:31+ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”)

This verse captures two critical themes of Ecclesiastes: The **Sovereignty of God** which teaches that everything is in God’s hands and that the lives, actions, and futures of the righteous are not outside His control. Secondly, it speaks to the **Mystery of Providence** that God is in control, and we cannot predict what life will bring. The righteous might suffer. The wicked might prosper as he has taught in previous passages. The visible outcomes do not always match spiritual realities. This truth echoes the lament of Job and the insight of Psalm 73:1-28.

Your Future  
In the Hands of God!

**“Trusting the God Who Holds Tomorrow”** Solomon speaks for anyone who’s ever thought: “If I live rightly, will life go well for me?” And his answer? Not always. Not predictably. But everything is still in God’s hand. Even when you cannot foresee what’s coming—a trial or a blessing, peace or conflict—you can rest in this: You are in the hand of God. You don’t need to know the future when you know the One who holds it.

**PLAY THE SONG BY THE NEWSBOYS - [IN THE HANDS OF GOD](#)**. Do you believe the great truth that you are in the hands of the God? God sovereignly governs the lives of the righteous and wise. Life’s outcomes are unpredictable—even for godly people. Being in God’s hand is better than understanding what’s coming. Faith does not guarantee ease—but it anchors us in uncertainty. We must live faithfully even when outcomes are unclear. Surrender your future to God’s providence. Trust His hand when you cannot see His plan. Do not judge your spiritual standing by your circumstances. Hardship does not mean abandonment. Encourage others facing uncertainty. Remind them they are in God’s hand. Practice humility in your plans. Say, “If the Lord wills...” (James 4:15). Keep doing good—regardless of what it may bring.

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**Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - MY LIFE IN GOD’S HANDS Ecclesiastes 9:1-3**

“No man knows whether love or hate awaits him,” Solomon declares in a short but telling phrase in verse 1 of this passage. Here is the great mystery of death. Seen from this side of the great divide, no one can say with certainty what happens when we die.

We all wonder about life after death, don’t we? It’s natural to think about it because sooner or later we’re all going to die. I was asked recently to pray for two elderly women in our church, both facing the spectre of death. One is over ninety and needs surgery but probably wouldn’t survive it; the other, age seventy-eight, is fighting pancreatic cancer. Both know Jesus Christ and are not afraid to

die. When the staff and I met to pray, I told them we should ask that the Lord would let them die soon.

Many people would regard such a prayer as incredible. How can you pray that someone would die? You can pray that way only if you know for certain what will happen next, that there is lasting life after this earthly life. Some people try to peer behind the veil of death by reading about "near-death experiences."

A recent article reports that as many as 15 million Americans have had near-death experiences. Close to death, they had the sensation of leaving earth, or at least their body, and had a preview of "life on the other side." Some of them say they saw heaven. Many were changed forever by the things they experienced. They had touched eternity, or so they believed, and life on this earth could never be the same again.

In some ways, you can't blame the people of the world for looking to near-death experiences to answer their questions about life after death. If you don't know Jesus, you'll grasp at any straw. But if you know Him, you don't need to worry about those things. We don't need the word of people who nearly died when we have the word of someone who died on Friday and then came back to life on Sunday morning. He can be trusted when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

What Solomon wrote is true as far as it goes. Everyone dies eventually. The grave is our common destiny. But is that the end? Or is there something more?

A friend told me about the last moments of his wife's life. As he held her in his arms, she took a few short breaths and then was gone. "I held her in my arms until Jesus came and took her in His arms," he said.

One of the verses of an old gospel song called "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart." contains this phrase: "There's a light in the valley of death now for me, since Jesus came into my heart." That light is the light of Jesus who came to be the light of the world. His light will shine a path for His people as they make the journey from earth to heaven.

Lord Jesus, what would we do with You? Where could we go but to the Lord? You alone have the words of eternal life. Thank You for hope that goes beyond the grave. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, how would you spend the next twenty-four hours?
- What destiny awaits you when you die?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 116:15; John 5:28-29; and Zephaniah 2: 8-11.

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**Walter Kaiser on suffering** - If believers are to walk by faith, there will be times when outward appearances and facts will defy explanation for the moment. It is cruel to add to the hurt of oppressed persons by suggesting that they are definitely objects of God's judgment. Such narrow-minded reasoning would suggest that all suffering is the result of personal sin, but that would be un-biblical. Certainly some suffering is

- (1) educational (as Elihu informed Job by divine inspiration in Job 34:32; 35:11; 36:10, 15, 22); some is
- (2) doxological, for the glory of God (as Jesus showed His disciples the proper deduction to be drawn from the man born blind in John 9:1-3); some is
- (3) probationary (as when Habakkuk looked out from his watchtower on a world of tyranny, violence, and sin and found the answer in patient waiting for God's long-suffering retribution to take effect); some is
- (4) revelational (as the prophet Hosea learned the isolation felt by God as a result of Israel's spiritual adultery when he, Hosea, lost his own wife in physical harlotries); and some suffering is
- (5) sacrificial (as the suffering Servant bore great pain because of the sin of others [Isa. 42; 49-50; 53]).

Therefore it is most unfortunate when men hastily make a one-to-one nexus between personal guilt and suffering. (Borrow [Quality Living](#))

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**Jonathan Edwards resolutions** The goals (resolutions) of the great preacher Jonathan Edwards, written before Edwards was 20 years old: 'Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will.'

#1 - Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure... To do whatever I think to be my duty... for the good and advantage of mankind in general.

#4 - Resolved, Never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body less or more, but what tends to the glory of God...'

#5 - Resolved, Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

#6 - Resolved, To live with all my might, while I do live.

#7 - Resolved, Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

#28 - Resolved, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

#43 - Resolved, Never, henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's.

#46 - Resolved, Never to allow the least measure of any fretting or uneasiness at my father or mother.

#70 - Resolved, (That) there be something of benevolence in all I speak. - (Edwards resolved to read these resolutions over once a week!).

**Ecclesiastes 9:2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:2 All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:2 All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:2 Everyone shares the same fate— the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the ceremonially clean and unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. What happens to the good person, also happens to the sinner; what happens to those who make vows, also happens to those who are afraid to make vows.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:2 μαται της ν το ς π σιν συν ντημα ν τ δικα κα τ σεβε τ γαθ κα τ κακ κα τ καθαρ κα τ καθ ρτ κα τ θυσι ζοντι κα τ μ θυσι ζοντι ς γαθ ς ς μαρτ νων ς μν ων καθ ς τ ν ρκον φοβο μενος

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:2 Vanity is in all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the bad; both to the pure, and to the impure; both to him that sacrifices, and to him that sacrifice not: as is the good, so is the sinner: as is the swearer, even so is he that fears an oath.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:2 Everything is the same for everyone: there is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the good and the bad, for the clean and the unclean, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice. As it is for the good, so it is for the sinner; as for the one who takes an oath, so for the one who fears an oath.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:2 It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:2 All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:2 The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don't.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:2 The whole is as to the whole; one event is to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean, and to him who is sacrificing, and to him who is not sacrificing; as



is the good, so is the sinner, he who is swearing as he who is fearing an oath.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:2 futile. And for all of us is reserved a common fate, for the upright and for the wicked, for the good and for the bad; whether we are ritually pure or not, whether we offer sacrifice or not: it is the same for the good and for the sinner, for someone who takes a vow, as for someone who fears to do so.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:2 is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:2 in that there is the same lot for all, for the just and the wicked, for the good and the bad, for the clean and the unclean, for him who offers sacrifice and him who does not. As it is for the good man, so it is for the sinner; as it is for him who swears rashly, so it is for him who fears an oath.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:2 Everything turns out the same way for everyone. All people will share the same destiny, whether they are righteous, wicked, or good, clean or unclean, whether they offer sacrifices or don't offer sacrifices. Good people are treated like sinners. People who take oaths are treated like those who are afraid to take oaths.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:2 Because to all there is one event, to the upright man and to the evil, to the clean and to the unclean, to him who makes an offering and to him who makes no offering; as is the good so is the sinner; he who takes an oath is as he who has fear of it.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:2 since one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good man, so is the sinner; and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.

- **It is the same for all:** Ec 2:14-16 Job 21:7-34 Ps 73:3 Mal 3:15
- as is: Ec 2:26 7:18 8:12-14
- feareth: Ge 24:3,8,9 Jos 2:17-20 1Sa 14:26 Eze 17:18,19 Zec 5:3,4 Mal 3:5,18

#### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."

Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. 20 All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

Hebrews 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Psalm 89:48 What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah.

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

Death is the Great Equalizer, so  
Live with urgency & an eternal perspective.

## THE UNAVOIDABLE APPOINTMENT

**It is the same for all. There is one fate** - This is a straightforward statement of one fate for all men and in context that fate is death. It is interesting that Solomon moves from the unpredictable fate of men during life, to the perfectly predictable fate of all men after life. Death is the single, inevitable event that awaits all people under the sun.



As **Michael Eaton** says "The point is simply that the righteous are not visibly favoured by providence, nor the unrighteous visibly rebuked by providence. Death itself comes indiscriminately to all." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Solomon then gives a list of the "all" with several contrasting pairs, in each the "good" followed by the bad. There is no distinction in the outcome—whether good or evil, all share the same earthly fate.

*Death is the debt we all must pay*

--Euripides

**For the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear** - The upshot of this list of good/bad is that no group is immune from the fate of death, regardless of their morality. Solomon does not mention taxes as we often hear folks say the two things you cannot avoid are "Death and Taxes." Actually, some people, either through cleverness or crime can avoid taxes, but no one avoids death!

**David Hubbard** - Two consequences are drawn from this announcement of death's certainty: (1) the time or kind of death tells us nothing about a person's standing with God (Ec 9:1–2); (2) almost any kind of life is preferable to death (Ec 9:4–6). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**William Barrick** Solomon continues his discourse with yet another very brief and enigmatic declaration, **'it is the same for all'** (literally, "The all just as for the all"). Coming back-to-back with the close of Eccl 9:1, the two statements form a hinge. The repetition of "the all" brings to mind the refrain that occurs throughout the book: "All is vanity." Every individual, regardless of their level of spiritual commitment (or lack thereof), falls prey to the fallen character of mankind. ([Fredericks](#)) Every individual will someday experience death—that is the universal condition faced by all human beings (Eccl 9:2). Solomon lists a number of examples: the righteous compared to the wicked, the good and clean compared to the unclean ([Provan](#)), the person with a sacrifice compared to the person without a sacrifice, the good person compared with the sinner, the one who vows compared with the person who makes no vow. In the last pair, Eaton understands the first as one who takes an oath by the Lord's name as part of promising allegiance to God's covenant. The opposite would be a person who avoids such loyalty to the divine covenant. ([Eaton](#)) On the other side of the matter, these could be the person who perjures himself, not taking their oath seriously, compared to someone having a "proper reverence for the seriousness of oaths." ([Seow](#)) Eaton's view offers the better option, since it preserves the order of good before bad throughout all five sets of examples. The point is that everyone without exception faces death. Considering the inevitability of death in everyone's life, it is astonishing that people, knowing death is imminent, still "fill their lives with the distractions of a thousand passions and squander what little time they have to immediate but insignificant worries." ([Garrett](#)) This is the very thought which Solomon will develop more fully in the coming chapters. He advises that everyone avoid the distractions, focus on what is important, and use the remainder of one's life wisely."

**Warren Wiersbe** on **it is the same for all** (death) - If so, why bother to live a godly life?" someone may ask. "After all, whether we obey the Law or disobey, bring sacrifices or neglect them, make or break promises, we will die just the same." Yes, we share a common destiny on earth—death and the grave—but we do not share a common destiny in eternity. For that reason, everybody must honestly face "the last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26+) and decide how to deal with it. Christians have trusted Jesus Christ to save them from sin and death, so, as far as they are concerned, "the last enemy" has been defeated (Ro 6:23; John 11:25-26; 1Th 4:13-18; 1Co 15:51-58). Unbelievers don't have that confidence and are unprepared to die. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**"Death Is Certain—Live Accordingly"** We live in a world that hides death behind distractions. But Solomon pulls the curtain aside and says: Look—it comes for everyone. The good. The wicked. The clean. The unclean. If death is certain for all, what matters is how we live in light of that truth: Are we ready? Do we fear God? Do we invest in what lasts beyond death? You cannot escape death—but you can be ready for it. Live with urgency and eternal perspective. Use your time wisely (Eccl. 9:10)—your earthly toil is temporary. You don't know how many days you have left. Anchor your hope in Christ Who Alone conquered death (1Co 15:57+) and gives eternal life (Jn 11:25-26+) Share the gospel of Jesus Christ at every opportunity God gives you, because every soul will face death.

**Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is the unfortunate fact about everything that happens on earth: the same fate awaits everyone. In addition to this, the hearts of all people are full of evil, and there is folly in their hearts during their lives-- then they die.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:3 το το πονηρὸν ἐν παντὶ πεποίηκεν πᾶσι τοῖς υἱοῖς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ καρδία αὐτῶν ἡμάρτια ἐστίν· καὶ ἡ μωρία ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν καθ' ὅσον ζῶσι, καὶ μετὰ τὸ περὶ τοῦ θανάτου.

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:3 There is this evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yea, the heart of the sons of men is filled with evil, and madness is in their heart during their life, and after that they go to the dead.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: there is one fate for everyone. In addition, the hearts of people are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live-- after that they go to the dead.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:3 It seems so tragic that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. That is why people are not more careful to be good. Instead, they choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil among all that hath been done under the sun, that one event is to all, and also the heart of the sons of man is full of evil, and madness is in their heart during their life, and after it -- unto the dead.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is another evil among those occurring under the sun: that there should be the same fate for everyone. The human heart, however, is full of wickedness; folly lurks in our hearts throughout our lives, until we end among the dead.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:3 Among all the things that happen under the sun, this is the worst, that things turn out the same for all. Hence the minds of men are filled with evil, and madness is in their hearts during life; and afterward they go to the dead.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is the tragedy of everything that happens under the sun: Everyone shares the same destiny. Moreover, the hearts of mortals are full of evil. Madness is in their hearts while they are still alive. After that, they join the dead.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is evil in all things which are done under the sun: that there is one fate for all, and the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; while they have life their hearts are foolish, and after that -- to the dead.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate comes to all; also the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

- also: Ec 8:11 Ge 6:5 8:21 Job 15:16 Ps 51:5 Jer 17:9 Mt 15:19,20 Mk 7:21-23 Ro 1:29-31 Tit 3:3
- and madness: Ec 1:17 7:25 Lu 6:11 15:17 Ac 26:11,24 2Pe 2:16
- after: Ec 12:7 Pr 14:32 Ac 12:23

#### Related Passages:

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of

the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Psalm 14:2-3 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## THE EVIL UNDER THE SUN

**This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. - NLT-** " It seems so tragic that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate." The fact that it is **done under the sun** signifies that it is part of life on earth and therefore is inescapable! Solomon declares it a great injustice or tragedy that everyone, good or evil, shares the same fate of death. It is as if Solomon does not see death as a natural phenomenon but as **an evil**. For Solomon the inescapable finality of death is a perplexing feature of human existence.

**Tommy Nelson** - In a game of chess, different pieces occupy squares all over the board. The pawns, bishops, rooks, knights, queens, and kings have different abilities and positions of power. But at the end of the game, where do all the pieces end up? In a box. (ED: AND MEN END UP IN A PINE BOX CALLED A CASKET!) Solomon says that life is the same way. The righteous and the unrighteous, the moral and the immoral, the goody-two-shoes and the low-down, no-good, egg-sucking dog—they all die. Every last one of them will end up in a box. Some will die late, some early. But it's the same for both. Not only that, but Solomon says that during our lives we live among crazy people. Their hearts are so confused that they pursue all kinds of wickedness. The Calvin and Hobbes comic is one my favorite theological commentaries. In one strip, Calvin says to Hobbes, "Do you think babies are born into the world as sinners?" Hobbes replies, "No, I think they're just quick studies." Solomon says that the craziness of life makes evil men more evil. One day, some maniac who doesn't have any insurance may run a red light and plow into your car. Or your car might be broken into in a parking lot and your purse will get stolen. Friends will turn their backs on you and say all kinds of terrible things. A customer of your business will get angry, curse you to your face, and then complain to your boss. How do we live in this world and still believe in a sovereign God? Solomon gives us some insight in the following verses. (Ec 9:4-6) (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 144](#))

**Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity**([holelah](#); Lxx - periphereia - error, wandering) **is in their hearts throughout their lives.** Human beings, at their core, are not neutral, but because they inherited the "sin virus" from Adam (Ro 5:12+), their hearts are continually inclined toward evil (cf Ec 7:29+). The heart of their problem is their heart problem, aka [Sin](#)! Note the phrase **full of**! Hearts are like cups filled to the brim with poison, so that evil is sure to spill out from a heart filled with evil!

*What an awful mixture --  
meanness and madness!*

**Warren Wiersbe** points out that "The fact of death and the fear of death will either bring out the best in people or the worst in people; and too often it is the worst. When death comes to a family, it doesn't *create* problems; it *reveals* them. Many ministers and funeral directors have witnessed the "X-ray" power of death and bereavement as it reveals the hearts of people. In facing the death of others, we are confronted with our own death, and many people just can't handle it...will do almost *anything but repent* in order to escape the reality of death. They will get drunk, fight with their relatives, drive recklessly, spend large amounts of money on useless things, and plunge into one senseless pleasure after another, all to keep the Grim Reaper at arm's length. But their costly endeavors only distract them from the battle; they don't end the war, because "the last enemy" is still there. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Joseph Bayly** wrote the following about death and how Jesus Christ can heal the brokenhearted who have experienced death of a loved one "Death is the great adventure, beside which moon landings and space trips pale into insignificance. The paradox is that when you accept the fact of death, you are freed to live." (Borrow [The Last Thing We Talk About - a Christian view of death](#) - recommended read)

**Swindoll** - We've heard about the doctrine of depravity all our lives, but not much about the doctrine of insanity, right? Honestly, have you ever seen this in Scripture before? Lurking in the human heart is a permanent mixture of evil and insanity! It's enough to make shivers run up one's spine! Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser renders insanity "every conceivable madness." What an awful mixture -- meanness and madness! Think about our day. How else can we explain the moral insanity? The sexual insanity? The homicidal insanity?...The materialistic madness? The intellectual madness? The judicial madness of our times? It's absolutely insane! (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*Malevolence and madness  
make a morbid mixture.*

**William Barrick** - According to Eccl 9:3, the one fate, death itself, is an “evil” that awaits everyone. In Hebrew, the meaning of “evil” in such contexts comes within the semantic scope of “misery.” (Provan) As he has in recent chapters, Solomon focuses on the depravity of mankind: “**Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.**” Malevolence and madness make a morbid mixture. **Swindoll** identifies this “insanity” (cf. Eccl 1:17; 2:12; 7:25; 10:13) with the answers people give to “hard questions, like: ‘Why did you walk away from your family?’ Or, ‘How can you continue to live like that, knowing that it’s wrong and that Scripture stands against such things?’” (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#)) As though to make certain the reader does not miss the message, Solomon brings the verse to a close by means of an abrupt ending that literally reads, “and afterwards—to the dead!” (R. N. Whybray, [Ecclesiastes](#) online) **Death comes that way—abruptly.**

**Afterwards they go to the dead.** Despite their evil and folly, they all end up dead—a somber conclusion.

*Death is not an **accident**, it's an **appointment** (Heb. 9:27),  
a destiny that nobody but God can cancel or change.*

**Warren Wiersbe** - I'm not afraid to die;" quipped Woody Allen, "I just don't want to be there when it happens." But he *will* be there when it happens, as must every human being, because there is no escaping death when your time has come. Death is not an accident, it's an appointment (Heb. 9:27) (**ED: WHO "BOOKED" THE APPOINTMENT? THE SOVEREIGN GOD!**), a destiny that nobody but God can cancel or change. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

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**Insanity** ([01947](#)) holelah (from halal to be boastful) refers to moral life so that the acts of a person are done apart from reflection upon divine law. It describes a moral wildness that is impetuous and irrational. The noun conveys a sense of willful noncompliance or bad moral judgment. It does not refer to an innate mental incapacity. This is the ultimate type of foolishness, as one ignores the moral commands of Yahweh concerning how to interact with others in society.

**HOLELAH - 4V - insanity(1), madness(3).** Eccl. 1:17; 2:12; 7:25; 9:3

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**ILLUSTRATION - hearts full of evil** - In 1882, Paul Gauguin lived with his wife and five children in Paris. He was doing well as a thirty-five-year-old stockbroker when he met someone who changed his life—Camille Pissarro. Pissarro was one of the most important artists in the Impressionist movement and had a profound effect on Gauguin. After this friendship blossomed, Gauguin gave up his job to become a devoted art collector and amateur artist. Three years later, Gauguin abandoned his family. He renounced the trappings of modern life and industrialized society. He first went to the rustic villages of Brittany. In 1891, he went to Tahiti to paint, hoping to find man in pristine innocence there. He believed that in Tahiti there would be no need for rules or religion—nothing to curtail the noble savage. He was hoping to find true beauty and purity. What Gauguin found instead was sin, violence, disease, death, pain, and heartache. He discovered there was no such thing as a Shangri-La. He could not find an Oz. He could not find Utopia. In response, he tried unsuccessfully to kill himself.

**Ecclesiastes 9:4 For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:4 But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:4 But whoever is among the living has hope; a live dog is better than a dead lion.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:4 τ ι τ ς ς κοινωνε πρ ς π ντας το ς ζ ντας σι ν λ π ς τ ι κ ω ν ζ ν α τ ς γ α θ ς π ρ τ ν λ ο ν τ α τ ν νε κ ρ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:4 for who is he that has fellowship with all the living? there is hope of him: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:4 But there is hope for whoever is joined with all the living, since a live dog is better than a dead lion.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead

lion.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:4 Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:4 There is hope only for the living. As they say, "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion!"

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:4 But to him who is joined unto all the living there is confidence, for to a living dog it is better than to the dead lion.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:4 But there is hope for someone still linked to the rest of the living: better be a live dog than a dead lion.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:4 But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:4 Indeed, for any among the living there is hope; a live dog is better off than a dead lion.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:4 But all who are among the living have hope, because a living dog is better than a dead lion.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:4 For him who is joined to all the living there is hope; a living dog is better than a dead lion.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

- Job 14:7-12 27:8 Isa 38:18 La 3:21,22 Lu 16:26-29

#### Related Passages:

Psalms 146:4 His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";

Luke 15:24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

Luke 16:26-29 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' 27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "But Abraham \*said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

Life no matter how humble  
is better than death

### HOPE FOR THE LIVING

**For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion-** Life has advantages over death as Solomon indicates by a live dog and dead lion. The sense seems to be that it is better to be alive and dishonored (like a dog, a despised scavenger Ex 22:31, 1Ki 14:11 and was notorious for its uncleanness Pr 26:11) than to be an honored beast (lion) that was dead. What is the advantage of the living? The living have hope, which is not so much "hope so" but more like "hope sure." This word **hope** often means trustful expectation, not wishful thinking. As [Barrick](#) says **hope** in Ec 9:4 "entails the concept of confidence, trust, or security. It does not look forward to something or wish for something, it speaks of the certitude one has about something that will happen. (Seow)"

After lamenting in Ecclesiastes 9:1–3 the certainty of death and the madness of mankind, Solomon now shifts in v.4 to affirm a vital truth: As long as you're alive, there's **hope**. This verse serves as a bridge between the darkness of death and the encouragement to enjoy life (vv.5–10). It's realistic, yet quietly optimistic. Anyone still alive and among the living is still connected to possibility. Life offers opportunity for change, repentance, joy, or wisdom—while death ends all such chances.

As long as you are alive, you still have hope. Death ends all earthly opportunities—whether for repentance, growth, joy, or reconciliation. Therefore, life, however imperfect or humble, is precious. In Solomon's theology: Death is not ultimate hopelessness, but it is final under the sun. This drives the need to live wisely, joyfully, and urgently while one still can.

**Warren Wiersbe** - When confronted by the stern fact of death, not everybody dives into an escape hatch and shouts, "Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" Many people just grit their teeth, square their shoulders and endure. They hold on to that ancient motto, "Where there's life, there's hope!" (That's a good paraphrase of Ec 9:4.) That motto goes as far back as the third century B.C. It's part of a conversation between two farmers who are featured in a poem by the Greek poet Theokritos. "Console yourself, dear Battos," says Korydon. "Things may be better tomorrow. While there's life there's hope. Only the dead have none." Shades of Ecclesiastes! ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Surely a live dog is better than a dead lion** - Dog in ancient Israel, a despised, unclean animal (cf. 1Sa 17:43). Lion was a noble, majestic creature, symbol of strength. A lowly, living creature is better than a majestic one that's dead. Life itself, even in low condition, is preferable to the finality of death.

As **Tommy Nelson** explains "it's better to be alive than dead. Now there's a brilliant insight, right? Solomon is saying don't give up hope and give in to despair. Just because life is vanity does not mean it is hopeless. Life is a common blessing that God has bestowed on men. Life is better than death because at least when you're alive, you know that one day you're going to die, so you can change your life and make something out of it. (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 146](#))

**William Barrick** - Solomon's bold metaphor contrasting a **live dog** with a **dead lion** derives from the confidence shown by a lion in his domain. Cringing and cowering street curs exercise greater confidence than a dead lion. The two animals typify the two extremes of wisdom and folly (Pr 26:11), power (Pr 30:30) and weakness, the majestic and the lowly (1Sa 17:43).<sup>20</sup> One advantage of the living is that they know they will die.<sup>21</sup> In view of the meaning of certitude, Kaiser's three hopes <sup>22</sup> might be altered to more closely to the text: (1) the certitude of meeting God, (2) the certitude that it is significant how one lives, and (3) the certitude of God's glory standing as that which each must pursue "under the sun."

**"It's Not Too Late"** This verse reminds us of a powerful spiritual truth: If you're still breathing, God's not done with you. You may feel weak like a dog—not majestic like a lion. You may be low in status, strength, or success. But if you're alive, you still have the ability to: Turn to Jesus Christ. Make amends. Love others. Choose joy. Begin again. The gift of life is the gift of opportunity. Don't waste it. Act now in areas you've been delaying—life won't last forever. Use every day intentionally—for God's glory and others' good.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE** Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

I find enormous encouragement—and not a little humor—in the thought that a living dog is better than a dead lion (v. 4). A dead lion may be magnificent—but he is dead. Meanwhile that little yapping dog is still running in the front yard. It's better to be alive than dead. This is what Solomon wants us to know. The dead see nothing, feel nothing, hear nothing, say nothing, and do nothing. They have vanished from the earth, never to return until they stand before God in judgment (either at Bema Seat for believers 2Co 5:10+ or Great White Throne for Christ rejecter - Rev 20:11-15+).

What if I knew how many days I had left on this earth? What difference would it make to me?

I wouldn't waste so much time on trivial things.  
I would set two or three goals and work like crazy to see them accomplished.  
I wouldn't get angry so easily or hold a grudge so long.  
I would take time to hug my boys at least once a day.  
I wouldn't spend so much time watching television.  
I would say, "I love you" more often than I do.  
I wouldn't complain about spinach or tuna casserole or time spent window-shopping at the mall.  
I would write more letters.  
I wouldn't worry about most of the things that currently bother me.  
I wouldn't let pressure build up in the relationships that matter the most to me.  
I wouldn't get disappointed when other people let me down.  
I wouldn't put off saying "thank you" to others.

There are a few other things I would do if I knew I'd be here only a few months longer. I would:

- Be quick to ask forgiveness when I hurt someone.
- Pray every day for the love of Jesus to shine through my life.

- Spend more time with Marlene and my boys because soon enough my time with them will be over.
- Pray more, love more, laugh more, simplify my life, rearrange my priorities, fret less, and concentrate on the things that really matter.

But if that's the way I would live, then why don't I live that way now? "We're all terminal," a friend reminded me. "Some of us just find out sooner than others."

Sovereign Lord, my life is in Your hands. May I not waste this day but use it fully to Your glory. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- What is the source of your hope? What worthwhile thing could you accomplish today with God's help?
- Name five ways your life would be different if you knew how many days you had left on earth.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 130:1-8; John 9:4; and Hebrews 6:16-20

**Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they have no further reward— and even the memory of them disappears.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:5 τι ο ζ ντες γν σονται τι ποθανο νται κα ο νεκρο ο κ ε σιν γιν σκοντες ο δ ν κα ο κ σιν α το ς τι μισθ ς τι πελ σθη μν μη α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living will know that they shall die: but the dead know nothing, and there is no longer any reward to them; for their memory is lost.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. There is no longer a reward for them because the memory of them is forgotten.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:5 The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they die, and the dead know not anything, and there is no more to them a reward, for their remembrance hath been forgotten.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:5 The living are at least aware that they are going to die, but the dead know nothing whatever. No more wages for them, since their memory is forgotten.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:5 The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they are to die, but the dead no longer know anything. There is no further recompense for them, because all memory of them is lost.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:5 The living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. There is no more reward for the dead when the memory of them has faded.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:5 The living are conscious that death will come to them, but the dead are not conscious of anything, and they no longer have a reward, because there is no memory of them.



RSV Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost.

- the living: Ec 7:2 Job 30:23 Heb 9:27
- the dead: Job 14:21 Ps 6:5 88:10,11 Isa 63:16
- for the: Ec 2:16 8:10 Job 7:8-10 Ps 109:15 Isa 26:14

#### Related Passages:

Psalms 6:5 For there is no mention of You in death; In Sheol who will give You thanks?

### LIFE'S URGENCY IN LIGHT OF THE SILENCE OF THE DEAD

**For** - Term of explanation. What is Solomon explaining? Verse 4 praised the advantage of the living—they still have hope. Now, verse 5 explains why: The living are aware and can act; the dead cannot. He has just said those who are alive have hope. As **Eaton** says "The hope of v4 is explained by the opportunity this present life affords to consider the fact of death, as the Preacher has been constantly urging, and to evaluate life accordingly."

**The living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything** - Solomon gives another advantage to the living. They have knowledge, even if it is only the knowledge that they will die. The dead have no such knowledge in the realm of the dead! They can no longer make "course corrections" in their life! Unlike the dead, the living know their end is coming. This awareness gives (or should give) urgency and meaning to their choices.

**NOTE:** The living can still reflect on their mortality, and, if they are wise, they can make any needed corrections to adjust their course in life from the ruin of godlessness to the reward of godliness. Paul exhorts Timothy and all believers "**have nothing to do with** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, **discipline** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourself for the purpose of **godliness**; 8 (**WHY?**) for (term of explanation) bodily discipline is only of little profit, but **godliness** is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for (1) the present life and (2) also for the life to come.." (1Ti 4:7-8+) Only the living can obey this command and reap the eternal rewards. Are you disciplining yourself for godliness? If so, great will be your reward, now but even more throughout eternity!

**Donald Glenn** says "**The living** at least have consciousness and **hope**, things they can look forward to enjoying. But **the dead** have no consciousness."

**Warren Wiersbe** - The Christian believer has "a living hope," not a "dead" hope, because the Saviour is alive and has conquered death (1 Peter 1:3–5; 2 Tim. 1:10). A hope that can be destroyed by death is a false hope and must be abandoned.....Solomon was emphasizing the importance of seizing opportunities while we live, rather than blindly hoping for something better in the future, because death will end our opportunities on this earth.....We endure because we hope, but "hope in hope" (like "faith in faith") is too often only a kind of self-hypnosis that keeps us from facing life honestly. While a patient may be better off with an optimistic attitude, it is dangerous for him to follow a false hope that may keep him from preparing for death. That kind of hope is hopeless. When the end comes, the patient's outlook may be cheerful, but the outcome will be tragic. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten** - Another advantage of the living is reward and the fact that people remember them. But for the dead "they have no further reward— and even the memory of them disappears." (NET) The dead are cut off from the events, knowledge, and awareness of life "under the sun." Over time, the dead are forgotten by the world, and their stories fade from memory. This does not teach soul-sleep or annihilation, but from an earthly perspective, the dead are inactive, silent, and disconnected from this world.

*If people live their lives for earthly rewards or worldly accolades,  
they have not walked in the way of wisdom.*

-- Danny Akin

**William Barrick** - The **dead** know nothing of life under the sun and gain no more reward than what they have already gained during life (Eccl 9:5). In fact, they are forgotten "under the sun." The association of reward with being forgotten involves a pun in the Hebrew. "**Reward**" is the word *sakar* while "**memory**" is *zeker* from the root *zakar*.<sup>23</sup> The pun may heighten a sense of reversal.<sup>24</sup> The expected reward (or, wages) for a lifetime of labor does not consist of being remembered after one is dead. These verses do not deny the existence of an afterlife. Instead, they insist on the fact that a person can only enjoy God's "under the sun"-gifts in this

This verse presents a sobering truth from the perspective of life “under the sun”: The living still have agency—they know, choose, act. The dead are removed from the realm of human experience: they know nothing, earn nothing, and are eventually forgotten. This affirms: The urgency of the present, and The finality of death (in this life).

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### Related Resources on Hope

- [The Blessed Hope: Part 1](#)
- [The Blessed Hope: Definition](#)
- [The Blessed Hope: Source of](#)
- [The Blessed Hope: Part 2](#)
- [The Blessed Hope: Stabilizing Effect](#)
- [The Blessed Hope: Sanctifying Effect](#)

**Ecclesiastes 9:6 Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:6 What they loved, as well as what they hated and envied, perished long ago, and they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:6 κα γε γ πη α τ ν κα γε μ σο ς α τ ν κα γε ζ λο ς α τ ν δη π λε το κα με ρ ς ο κ σ τ ι ν α το ς τ ι ε ς α ν α ν παντ τ πε ποι η μ ν π τ ν λ ι ο ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:6 also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, have now perished; yea, there is no portion for them any more for ever in all that is done under the sun.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love, their hate, and their envy have already disappeared, and there is no longer a portion for them in all that is done under the sun.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:6 Whatever they did in their lifetime-- loving, hating, envying-- is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love also, their hatred also, their envy also, hath already perished, and they have no more a portion to the age in all that hath been done under the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love, their hate, their jealousy, have perished long since, and they will never have any further part in what goes on under the sun.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:6 For them, love and hatred and rivalry have long since perished. They will never again have part in anything that is done under the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love, their hate, and their passions have already vanished. They will never again take part in anything that happens under the sun.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love and their hate and their envy are now ended; and they have no longer a part for ever in anything which is done under the sun.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more

for ever any share in all that is done under the sun.

- their love: Ex 1:8 Job 3:17,18 Ps 146:3,4 Pr 10:28 Mt 2:20
- have they: Ec 2:18-23 6:12

#### Related Passages:

Job 14:10-12 "But man dies and lies prostrate. Man expires, and where is he? 11"As water evaporates from the sea, And a river becomes parched and dried up, 12So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep.

Psalm 88:10-12 Will You perform wonders for the dead? Will the departed spirits rise and praise You? Selah. 11 Will Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon? 12 Will Your wonders be made known in the darkness? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Isaiah 38:18-19 "For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness. 19"It is the living who give thanks to You, as I do today; A father tells his sons about Your faithfulness.

### NO MORE SHARE IN THIS LIFE

**Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished**(CSB - have already disappeared, NIV - have long since vanished, NLT - is all long gone) - Solomon says some of the earthly experiences which will cease for the dead are love, hate and zeal (envy, passions). These represent the full range of human emotion and passion. All these earthly experiences end with death. The passions and emotional involvements of the dead are gone permanently. Death closes the door on such engagement.

**and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun**- NLT - "They no longer play a part in anything here on earth." For the dead their share all that is done on the earth has come to an end. Note the two time phrases emphasizing that the passing of things on earth (under the sun) is total (**already perished**) and permanent (**no longer**).

**Michael Eaton** explains what the dead miss by no longer having a **share** - One's portion (AV) or share (RSV) is the measure of joy and satisfaction that comes through one's daily activities (cf. Ec 3:22; 5:18, where it is sometimes translated lot), found not in self-centred pleasures (Ec 2:1-11) but only when taken as the gift of God (Ec 3:22; 5:19). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Solomon again reflects on life "under the sun": Death is not annihilation, but it severs one from earthly affairs. All human emotion, ambition, relationships, and influence stop. From an "under the sun" viewpoint: Death ends opportunity (unlike life, which still has "hope"—v.4). This reality demands that we live wisely and urgently now. Solomon doesn't deny an afterlife—see Eccl. 12:7—but he emphasizes that earthly opportunities don't continue beyond the grave.

**William Barrick** - Everyone's love, hate, and zeal perish from the earth at death (Eccl 9:6). Life will continue on without them. They no longer participate in the events that mark the passing of time and the advancements of the human race. One's "lot/reward/portion" consists of "the measure of joy and satisfaction that comes through one's daily activities . . . found not in self-centred pleasures (Eccl 2:1-11) but only when taken as the gift of God (Eccl 3:22; 5:19)."26 The wise person rightly understands that the opportunities and joys of this brief life happen only once.

**"Before the Door Closes"** This verse sobers us. It reminds us: When you die, your chance to act, to influence, to love—ends. What are you waiting to say? What are you putting off doing for God? Whom are you delaying forgiveness for? Let this verse compel you to act while you live. There's a time to love. To serve. To repent. That time is now—before your share is gone.

**Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, because God has

already approved your works.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:7 δε ρο φ γε ν ε φροσ ν ρτον σου κα π ε ν καρδ γαθ ο ν ν σου τι δη ε δ κησεν θε ς τ ποι ματ σου

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat thy bread with mirth, and drink thy wine with a joyful heart; for now God has favourably accepted thy works.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:7 So go ahead. Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this!

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat with joy thy bread, and drink with a glad heart thy wine, for already hath God been pleased with thy works.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:7 So, eat your bread in joy, drink your wine with a glad heart, since God has already approved your actions.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, because it is now that God favors your works.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, enjoy eating your food, and drink your wine cheerfully, because God has already accepted what you've done.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:7 Come, take your bread with joy, and your wine with a glad heart. God has taken pleasure in your works.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do.

- **Go:** Ge 12:19 Mk 7:29 Joh 4:50
- **eat :** Ec 2:24-26 3:12,13 5:18 8:15 10:19 De 12:7,12 16:14,15 1Ki 8:66 1Ch 16:1-3 29:21-23 2Ch 30:23-27 Ne 8:10-12
- **for:** Ge 4:4,5 Ex 24:8-11 Lu 11:41 Ac 10:35

### Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 2:24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.

Psalms 104:14-15 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth, 15 And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make his face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart.

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Proverbs 15:17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox served with hatred.

Proverbs 17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

## JOY SANCTIONED BY GOD

**Go then, eat your bread in happiness** (with joy) **and drink your wine with a cheerful** (merry, happy) **heart** - Since life is short and death is certain, Solomon now breaks in with 3 exhortations in the form of commands (in the Septuagint these commands are [aorist imperative](#) calling for the reader to "Just Do It!" "Don't procrastinate!"). (in Ec 9:8-9 there are 3 more verbs, one imperative and two in [jussive sense](#) = commands) Solomon would say don't remain passive or paralyzed by fear of death, but get up and live! Because death is certain, life must be cherished. Solomon is not advocating reckless pleasure, but grateful, God-centered enjoyment of food, fellowship, and ordinary life.

See [BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AND ALCOHOL ABUSE](#)

**Warren Wiersbe** - Life is not easy, but there is more to life than simply enduring. There is a third response to the fact of death, a response that can be made only by those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. This has been one of Solomon's recurring themes (Ec 2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15), and he will bring it up again (Ec 11:9–10). His admonition "**Go** thy way!" means: "Don't sit around and brood! Get up and live!" Yes, death is coming, but God gives us good gifts to enjoy so enjoy them! Solomon didn't urge us to join the "jet set" and start searching for exotic pleasures in far away places. Instead, he listed some of the common experiences of home life: happy leisurely meals (Ec 9:7), joyful family celebrations (Ec 9:8), a faithful, loving marriage (Ec 9:9), and hard work (Ec 9:10). What a contrast to modern society's formula for happiness!...The most important thing on any menu is family love, for love turns an ordinary meal into a banquet. When the children would rather eat at a friend's house than bring their friends home to enjoy their mother's cooking, it's time to take inventory of what goes on around the table. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**For** (term of explanation) **God has already approved your works** - **For** explains why obey those commands? ESV says "God has already approved what you do." God is not opposed to your enjoyment of life's gifts, In fact He has already **approved** such gladness when done in reverent, faithful living.

**Michael Eaton** explains that "What had previously been put as advice (Ec 2:24–26; 3:12f., 22; 5:18–20) is now an urgent summons to action. The believer must give himself to a contented life (cf. comments on eat under Ec 5:18) and to a joyful life (cf. also 11:9). The basis of contentment is that God has already approved what you do. This almost Pauline touch is the nearest the Preacher came to a doctrine of justification by faith. Man has but to receive contentment as God's gift (cf. Ec 3:13); God will approve of him and his works. The believer is not struggling for acceptance; he is 'already' accepted. On that basis (moving from Paul to James, one might say) the wise man 'works with all his might' (Ec 9:10). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Charles Swindoll** - Live Happily Wherever You Are (Ecclesiastes 9:7) This is definitely uncommon advice in some Christian groups that try to maintain a narrow view, not only in their theology and morality (which is good), but even in their view of the blessings God has given them (which is sad). God approves of the enjoyment we receive from His simple material blessings of food and drink, for He graciously gave us the ability to enjoy the fruits of our labor (Ecclesiastes 2:24–25; 3:12–13; 5:18–19). The Lord is pleased when we find pleasure in His physical blessings and enjoy freedom from guilt as we partake of His benefits. This is true in a spiritual sense too, for we know from the New Testament that believers stand approved before God based not on our own merit but on the merit of Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). In this sense, we are called to richly and wisely enjoy freedom in the grace of Christ; we're no longer shamed by sin or bound by the rules and regulations of the Law (Galatians 5:1). ([Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World](#))

**Tommy Nelson** explains "In the last chapter Solomon told us to stay poised, do the right thing, and fly by the panel. In verse 7 of chapter 9, Solomon gives us three key insights. Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

At first this may seem odd. Is Solomon telling us to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the tragic nature of life? Is he saying we should try to dull the pain with pleasure? Again, as Augustine said, we are to translate Scripture with other Scripture. And in other passages in the Bible, we are clearly told not to get drunk and fall into debauchery. So what is Solomon talking about? He's saying the same thing he has already told us. We should go out with some buddies, have a good meal, and wash it down with a little Columbian coffee and a couple of dips of Rocky Road. Enjoy life right now even though you got laid off yesterday. Spend some time with good friends. You don't know why yesterday happened. You don't know what tomorrow holds. Jesus said, "Tomorrow will care for itself" (Matt. 6:34). Right now, God will take care of you. And God approves of your enjoying life. That's what the end of verse 7 means. Many Christians live as if it is a sin to enjoy life. But God created the world for us to enjoy. When Howard Hendricks said most Christians' faces would make a great cover for the Book of Lamentations, he was right. It's OK to be a believer and have a good time. Do you know what the word "**Eden**" means? "**Eden**" is Hebrew for "**delight**." God gave trees that were good for food and a delight to the eyes. He gave woman to man and man to woman. It was wonderful. One of the reasons God created the world was

for our enjoyment. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude" (1 Tim. 4:4). Too often, Christians today equate fun with sin and misery with righteousness. But the Bible says that "In [God's] presence is fullness of joy; / In [God's] right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps. 16:11). Some of this confusion may come because people often only see one side of a biblical command. They see that God warns us to stay sexually pure, but they miss that He also commands us to enjoy sex in marriage. They see that God commands us to keep our speech wholesome, but they don't see that we should enjoy conversation. They don't want to be unequally yoked, but they miss that we are to bind ourselves to some good buddies and have a good time. I think some Christians try to make themselves feel safe by keeping all the rules. They are frightened by life and by their freedom in Christ. They haven't yet understood that obedience to God does not alienate them from the delights of life. In fact, loving God only enhances our experience of real pleasure.

(See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 146](#))

**William Barrick** - Joy refrains in Ecclesiastes manifest a growing crescendo from the first (Eccl 2:24–26) to the last (Eccl 11:7–10). In this refrain, comparison ("nothing better," Eccl 2:24) gives way to command ("eat," "drink," "enjoy"). Solomon issues "an urgent summons to action" for the righteous to delight in God's gifts "under the sun." The very first command is "Go!" "It's a wakeup call. There's no time to waste. Stop your complaining! Stop nursing your anger! Stop brooding about your problems! Get over your anxiety!"<sup>28</sup> After all, "Why should anyone who truly fears God have the joy of life stolen out from under him because of the unresolved perplexities still remaining in the partially disclosed plan of God?"<sup>29</sup> Solomon's advice coincides with the early church's behavior (Acts 2:46) and the Apostle Paul's injunctions (Phil 4:4; 1 Tim 4:1–4).

**William Barrick** - Eccl 9:7 concludes with the thought that God has "approved" mankind's labors. "Approved" translates a Hebrew term that refers to divine acceptance, will, or favor. Enjoyment of the divine gifts in life "under the sun" belongs preeminently to those who do the divine will, who please God, who are recipients of His gracious favor. "God approves only that which is in conformity to his will and character."<sup>36</sup> The imperatives in these verses direct the believer to pursue only those things that God identifies as receiving His stamp of approval. "Already" might be taken as "long ago"—perhaps a reference to creation and God's blessing upon man and the gifts of wife, food, and clothing.<sup>37</sup> The imperative "Enjoy life" (Eccl 9:9; literally, "See life"), means "experience life."<sup>38</sup>

**God Wants You to Enjoy Life** Too often we live with anxiety, guilt, or fear, unsure if we're allowed to enjoy anything. Solomon says: God has already said yes to the simple pleasures of life—when they are received in reverence. Eat your bread with joy. Drink your cup with gratitude. Don't feel guilty for smiling, laughing, or celebrating small things. These aren't just distractions from death—they're gifts from God in the face of it.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - HAVE A BLAST WHILE YOU LAST Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

My friend Shirley Banta likes to say, "Have a blast while you last." That's what Solomon says in verses 7-10: We're not going to live forever, so we ought to make the most of our life while we have the opportunity. Life is not a dress rehearsal, so put your heart and soul into it the first time around.

If your goal is to live a life of security and safety, one warning: You'll end up with everything but Jesus. Our Lord never took the safe road. He never took the easy way. He never took a shortcut in order to play it safe. So if that's what you're looking for, you might as well forget about Jesus, because He doesn't have any part with that.

You can be old by the calendar and young at heart if you understand that the life of faith is inherently a life of risk. If you adopt that philosophy, you go through life full speed, with the throttle wide open, going for broke all the time.

May I share with you the goal of my life? I want to die young at a very old age. That's not just playing with words; that's a philosophy of life. Growing old is not just a matter of chronology. It's also a stage. You can be old at twenty and young at eighty-five. My goal is to die young at a very old age, doing everything I can for the cause of Christ.

I want to go down kicking and screaming and fighting and singing and laughing and playing and having a good time living my life till the day comes when they finally lower me into the ground.

The question is not "How old are you?" The question is "How old do you feel?"

How old was Abraham when his son Isaac was born? He was almost one hundred years old. How old was Moses when he led the Jews out of Egypt? He was eighty years old. Correction: He was eighty years young. An old man could never do what Moses did.

This chronology stuff is overrated. A life of faith can keep you active and young at heart. Looked at in that light, the statement "Have a blast while you last" is far more than a slogan. It's the most biblically based philosophy of life I've ever discovered.

Living by faith means that you live until you die and you don't die until you're dead.

Lord, help me to squeeze every drop of joy out of life today. Amen.



## SHINING THE LIGHT

- List three reasons why you are glad to be alive right now.
- How old do you feel? If you were accused of enjoying life too much, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Song 7:1-13; Matthew 5:1-11; and Luke 6:46-49.

**Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your clothes always be white, and do not spare precious ointment on your head.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:8 ν παντ καιρ στωσαν μ τι σου λευκ κα λαιον τι κεφαλ ν σου μ στερησ τω

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let thy garments be always white; and let not oil be wanting on thine head.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and never let oil be lacking on your head.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:8 Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:8 At all times let thy garments be white, and let not perfume be lacking on thy head.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:8 At all times, dress in white and keep your head well scented.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:8 At all times let your garments be white, and spare not the perfume for your head.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:8 Always wear clean clothes, and never go without lotion on your head.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your clothing be white at all times, and let not your head be without oil.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments be always white; let not oil be lacking on your head.

- thy garments: 2Sa 19:24 Es 8:15 Rev 3:4,5 7:9,13,14 16:15 19:8,14
- let thy head: Ru 3:3 2Sa 14:2 Da 10:3 Am 6:6 Mt 6:17 Lu 7:46

### Related Passages:

Psalms 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

Psalms 104:15 And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make his face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart.

Isaiah 61:3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

Matthew 6:17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

Let your outer joy reflect your  
inner confidence in Jehovah

## THE DAILY CELEBRATION OF LIFE

**Let your clothes be white** ([jussive sense](#) = like a command) **all the time**, and **let not oil be lacking** ([jussive sense](#) = like a command) **on your head** - Note the time phrase **all the time** (aka *always*). Wearing white garments indicates the attire of



celebration and comfort. The fragrant oil calls to mind welcome hospitality (Ps 23:5), unity and blessing (Ps 133:1–3), and gladness (Isa 61:3). Ecclesiastes 9:8 uses imagery from Hebrew culture to convey the idea of living not in mourning, but in joy. : White clothing, worn at feasts and special occasions, represents a life marked by joy, not sorrow. Solomon calls us to continual inner celebration, despite life's brevity. Contrast: Mourners wore sackcloth (black), not white. Oil on the head was a sign of gladness, blessing, and vitality (see Psalm 23:5, 133:2). This command urges us to live fully and joyfully, maintaining a spirit of festivity and purpose, not of depression.

*Godly joy is not just permitted  
—it is prescribed.*

**Tommy Nelson** explains "If you were going to a feast in Solomon's time, you would wear white clothes and anoint your head with oil. Solomon is telling us to party. Solomon is saying to enjoy life as much as you can. ([A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 148](#))

**Michael Eaton** - *White garments* and anointing *oil* made life more comfortable in a hot climate, the latter relieving the irritations of dry skin.

**Daniel Akin** - Not surprisingly, these metaphors are descriptive of joy (Ps. 45:3; Isa. 62:3; Keddie, 124; Longman, 230). Joy, as we saw early on in Ecclesiastes, can occur only when a person is in right relationship with God. It may seem that some non-Christians are joyful, but once they focus on the important issues of life (see comments on Eccl. 2:1–11), they find there is no lasting meaning apart from God. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes](#))

**Charles Swindoll** applies this verse to us in the New Testament writing "in the spiritual realm, especially for us living in the New Testament age, white clothes symbolize moral purity and spiritual righteousness (Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 3:4–5; 7:9–14), and oil represents the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38). In today's words, Solomon encourages us to not live as ascetic prudes or as extreme hedonists, but to live by the wise guidance of the Holy Spirit in both the physical and spiritual realms. When we live a balanced life in this way, our contentment and joy will be contagious." (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World ...](#))

**"Dress Your Days in Joy"** This verse is Solomon's way of saying: "Don't walk through life in funeral clothes. You've been given life. Celebrate it." Your life may not be perfect. The world is broken. But: God has given you this moment, He has blessed you with provision, And He invites you to live joyfully, not grimly. Wearing white and anointing your head isn't literal—it's a metaphor for choosing a posture of joy and hope. Let your soul wear white today. God delights in your delight when it honors Him. Gratitude makes every day a feast.

**Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun ; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with your beloved wife during all the days of your fleeting life that God has given you on earth during all your fleeting days; for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work on earth.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:9 δ ζω ν μετ γυναικ ς ς γ πησας π σας μ ρας ζω ς μαται τητ ς σου τ ς δοθε σας σοι π τ ν λιον π σας μ ρας μαται τητ ς σου τι α τ μερ ς σου ν τ ζω σου κα ν τ μ χθ σου σ μοχθε ς π τ ν λιον

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:9 And see life with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which are given thee under the sun: for that is thy portion in thy life, and in thy labour wherein thou labourest under the sun.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you under the sun, all your fleeting days. For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under the sun.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:9 Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:9 See life with the wife whom thou hast loved, all the days of the life of thy vanity, that He hath given to thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity, for it is thy portion in life, even of thy labour that thou art labouring at under the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:9 Spend your life with the woman you love, all the days of futile life God gives you under the sun, throughout your futile days, since this is your lot in life and in the effort you expend under the sun.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of the fleeting life that is granted you under the sun. This is your lot in life, for the toil of your labors under the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, during all your brief, pointless life. God has given you your pointless life under the sun. This is your lot in life and what you get for the hard work that you do under the sun.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:9 Have joy with the woman of your love all the days of your foolish life which he gives you under the sun. Because that is your part in life and in your work which you do under the sun.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

- **wife:** Pr 5:18,19 18:22 19:14 Mal 2:15
- **all the days of the life:** Ec 6:12 Ps 39:5 144:4
- **for:** Ec 2:10,24 3:13,22 5:18

#### Related Passages:

Genesis 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

Proverbs 5:18-19 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

1 Peter 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. 10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

Song of Solomon 8:7 "Many waters cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it; If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised."

Life is short. Love well.

### ENJOY LIFE WITH YOUR WIFE

**Enjoy** life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting ([hebel](#); [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#)) life which He has given to you under the sun **Enjoy** is a command. Rejoice in relational love, especially in marriage, as a divine gift in a fleeting world. Solomon affirms that even though death is inevitable, life still offers sacred joy in relationships, and these are not to be neglected. Marital contentment is a great blessing from God. Your life and wife (or husband) are gifts, not guarantees—so treasure them while they

last. **All the days** would seem to underscore God's desire that His gift of our spouse should be a life long commitment. When the [marriage covenant](#) is broken it inevitably has an impact on our "joy quotient" in this **fleeting life**!

**Daniel Akin** adds that "Every single day with our spouse can be joyful. The idea that the first few years of married life are terrific and the rest tolerable finds no basis in the Bible. Unfortunately, this idea lives in the minds of many Christians." (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes...](#))

*Marriage is a further help  
in the midst of the frustrations of life.*

-- [Michael Eaton](#)

**NET NOTE on fleeting** - As discussed in the note on the word "futile" in 1:2, the term הֶבֶל (hevel) has a wide range of meanings, and should not be translated the same in every place (see HALOT 236–237 s.v. הֶבֶל; BDB 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל). The term is used in two basic ways in OT, literally and figuratively. The literal, concrete sense is used in reference to the wind, man's transitory breath, evanescent vapor (Isa 57:13; Pss 62:10; 144:4; Prov 21:6; Job 7:16). In this sense, it is often a synonym for "breath; wind" (Eccl 1:14; Isa 57:13; Jer 10:14). The literal sense lent itself to the metaphorical sense. Because breath/vapor/wind is transitory and fleeting, the figurative connotation "fleeting; transitory" arose (e.g., Prov 31:30; Eccl 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10; Job 7:16). In this sense, it is parallel to "few days" and "[days] which he passes like a shadow" (Eccl 6:12). It is used in reference to youth and vigor (11:10) or life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9) which are "transitory" or "fleeting." In this context, the most appropriate meaning is "fleeting."

**Bob Utley** on **fleeting** - This is the Hebrew NOUN הֶבֶל (*hebel*). It was the name of Adam and Eve's second son, Abel (BDB 211 II). It is often used of the breath of humans. Its major usage is as imagery of transitoriness (cf. Eccl. 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10). In this context it encourages wise humans to enjoy their family life. This is the same root that occurs in Eccl. 1:2. It is a major theological concept in Ecclesiastes.

**For** (term of explanation) **this is your reward** ([cheleq](#) portion, lot) **in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun** - Solomon explains what we should enjoy marriage. **Reward** ([cheleq](#)) speaks of portion, share, or inheritance and points to relational joy as part of your divinely allotted inheritance. In short, God gave us marriage partners to give us joy in this fleeting life which is otherwise filled with **toil**.

**Bob Utley** on **toil** - The Hebrew root עָמַל (labor, toil, BDB 765, 766 II) denotes man's labor to support his family (cf. Eccl. 2:10,20,21,22,24; 3:13; 4:4,6,8,9; 5:18; 10:15). It implies hard work.

**Tommy Nelson** Man, enjoy your wife. Woman, enjoy your husband. Even though life is fleeting, enjoy your family and your kids. Isn't that some good counsel? Don't let today be darkened by the fact that you don't know everything. Enjoy right now. A few weeks from now, I'm going to meet my best buddy from high school at the airport. We are going to drive down to Waco, Texas, and go to our thirtieth high school reunion. I'm looking forward to it. This summer my wife and I are going to fly to Cape Cod. I will rent a car, and we'll drive to the place where my son plays in the Cape Cod League. We'll stay in a little bungalow on the beach. Before the sun comes up, I'll get up and go to this place called The White Hen and drink some terrific coffee and watch the dawn. Then I'll put on my running clothes and run up one of the most beautiful paths you've ever seen. I hope the world doesn't end. Maybe it will, but if it doesn't, I'm sure going to enjoy Cape Cod....I am enjoying my life right now. Why is this perspective so important? The other day I counseled a young, handsome guy in our church. He's healthy and doesn't have any bald spots. He's married to a lovely woman and has two wonderful little boys. He is about to throw it all away by being harsh and cruel to his wife. I looked at him and asked him how old he was. He told me he was thirty-four. Here is this young guy who is risking everything good in his life because he can't keep his angry mouth shut. I told him he needed to deal with his hostility and not squander his life through stupidity and sin. You only get one go-around. I want to live well and then die with a big smile on my face that the mortician will have to carve off. (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 148](#))

**William Barrick** - Eccl 9:9 commands the enjoyment of marital bliss with one's wife (cp. Prov 5:15–19). Some interpreters take it as advising discretion regarding one's choice of companion prior to marriage, rather than speaking of life with a woman after marriage.<sup>31</sup> Leupold believes that the absence of the definite article suggests that the writer directs the instruction to the unmarried who should marry in order to enjoy God's gift.<sup>32</sup> However, other passages use the word "woman" without the definite article in contexts demanding the meaning of "wife" (e.g., Gen 24:7; Ruth 4:13; 1 Sam 18:27). The object of "enjoy" is "life," not "woman." A partnership exists through which to enjoy life. Without his wife, a man cannot experience the fullness of the God-designed life.<sup>33</sup> Other documents from the Ancient Near East echo these same elements of joy in life—e.g., the Epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 2000 B.C.):<sup>34</sup>

Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly, Make thou merry by day and by night. Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing, Day and night dance thou and play!

Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,

Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.

...

Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!

For this is the task of [mankind]!

Solomon observes these same aspects of life on his own without the necessity of borrowing from the epic of Gilgamesh.<sup>35</sup> Noteworthy for its absence in the Epic of Gilgamesh, man's work or labor stands out in Ecclesiastes. Work forms a significant aspect of God-given joys. Solomon does not treat labor as either a curse or an option. Scripture stresses

- the dignity of labor as part of God's design from creation (Gen 2:15; Eccl 9:7)
- the necessity of work in a fallen world (Gen 3:17–19; Ps 104:14, 23; 2 Thess 3:10–12)
- the essentiality of the cycle of work and rest (Exod 20:9–10; 23:12; Eccl 5:12)
- the festivity arising from receiving the fruit of one's labors (Exod 23:16; Deut 16:13–15; Eccl 3:13; 9:7–9)
- the spirituality of work guided by the Spirit of God (Exod 31:3–5; 36:2–8; Rom 16:3, 6, 9, 12; Eph 4:12; Col 3:23)
- the community for which work provides (Deut 24:19; Prov 31:10–31; Eccl 4:9; Acts 20:35; Eph 4:28)
- the profitability of labor (Prov 14:23; Luke 10:7)
- the prosperity that results from labor with God's blessing (Deut 30:9; Ps 90:17; Prov 13:11)

**William Barrick** - Eccl 9:7 concludes with the thought that God has "approved" mankind's labors. "Approved" translates a Hebrew term that refers to divine acceptance, will, or favor. Enjoyment of the divine gifts in life "under the sun" belongs preeminently to those who do the divine will, who please God, who are recipients of His gracious favor. "God approves only that which is in conformity to his will and character."<sup>36</sup> The imperatives in these verses direct the believer to pursue only those things that God identifies as receiving His stamp of approval. "Already" might be taken as "long ago"—perhaps a reference to creation and God's blessing upon man and the gifts of wife, food, and clothing.<sup>37</sup> The imperative "Enjoy life" (Eccl 9:9; literally, "See life"), means "experience life."<sup>38</sup>

Words and phrases characteristic of the entire Solomonic treatise occur here: "fleeting life," "He has given," "under the sun," "your reward," "in life," "your toil," and "labored." Such clustering of concepts draws our attention back to Solomon's original question (Eccl 1:3). The six enjoyments in 9:7–9 represent the advantages. Note, also, the references to the individual's attitude or manner of enjoyment: "in happiness," "with a cheerful heart," experiencing God's approval, and a woman "whom you love."

**"Love Is Part of Your Reward"** Solomon reminds us: Don't neglect the relationships that make life sweet. Especially your marriage—God has given you this person to walk beside you through joy and pain, labor and rest. Love isn't a luxury—it's a gift from God to be honored, nurtured, and enjoyed. In a culture that idolizes independence or treats marriage lightly, Ecclesiastes says: Life is short. Love well. Hold nothing back. Marriage and love are gifts to be enjoyed—not merely endured. Cherish your spouse now—life is fleeting. Invest time and energy in your spouse—don't wait for "someday." Express affection and gratitude regularly. Pray with your spouse and seek to reflect God's joy in your home.

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**Fleeting** (vanity, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness)(01892) **hebel** means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. Hebel commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21, cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! **Hebel** refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use "my days are but a **breath**." (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where hebel parallels behālā from root bāhal "to hasten": Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) **Hebel** "generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be "Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die." (Gilbrant)

**HEBEL IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8

**Reward** (portion, share, lot)(02506) **cheleq** from **chalaq** = to divide, share) commonly refers to a share in an inheritance, share, lot. Early in OT is used with a technical nuance of share of land given to all the tribes when they entered the land. Cheleq may refer to a "portion" or "share" of booty divided among competitors (Gen. 14:24; 1 Sam. 30:24), or it may be a share of property or possession. "A share, a piece of territory in many ways: a part of booty or spoil (Gen. 14:24; Num. 31:36); of food (Lev. 6:17[10]); a tract or portion of land (Josh. 19:9; Hos. 5:7; Mic. 2:4); of Israel as a possession of the Lord (Deut. 32:9). It is used metaphorically of a person's doing his or her part in something (Job 32:17); of one's association or part or sharing in another group or way of life (Ps. 50:18; Isa. 57:6); or of the portion or share of fortune that the Lord gives to persons (Job 31:2). The portion or proper share for the wicked is punishment or calamity (Isa. 17:14)." (Complete Word Study Dictionary OT)

It is the term used for God's allotment of land to the tribes in Deuteronomy and Joshua.

"Portion" became a metaphor for the relationship of God and humans. Deuteronomy 32:9 says that God's "portion" or "inheritance" is his people. The psalmist, in turn, claims the Lord as his portion (Ps. 16:5). Even the wicked person has a portion from God, though it is not one of prosperity (Job 20:29). Thus, the concept of portion was integral to both the physical existence of Israel in the land of Palestine, which is their portion, and the spiritual portion they had in God.

**CHELEQ IN ECCLESIASTES** - Eccl. 2:10; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 3:22; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 5:19; Eccl. 9:6; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:2 -- "reward" in Eccl. 2:10; 5:18,19; 9:9 "lot" in Eccl. 3:22 "portion" in Eccl. 11:2

**Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever you find to do with your hands, do it with all your might, because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave, the place where you will eventually go.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:10 π ν τ α σ α ν ε ρ χ ε ρ σ ο υ τ ο π ο ι σ α ι ς δ ν α μ ς σ ο υ π ο η σ ο ν τ ι ο κ σ τ ι ν π ο η μ α κ α λ ο γ ι σ μ ς κ α γ ν σ ι ς κ α σ ο φ α ν δ π ο υ σ π ο ρ ε κ ε

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatsoever thine hand shall find to do, do with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Hades wither thou goest.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hands find to do, do with all your strength, because there is no work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:10 All that thy hand findeth to do, with thy power do, for there is no work, and device, and knowledge, and wisdom in Sheol whither thou art going.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever work you find to do, do it with all your might, for there is neither achievement, nor planning, nor science, nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:10 Anything you can turn your hand to, do with what power you have; for there will be no work, nor reason, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the nether world where you are going....

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever presents itself for you to do, do it with all your might, because there is no work, planning, knowledge, or skill in the grave where you're going.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever comes to your hand to do with all your power, do it because there is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in the place of the dead to which you are going.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

- thy hand: Nu 13:30 1Ch 22:19 28:20 29:2,3 2Ch 31:20,21 Ezr 6:14,15 Ne 2:12-20 3:1-16 4:2,6,9-13,17-23 13:8-31 Ps 71:15-18 Jer 29:13 Mt 6:33 Joh 4:34 Ro 12:11 15:18-20 1Co 9:24,26 1Co 15:10 16:10 Eph 5:16 Col 3:23 2Pe 1:12-15
- for: Ec 9:5,6 11:3 Job 14:7-12 Ps 6:5 88:10-12 Isa 38:18,19 Joh 9:4 Ac 20:25-31

## Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:22 I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

John 9:4 "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

Proverbs 10:4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

Time is short. Make every task count.  
Redeem the Time of your life!

## THIS IS YOUR MOMENT DO IT WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT

**Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might;** Solomon reminds us that earthly life is limited, and death will bring an end to all human action. So, do all you can while you still can. **Whatever** opportunity or responsibility God places before you, take it seriously. Don't do the bare minimum, put your whole heart and effort into your work, knowing your time is short.

**Bob Utley** - "Whatever your hand finds to do, verily do it with all your might" See note at Eccl. 9:7-9, #7. Physical labor originally was not a consequence of sin, but part of Adam's God-given task in the [GARDEN OF EDEN](#) (cf. Gen. 2:15). After the Fall labor became a curse (cf. Gen. 3:19). In this context labor refers to making a daily living (i.e., food, shelter, home, family, etc). This aspect of life is a gift from God. It takes our minds off the task of trying to discover God and His purposes, which we cannot do. Work is good! From the NT perspective it can glorify God (cf. Eccl. 11:6; John 9:4; Col. 3:17,23; Eph. 6:5-7). Do all you do as unto the Lord Jesus!

**Daniel Akin** The wise person gives his best effort with the available circumstances and opportunities. The temptation for all of us is to take this wise approach to life and push it to its unbiblical conclusion. For instance, it is irrational to be a workaholic because God ultimately gives us our work. Only he can bring any good out of it. We work, but he redeems. This truth need not promote passivity or sloppy work habits, but it does keep us from the folly of thinking that hard work alone will make for a rewarding life. It is also irrational to be a workaholic because relationships will suffer. To have the kind of marriage depicted in verse 9 of this chapter takes a lot of unhurried time. This is an impossibility if we expend all our effort outside the home. The unchecked workaholicism of so many people is also foolish because we do not know the day of our death. We ought to be wise in our use of time but watchful over a reckless attitude which thinks that more and faster is better. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes, ...](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - The things that make up employment in this life will not be present in the grave (sheol, the realm of the dead), so make the most of your opportunities now. One day our works will be judged, and we want to receive a reward for His glory (1 Cor. 3:10ff; Col. 3:23-25). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Tommy Nelson** Solomon says this is your only chance on this planet, so do what you do well. Note the progression in these verses: activity, planning, and wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to see. Planning is the ability to organize. Activity is the ability to initiate, persevere, and accomplish goals. Men and women are made to envision, to plan, and to do. God told Adam to enjoy life and cultivate the garden—He gave him work to do (and this is before the Fall). Solomon says that work is one of the areas that we can enjoy. Paul emphasized this when he said, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3:23). Work hard, be loyal, and do a good job. Do so well at your work that the company can't imagine life without you. Create something worthwhile with your life....It doesn't matter if you are working on an assembly line, at a convenience store, in an office, or out on the land; do your work well before the Lord. If you can't, then quit and go find a place where you can. Pour yourself into it and be the greatest at whatever you do. (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 151](#))

Sheol (Hades) - Lk 16:19-31+

**For** (term of explanation) **there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol** ([she'ol](#); Lxx - [Hades](#)) **where you are going**. Solomon explains why we should work with all our might while we still have our breath and our heart is beating! Death is a place where human enterprise ceases. There is no further contribution to life's projects. This life is a race and death marks the goal line. Once you cross it you are no longer in the race. God has given each person ever born a specific "lane" in which to run. Are you



running in your lane beloved? This recalls the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews...

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2+)

Solomon's theology here is deeply practical: Life is short. Death is certain. So work hard now, because you won't be able to serve or contribute after you're gone. This isn't a call to frantic striving, but to faithful, wholehearted effort. It parallels: Jesus' words: "We must work... while it is day" (John 9:4+). Paul's exhortation: "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord..." (Col. 3:23+).

**Bob Utley** - there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going" The OT (except for Job 14:14-15; 19:25-27; Ps. 16:9-10; 49:15; 86:13) depicts death as a conscious but shadowy existence. The faithful are with their families, but there is no fellowship, joy, or activity. Death is a place or abode, but nothing more (e.g., 1:11; 9:5; Job 3:13-19; 10:21-22). Thank God for the progressive revelation of the New Testament! Notice the things that humans do not do in *Sheol*:

1. activity ("work," cf. Eccl. 2:4,11; 3:17,22; 8:9; 9:7,10)
2. planning (or "reckoning schemes," Bcf. Eccl. 7:25,27)
3. pursue knowledge (cf. Eccl. 1:16,18; 2:21,26; 7:12)
4. gain wisdom (cf. Eccl. 1:13,16 [twice], 18; 2:3,9,13,21; 7:10,11,12 [twice], 19,23; 8:1; 9:10, 15,16 [twice], 18; 10:1,10)
5. [SPECIAL TOPIC: WHERE ARE THE DEAD? \(Sheol/Hades. Gehenna. Tartarus\)](#)

**William Barrick** - Eccl 9:10 takes up the thought of Eccl 9:4-6 and anticipates the conclusion to Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:8.39 Sheol (in this context, the grave and the cessation of all bodily functions characteristic of a living person) does not offer opportunities for labor, activity, planning, applying knowledge, or increasing wisdom. Solomon does not deny immortality nor does he eliminate the activities of departed spirits, whether in a place of the righteous dead or a place of the unrighteous dead. He focuses on entering into life "under the sun" wholeheartedly and identifies divine gifts which one can only use or enjoy "under the sun." As Tidball remarks, "Let us use them! If we don't use them here, it is certain that we won't get the opportunity to use them in the hereafter." (40 Derek Tidball, That's Just the Way It Is: A Realistic View of Life from the Book of Ecclesiastes) Even greater yet is the fact that "If we do not enjoy God's gifts, we dishonor the Giver." (41 Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes, 237.) 1 Corinthians 10:31 enjoins believers to "do all to the glory of God," while eating and drinking—indeed, in "whatever you do" (cp. Ps 118:24).

**"While You Still Can"** You have one life. One opportunity to love, serve, write, build, care, encourage, and labor. After you're gone, there's no more contribution to this world's story. So Solomon urges: "Do it now. Do it fully. Do it for God." Whether folding laundry or preaching sermons, whether raising children or digging ditches—your work matters. Do it with all your might, because time is short. There is no redo after death—this is your season to labor. Godly diligence reflects trust in God's purpose for your life. Put your best effort into your work—even (Especially) if unseen.

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**Sheol** (07585) **she'ol** is the underworld or the place to which people descend at death. The grave, death, the depths, the nether world, the underworld. Sheol was viewed as the place where departed spirits went after death. Sheol was envisioned as a dark region within the earth, the entrance to which was the grave with its steep slopes (cf. Ps 88:4-6). In Job 14:13-22, Job expressed the common view of life beyond death, namely, that in Sheol there is no contact with the living, only separation, but in Sheol there is a conscious awareness of the dreary existence. In Jonah 2:3 Jonah pictures himself in the belly of Sheol, its very center - in other words he is as good as dead. In Ps 22:6 Sheol, the underworld, the place of the dead, is personified as David's enemy. **Abaddon** is used as a name for Sheol in Ps 88:11. In Ps 143:3 "dark places" is a synonym for Sheol, pictured as a dark place located deep in the ground. In the ancient Israelite view he joined his deceased ancestors in Sheol. In Isaiah 7:11, the phrase "Make it as deep as Sheol or make it high upwards" words suggest that Ahaz can feel free to go beyond the bounds of ordinary human experience. The phrase "path of life" stands in contrast to death/Sheol in Pr 2:18-19; 5:5-6; 15:24. Sheol, the place of death, is sometimes depicted as a raging sea (see Ps 18:4, 15-16). Sheol is the land of the dead localized in Hebrew thought in the earth's core or the grave. "Sheol" in the Bible can be used four different ways: the grave, the realm of the departed [wicked] spirits or Hell, death in general, or a place of extreme danger (one that will lead to the grave if God does not intervene). (**Note:** Many of these comments on Sheol are summarized from over 100 comments on "Sheol" in the very helpful resource, [NET Note](#)).

**SHEOL - 64V** - Gen. 37:35; Gen. 42:38; Gen. 44:29; Gen. 44:31; Num. 16:30; Num. 16:33; Deut. 32:22; 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Sam. 22:6; 1 Ki. 2:6; 1 Ki. 2:9; Job 7:9; Job 11:8; Job 14:13; Job 17:13; Job 17:16; Job 21:13; Job 24:19; Job 26:6; Ps. 6:5; Ps. 9:17; Ps. 16:10; Ps. 18:5; Ps. 30:3; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 49:14; Ps. 49:15; Ps. 55:15; Ps. 86:13; Ps. 88:3; Ps. 89:48; Ps. 116:3; Ps. 139:8; Ps. 141:7; Prov. 1:12; Prov. 5:5; Prov. 7:27; Prov. 9:18; Prov. 15:11; Prov. 15:24; Prov. 23:14; Prov. 27:20; Prov. 30:16; Eccl. 9:10; Cant. 8:6; Isa. 5:14; Isa. 7:11; Isa. 14:9; Isa. 14:11; Isa. 14:15; Isa. 28:15; Isa. 28:18; Isa. 38:10; Isa. 38:18; Isa. 57:9; Ezek. 31:15; Ezek. 31:16;



In Hebrew thought, **Sheol** is the proper name of the subterranean world which was regarded as the land of the dead. In ancient Canaanite thought Death was a powerful god whose appetite was never satisfied. In the OT Sheol/Death, though not deified, is personified as greedy and as having a voracious appetite. See Pr 30:15-16; Isa 5:14. According to the OT, those who descend into the realm of death/Sheol are cut off from God's mighty deeds and from the worshiping covenant community that experiences divine intervention (Ps 30:9; 88:10-12; Isa 38:18). The Hebrew term שְׁחַל (shakhat, "pit" = not same Hebrew word used in Pr 1:12-see below) is often used as a title for Sheol (see Ps 16:10, 49:9 - decay = pit; Ps 55:24; 103:4 = pit of destruction, where our physical body decays).

In Dt 32:22, **Sheol** refers here not to hell and hell-fire - a much later concept - but to the innermost parts of the earth, as low down as one could get. The parallel with "the foundations of the mountains" makes this clear (cf. Ps 9:17; 16:10; 139:8; Isa 14:9, 15; Amos 9:2).

In Job **Sheol** is a land from which there is no return (Job 10:21, 7:9). It is a place of darkness and gloom (Job 10:21-22), a place where the dead lie hidden (Job 14:13); as a place appointed for all no matter what their standing on earth might have been (Job 30:23).

In Pr 9:18 "in the depths of Sheol" (שְׁחַל וְאֵדֹם, bé'imqe shé'ol) is a parallelism which stresses that those who turn to this way of life are ignorant and doomed. It may signal a literal death lying ahead in the not too distant future, but it is more likely an analogy. The point is that the life of folly, a life of undisciplined, immoral, riotous living, runs counter to God's appeal for wisdom and leads to ruin. That is the broad way that leads to destruction.

In Pr 15:11 "Sheol and Abaddon" (שְׁחַל וְאַבְדֹן, shé'ol va'adon); as in ASV, NASB, NRSV; cf. KJV "Hell and destruction"; NAB "the nether world and the abyss." These terms represent the remote underworld and all the mighty powers that reside there (e.g., Pr 27:20; Job 26:6; Ps 139:8; Amos 9:2; Rev 9:11). The LORD knows everything about this remote region.

In Pr 23:14 the term שְׁחַל (shé'ol, "Sheol") in this context probably means "death" (so NIV, NCV, NLT) and not the realm of the departed (wicked) spirits (cf. NAB "the nether world"). In the wisdom of other lands, Ahiqar 6:82 says, "If I strike you, my son, you will not die." The idea is that discipline helps the child to a full life; if the child dies prematurely, it would be more than likely a consequence of not being trained by discipline. In the book of Proverbs the "death" mentioned here could be social as well as physical.

**Sheol** is equivalent to the term **Hades** in the NT (Acts 2:27) and is distinct from the NT term **Gehenna**, the second death, the lake of fire, that place where even Sheol (Hades) will be thrown (Rev 20:14-15-[note](#)) In the OT, Hades was known as Sheol. It is the place where the unrighteous will reside (Luke 10:15; 16:23; Rev 20:13-14-[note](#)), a place of torment, especially as one knows that he is separated from God (cp Lk 16:23).

**Erwin Lutzer** has an excellent summary of **Sheol** in his book [One Minute After You Die \(borrow book\)](#):

The most important word in the Old Testament that speaks of the afterlife is the Hebrew word sheol, which occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament. In the King James Version of the Bible it is translated "hell" thirty-one times, "grave" thirty-one times, and "pit" three times. This inconsistency in translation has caused some to be confused regarding what sheol really means.

First, we must remember that elsewhere in the Bible, sheol is clearly distinguished from hell (I'll comment more on this later). And second, just because it is sometimes translated "grave," this does not mean that it refers only to the literal grave. Some people who believe that it refers to the grave and nothing more assume that when we die, we just die like a dog; i.e., since our bodies have died, our existence has ended.

Not so. Of course, sheol can be translated "grave" in some contexts, because the word includes the concept of the grave. But what seems clear is that the writers of the Old Testament believed that to go to sheol was not only to go to the grave but also to experience a conscious afterlife.

There is a Hebrew word that can only be translated "grave"—kever—but the writers often preferred the word sheol because it encompassed the region of departed spirits who were conscious, either in bliss or torment. The word sheol never means just a physical grave.

For the purpose of greater clarity, more recent translations of the Bible sometimes do not attempt to use an English equivalent to translate sheol. They simply let the Hebrew word stand as it is. For example, in the very first use of the word in the Old Testament, the New American Standard Bible quotes Jacob as saying, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son" (Genesis 37:35).

So here are some facts we should know in order to understand what the Old Testament means by the word sheol.

First, there is a clear distinction between the grave, where the body rests, and sheol, where the spirits of the dead gather. Although graves are usually in shallow earth or even above the earth, sheol is always thought of as down under, somewhere in a hollow part of the earth. Isaiah writes that when the king is overthrown, "Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones" (Isaiah 14:9; see also verse 10). Sheol is not impersonal; it is a place of activity.

Second, sheol is often spoken of as a shadowy place of darkness, a place that is not a part of this existence. Another prophet, Ezekiel, says that Tyre will be "[brought] down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit [sheol], so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set glory in the land of the living" (Ezekiel 26:20).

Job speaks of the inhabitants of sheol as in pain. "The departed spirits tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Naked is Sheol before Him, and Abaddon has no covering" (Job 26:5–6).

Third, after death one can be united with his ancestors in sheol. Jacob went down into sheol and was "gathered to his people" (Genesis 49:33). Abraham was assured by the Lord that he would go down to his fathers in peace (Genesis 15:15). Some have interpreted this as simply a reference to the fact that the bones of a particular family were often buried together. But the clear implication is that there would be a reunion of some kind in the world beyond.

That the word sheol refers to the realm of departed spirits seems unmistakable. What seems equally clear is that those who entered this region did not all have the same experience. For some, it was a region of gloom; but for others, it was a place where they would dwell with God.

Asaph, the author of many of the psalms, wrote, "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 73:23–25). He expected to see the glory of God at death; indeed, he speaks about heaven.

Fourth, there are hints in the Old Testament that sheol has different regions. Both the wicked and the righteous are said to go to sheol. Jacob went into sheol, but so did rebellious people, such as Korah and Dathan. This explains why there is a "lower region." The Lord says, "For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains" (Deuteronomy 32:22).

The reason there are two different realms in sheol is best explained by remembering that sheol has two different kinds of inhabitants. "This is the way of those who are foolish.... As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; and the upright shall rule over them in the morning, and their form shall be for Sheol to consume so that they have no habitation. But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me" (Psalm 49:13–15). Other Old Testament passages make a similar contrast (Job 24:19; Psalms 9:17; 16:10; 31:17; 55:15).

Perhaps one of the clearest expressions of immortality in the Old Testament comes from the book of Daniel. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Daniel not only believed that there were two classes of people who would live either in bliss or contempt, but that their bodies would also arise someday. This is an explicit reference to the New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

The Old Testament makes a sharp distinction between the wicked and the righteous, with the clear implication that they have separate destinies in the afterlife. Though this division of sheol is not expressly stated, later rabbis clearly taught that sheol has two compartments.

Sheol, then, is a general term for the nether world, the region of departed spirits. As the scholar B. B. Warfield wrote, "Israel from the beginning of its recorded history cherished the most settled conviction of the persistence of the soul in life after death.... The body is laid in the grave and the soul departs for sheol." Here the righteous and the wicked enter, though when they arrive, they do not have the same experience.

If the door to the afterlife is open but a crack in the Old Testament, it is thrown wide open in the New. Here we

have detailed descriptions of both the righteous and the unbelievers after death. Based on this information, we are better able to answer the question of what we can expect one minute after we have breathed our last. (From Lutzer's book which I highly recommend - [One Minute After You Die -- borrow book](#))

**Ecclesiastes 9:11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned and saw under the sun that-- The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again, I observed this on the earth: the race is not always won by the swiftest, the battle is not always won by the strongest; prosperity does not always belong to those who are the wisest, wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning, nor does success always come to those with the most knowledge— for time and chance may overcome them all.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:11 π στρεψα κα ε δον π τ ν λιον π ο το ς κο φοι ς δρ μο ς κα ο το ς δυν ατο ς π λεμο ς κα γε ο το ς σο φο ς ρ το ς κα γε ο το ς συνε το ς πλο το ς κα γε ο το ς γιν σκου σιν χ ρι ς τι κα ι ς κα π ντη μα συν αντ σε ται το ς π σιν α το ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet wealth to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of knowledge; for time and chance will happen to them all.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:11 I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:11 I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:11 I have turned so as to see under the sun, that not to the swift is the race, nor to the mighty the battle, nor even to the wise bread, nor even to the intelligent wealth, nor even to the skilful grace, for time and chance happen with them all.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:11 Another thing I have observed under the sun: that the race is not won by the speediest, nor the battle by the champions; it is not the wise who get food, nor the intelligent wealth, nor the learned favour: chance and mischance befall them all.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the valiant, nor a livelihood by the wise, nor riches by the shrewd, nor favor by the experts; for a time of calamity comes to all alike.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:11 I saw something else under the sun. The race isn't won by fast runners, or the battle

by heroes. Wise people don't necessarily have food. Intelligent people don't necessarily have riches, and skilled people don't necessarily receive special treatment. But time and unpredictable events overtake all of them.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:11 And again I saw under the sun that the reward goes not to him who is quick, or the fruits of war to the strong; and there is no bread for the wise, or wealth for men of learning, or respect for those who have knowledge; but time and chance come to all.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.

- returned: Ec 2:12 4:1,4 Mal 3:18
- that the race: 1Sa 17:50 2Sa 2:18-23 17:14,23 Ps 33:16,17 73:6,7 147:10,11 Jer 9:23 46:6 Am 2:14-16
- but: Ec 2:14,15 3:14,17 7:13 1Sa 2:3-10 Job 5:11-14 34:29 Pr 21:30,31 La 3:37,38 Da 4:35 Eph 1:11

#### Related Passages:

Psalms 33:16-17 The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. 17A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.

Proverbs 19:21 Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Matthew 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Romans 9:16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

## THE LIMITS OF OUR ABILITY

After urging his readers in verse 10 to work with all their might before death comes, Solomon now gives a realistic qualification: Even diligence and skill don't guarantee success. This introduces one of Ecclesiastes' core themes: life is not always fair or predictable. **Time and chance** (i.e., God's mysterious providence) override human strength or wisdom.

**I again saw under the sun** Solomon apparently has actual incidents (which he saw) and so reflects again on the realities of life as they appear to human eyes, **under the sun**.

**that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability** - Natural advantage doesn't guarantee outcome. Life is often unpredictable. Racing: The fastest don't always win. Battle: The strongest don't always triumph. Bread to the wise: Even the intelligent may go hungry. Wealth to the discerning: The shrewd are not always rich. Favor to the skillful: Talented people are often overlooked.

**Charles Swindoll** on the "Rat Race" - [Webster's](#) defines it as "strenuous, wearisome, and . . . competitive activity or rush," and it has often been summed up in three words: hurry, worry, and bury. It replaces living with survival, regards relaxation as a waste of time, and considers leisure activities as luxuries. It's the rat race—speeding along the ragged edge of reality at full throttle, trying desperately to catch the horizon before the sunset of life. In the fury of the chase, Ecclesiastes 9:11–18 invites us to pull over to the side of the road and step back for an honest, objective look at the rat race that captivates so many of us. These few verses provide us with divine counsel on how we can live with a more balanced perspective and why the race can never be won.....Why do people feel the need to approach life through the lens of optimism, pessimism, suspicion, or fatalism? Because life can be harsh, unjust, treacherous, and out of control—and in the end we die! How else will people cope with life when each day nudges them closer to falling over the ragged edge (Ecclesiastes 9:2)? In the midst of these approaches, God's realistic view of life crashes in, toppling all these unbalanced extremes like a bowling ball smashing a set of pins. In contrast to these views, God exhorts us to live with a perspective characterized by reality, joy, trust, and hope (Eccl 9:7–10). But if we take Ecclesiastes 9:10 seriously and do whatever our hand finds to do with all our might, doesn't that mean we should put the pedal to the metal and live it up? We could draw this conclusion if we aren't careful. This is why Solomon switched on the warning lights in Ecclesiastes 9:11–18, offering reality in the place of fantasy, gloom, paranoia, and passivity. It's the balance needed to save us from the rat race of the ragged edge. (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World ...](#))

**For** (term of explanation) **time and chance overtake them all.** Human success is subject to God's sovereign timing and the unpredictable realities of life. Control is an illusion. Don't misunderstand "chance" as if some events happen outside of God's control when in fact ABSOLUTELY NOTHING happens outside of God's sovereign control (whether we like that doctrine or not!)

**Warren Wiersbe** - Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock said, "I'm a great believer in luck. I find that the harder I work, the more I have of it." Christians trust God to guide them and help them in making decisions, and they believe that His will is best. They leave "time and chance" in His capable hands. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Iain Provan** on **chance** - The NIV's "chance" (pega') is an unhappy choice of translation, since this word connotes an impersonal and random force, whereas Qohelet is clear throughout the book that human fate lies ultimately in God's hands, no matter how random and impersonal what befalls us may appear. The verbal form pg' means 'to meet, encounter.' A pega' is simply something we encounter on the path of life—a circumstance or situation over which we have no control (See [Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Page 183](#)).

**David Hubbard** - This set of supreme virtues (swift...warriors...wise...discerning...ability) is **not always enough**. Timing ("time," see Ec 3:1) may upset the best of plans and the keenest of abilities. "Chance" is the unavoidable and unforeseen circumstance. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Tommy Nelson** You also need to work with wisdom. If you are just working to be successful and wealthy, you could be in for a rude awakening....Work hard, but with an asterisk. Even great natural abilities and hard work don't guarantee success. Life is unpredictable; there isn't any formula you can use that will automatically produce a certain outcome. Time and chance overtake them all....Jim Elliot focused his life on becoming a missionary. He prepared and organized himself for years before moving to work with Indian tribes in Ecuador. After only four years on the mission field, he and four other men were killed by the Auca Indians during an attempt to approach them with the gospel. This righteous man was cut down in the prime of his life....In business you see this principle of chance all the time. You work hard on a promising project and think the sale is in the bag. Months and months of effort go into it, along with dozens of letters and phone calls. Then right before the deal is signed, something happens and the whole plan falls through. The next week, someone calls out of the blue, and you make a sale in less than an hour to a customer you have never talked to before. **Time and chance overtake them all.** Who is the biggest guy in the Bible? Goliath. But he was killed by a boy with a sling. Who is the wealthiest man in the Bible? Solomon. But his life was a disaster. Who's the fastest guy in the Bible? Joab's brother. But he chased a guy who was bigger than him and ended up being run through by a spear. Who's the handsomest fellow in the Bible? David's son Absalom, of whom it was said that there wasn't a flaw in him from the bottom of his foot to the top of his head. He died hanging from a tree. The people with the greatest gifts often end up with the most tragic endings because they're not wise. So enjoy your life and work hard. But don't think that your natural abilities will give you automatic success.

**William Barrick** - Life's Inescapable Ironies (Eccl 9:11–12) Having previously itemized five sets of contrasting individuals in verse 2, Solomon now lists five ironies in Eccl 9:11:

- the swift might not win the race
- the warriors might not win the battle
- the wise might not obtain food (or, earn a living)
- the discerning might not gain wealth
- the skilled might not find favor

These ironies contribute to life's unpredictability.<sup>42</sup> Each irony states the negative first, in order to emphasize it. There is, for example, no guarantee that the swiftest individual in a race or a chase will be the victor (cp. Amos 2:14–15; see, also, Pss 33:17; 147:10; Prov 21:31). These ironies lead the reader to consider that God is the One in control of all outcomes. God alone provides those things that people value: wisdom, victory, food, wealth, favor, influence, and success (1 Sam 17:47; Ps 33:16–17; Rom 9:16).<sup>43</sup>

"Time and chance" (Eccl 9:11) might express the idea of "timely events." "Chance" represents an unhappy translation, since it refers to "a happening," not to anything like luck or fortune. The word for "time" is not the same one highlighted in chapter 3. This word occurs only here and in the Solomonic history at 1 Kings 5:4 (Hebrew, Eccl 9:18, "misfortune" is literally "evil occurrence"). In both contexts the term "chance" takes on the negative connotation of something like the English word "accident."

**Bob Utley** - **9:11-12** These verses highlight the ineffectualness and helplessness of human effort! They again magnify the sovereignty of God. This conclusion is based on the unfairness and injustice that Qoheleth had seen and experienced. Life is unpredictable and uncontrollable (i.e., "for time and chance overtake them all," cf. Eccl. 9:12; 8:7). His conclusions to this situations are (1) enjoy life when and where you can; death is coming (2) trust God even if He is unknown and invisible (3) there is an afterlife and humans will give an account of the gifts and stewardship of life (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-14) As I sit here writing this, I am so glad I live in a post-resurrection era. Progressive revelation, the life of Jesus, the gospel, the empty tomb are ours! New Testament believers understand so much more of the eternal plans and purposes of God than any OT person. The real question for us is, "What are we doing with this information?"!

**"The Illusion of Control"** You may be strong, fast, wise, and well-prepared...Yet life throws unexpected hardship your way. Solomon's lesson? Stop trusting in your strengths—trust in God. Plan wisely. Work hard. But don't assume success is owed to you. Your outcomes are in the hands of a sovereign God, not your own timing or talent. That's not depressing—it's freeing. It means you can rest knowing God sees and rules over all. Skill and strength are valuable—but not sovereign. Life often unfolds unpredictably. You are not ultimately in control—God is. Work hard, but hold your expectations humbly. Live by faith, not by presumption.

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**Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - DAMON RUNYON'S REMARK** Ecclesiastes 9:11

Damon Runyon was a famous New York columnist in the first half of the twentieth century. He once offered this wry observation on our text: "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, but that's the way to bet." Solomon wouldn't disagree at all. He would merely point out that the swift don't always come in first, nor do the strong win every battle. You win some, you lose some. That's life.

I read recently about a pastor who has the following sign hanging in his office:

Walt, Do not feel totally, personally,  
irrevocably responsible for everything. That's My job!  
Love, God!

In the movie Rudy, a college student hopes yet despairs of making the Notre Dame football team. The title character is too small, too slow, too weak, and in every way fails to meet the challenge. Totally discouraged, Rudy goes to a priest and asks if he will ever make the team. The priest smiles and says that in thirty-five years he has learned only two things for certain: "First, there is a God, and second, I'm not Him."

Yes, God is in control, often in ways we cannot understand or even imagine, yet always in good, wise ways. Consider the birth of Christ—the central miracle of the Christian faith. Theologians call this the incarnation— which means to take the form of human flesh. Skeptics and unbelievers have attacked our faith at precisely this point—the "silly" notion that God could ever become a man, much less a baby.

But that is precisely what happened at Bethlehem. Either you believe that or you don't. If you don't, then all the miracles of the Bible will seem impossible to you. But if you do believe that, then you shouldn't have trouble believing anything else the Bible says. You will be able to believe an all-powerful God can bring all things to pass.

Many Christians struggle with a heavy load of worries about the future. There are career questions, health issues, family problems, financial difficulties, and a host of unfulfilled dreams. We wonder if the future will simply mean more of the same. Sometimes we truly feel that everything depends on us and that we are "totally, personally, irrevocably responsible for everything." When that happens, we should ponder the miracle of Christmas.

Ponder, for instance, these miracles of Christmas: God can arrange for a virgin to become pregnant. He can cause a Roman ruler to order a census at precisely the right moment in history. He can ensure that the baby will be born at exactly the place prophesied seven hundred years earlier. He can bring together angels, shepherds, and wise men to celebrate that miraculous birth. And He can take a tiny baby born in a stable and make that baby the Savior of the world.

Now if God can do all that, what are you so worried about?

God of the impossible, may I never doubt Your power or believe that You are not equal to my circumstances.  
Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you agree with Damon Runyon's remark? Why or why not?
- What does this teach us about making our own plans for the future?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Luke 2:1-20; Galatians 5:16-26; and James 4:13-17.

**Ecclesiastes 9:12** Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:12 For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:12 For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:12 Surely, no one knows his appointed time! Like fish that are caught in a deadly net, and like birds that are caught in a snare— just like them, all people are ensnared at an unfortunate time that falls upon them suddenly.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:12 πικὰ γέοκ γινώ νθρωπος τὴν καιρὸν αὐτοῦ· ὅς οὐ χθὲς οὐ θηρεύμενοι ν μπιβλ στρ κακ καὶ ρνεα τ θηρεύμενα ν παγιδι ζατ παγιδεονται οὐ οὐ το νθρ που ες καιρὸν πονηρὸν τὰν πιπσ π ατο ζ φνω

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:12 For surely man also knows not his time: as fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as birds that are caught in a snare; even thus the sons of men are snared at an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:12 For man certainly does not know his time: like fish caught in a cruel net or like birds caught in a trap, so people are trapped in an evil time as it suddenly falls on them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:12 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.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:12 People can never predict when hard times might come. Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:12 For even man knoweth not his time; as fish that are taken hold of by an evil net, and as birds that are taken hold of by a snare, like these are the sons of man snared at an evil time, when it falleth upon them suddenly.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:12 We do not know when our time will come: like fish caught in the treacherous net, like birds caught in the snare, just so are we all trapped by misfortune when it suddenly overtakes us.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:12 For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:12 Man no more knows his own time than fish taken in the fatal net, or birds trapped in the snare; like these the children of men are caught when the evil time falls suddenly upon them.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:12 No one knows when his time will come. Like fish that are caught in a cruel net or birds caught in a snare, humans are trapped by a disaster when it suddenly strikes them.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:12 Even man has no knowledge of his time; like fishes taken in an evil net, or like birds taken by deceit, are the sons of men taken in an evil time when it comes suddenly on them.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:12 For man does not know his time. Like fish which are taken in an evil net, and like birds which are caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

- **man:** Ec 8:5-7,11 Lu 19:42-44 2Co 6:2 1Pe 2:12
- **fish:** Pr 7:22,23 Hab 1:14-17 2Ti 2:26
- **the sons:** Job 18:8-10 Ps 11:6 73:18-20 Pr 6:15 29:6 Isa 30:13 Lu 12:20,39 17:26-31 21:34-36 1Th 5:3 2Pe 2:12

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

Luke 12:20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'

James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.



Job 14:5 “Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.

Matthew 24:44 “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Like fish caught in a net...  
No one knows the time of their death or trial.  
Disaster often comes suddenly and unexpectedly.

## CAUGHT IN A MOMENT TRAPPED WITHOUT WARNING

Ecclesiastes 9:11 explained that success isn't always earned—“time and chance” affect everyone. Now in verse 12, Solomon builds on that idea, showing how death and calamity often arrive unexpectedly, catching people off guard, no matter how prepared or wise they are. This is part of Solomon's broader call to live wisely, humbly, and urgently in a world we cannot control.

*Martin Luther said that a man should always live  
with the day of his death on his mind.*

**Moreover, man does not know his time** In context **his time** refers to the moment of death (or possibly a crisis in your life) which is sovereignly appointed by God (Heb 9:27+) but unpredictable by man. No human being knows when disaster or death will strike because it is outside our control.

**NET NOTE on time** - Heb “time.” BDB 773 s.v. 2 תַּיִם suggests that תַּיִם (‘et, “time”) refers to an “uncertain time.” On the other hand, HALOT 901 s.v. 6 תַּיִם nuances it as “destined time,” that is, “no one knows his destined time [i.e., hour of destiny].” It is used in parallelism with זְמַן (zéman, “appointed time; appointed hour”) in Ec 3:1 (HALOT 273 s.v. זְמַן; BDB 273 s.v. זְמַן). Eccl 3:9–15 teaches God's sovereignty over the appointed time-table of human events. Similarly, Qoheleth here notes that no one knows what God has appointed in any situation or time. This highlights the limitations of human wisdom and human ability, as Ec 9:11 stresses

**Like fish caught in a treacherous net** - This [simile](#) illustrates that like fish which are unsuspecting, vulnerable creatures, and are suddenly trapped in a net, so too is our lot in life! Like fish swimming freely, people may feel safe, until they are suddenly caught by trouble or death.

**And birds trapped in a snare** Birds provide another [simile](#) for like birds people may “fly freely,” full of life, but are vulnerable to sudden entrapment, the idea of snare often used metaphorically for hidden danger.

**Swindoll** - Solomon likened the intervention of God's hand in a person's life to fish caught in a net or birds in a snare—a negative event that falls upon people suddenly.....Death is a reality, and sudden cataclysmic change is real. We can't escape such events no matter how mighty, clever, or aggressive we are. It does us no good to deny our own mortality or to challenge God's sovereignty. We are only deceiving ourselves if we pretend to be immune to tragedy. Has God ever gotten your attention by unexpected or drastic means? (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World ...](#))

**So the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them-** Solomon's point is straightforward saying that people are caught by tragedy or death without warning, often in moments they did not expect. Tragedy often strikes without warning, which is why Solomon urges earlier (Ec 9:10) to live wholeheartedly and urgently.

The upshot is that this verse reinforces three key truths about life “under the sun” -- Life is uncertain. Death is certain and often sudden. Human control is limited. But rather than despair, Solomon's goal is to provoke us to a sense of urgency in how we live, and trust in God's sovereign timing (see Ec 3:11+).

*Solomon makes the point that no one  
can know the timing for life's ironic moments*  
-- William Barrick

**David Hubbard** - Far from being foolproof, unflappable, and immune to failure, the most talented among us can be vulnerable to mishap on occasion (v. 12). And we have no way of predicting when this may happen—a human being (“man,” Heb. ’ādām, see 1:3) “does not know” his or her “time.” (3:1). The apt illustration is drawn from hunting and fishing (see 7:26, where “snares,” “nets,” and “fetters” describe the wiles of certain women). “Evil time” suggests the unforeseen accident, as in 1 Kings 5:4. “Falls suddenly” carries on the snaring imagery and shows that “evil time” here has no reference to a wicked era but to an unexpected mishap that catches any person (“sons of men”) off guard and devastates well-laid plans.....Kohleth taught his students to cope with life's mysteries and their mortality by finding joy in their daily round of ordinary activities. Jesus teaches His disciples to do the same. But

He teaches more. His life, death, and Resurrection point to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading and to a joy that flows not from what we see but from what we believe—"a joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:3–9). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

**Tommy Nelson** God will rudely interrupt your life at very inconvenient times. His timing may be perfect for Him, but it often doesn't seem perfect to us. He has a way of making mincemeat of our plans. If you don't believe me, try this. Take out a sheet of paper and date it. Now write down all the major things you believe are going to happen in the next year—the projects, trips, goals, events, and so on. Now save the paper for a year, then reread it and see how many of those things actually happened. It's wonderful to plan; just don't love your plan more than you love God. Only one thing is certain about a plan; it won't work exactly like you expected it to. Do right and be wise but be ready to flex. (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 153](#))

**William Barrick** - Solomon makes the point that no one can know the timing for life's ironic moments (Eccl 9:12). People can be trapped by circumstances just like a fish caught by a net or a bird caught by a cleverly designed trap. "**An evil time**" seems by context to refer to more than just death—other calamities, disasters, and troubles may be included.<sup>44</sup> Trouble never comes at a good time—neither does death. A frugal man planning for his retirement, can leave life "under the sun" without the opportunity to enjoy it (cp. Luke 12:16–21). The chores for getting one's house in order before leaving this life might never be completed. Something will always be left incomplete, absent, lost, or never started. Longman concludes that "human inability drives Paul to divine grace, while Qohelet ends up in frustration."<sup>45</sup> However, Solomon's frustration at this point in his discourse is a temporary reaction, not a permanent one. He later speaks of a conscious awareness of the Creator's presence (Eccl 12:1), the reality of God's future judgment (Eccl 11:9; 12:14), and the return of man's spirit to God Himself (Eccl 12:7). The fact that God will judge the good as well as the bad (Eccl 12:14) indicates that God will make some form of distinction between the two beyond the sun.

**"You Don't Know Your Time"** You don't know when the call will come. You don't know what tomorrow holds. But you know Who holds it. Solomon isn't telling you to fear—but to live wisely, urgently, and gratefully. Because the trap of death or disaster may come without warning, but those who walk with God are never truly caught off guard. Prepare spiritually—don't wait for a more convenient time. Use each day wisely—it could be your last. Refuse to take time for granted—treasure every relationship. Accept that you cannot control everything—rest in God's control. Let this awareness shape how you invest your time.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - **LIKE FISH IN THE NET** Ecclesiastes 9:12

No person knows when his or her final hour will come. How often are we reminded of this solemn truth. Yesterday I received word that a distinguished minister in our own city died suddenly after an early morning prayer meeting. I knew him slightly and admired him from a distance. Over thirty years ago he had founded the church where he served as pastor until his death at age fifty-five. Not a heart attack, the doctors said, but a blood clot or an aneurysm. He preached last Sunday with no idea it was his last time in the pulpit. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Solomon uses two images from nature to drive home the unexpected nature of death. Fish swim serenely in the ocean, then suddenly they are scooped up in the net. Birds fly freely through the air, then stumble into a hidden snare. The whole point is that very few of us know the precise moment of our own death. For every person who lives to a ripe old age and dies surrounded by family and friends, there are many more who are struck down much earlier by a wasting disease or a disastrous accident.

One day you're feeling fine, the next you notice a lump in your neck or a strange pain in your ribs. Or you're driving down the road, absentmindedly flipping the stations on your radio when a truck jumps the median divider and hits your car head-on. Or you might be caught in a drive-by shooting. Who knows? The list of possible ways to die is endless.

Since you can't know the moment of your own death, the best you can do is to (1) accept that reality, and (2) be prepared when the moment comes. As a practical matter, that certainly involves having your will up-to-date, keeping short accounts with God and with others, and making sure that the people you love the most know how much you love them.

On another level, it means following Martin Luther's advice. The father of the Reformation said that a man should always live with the day of his death on his mind. Perhaps in modern management terms that means beginning with the end in view.

You won't live forever. You may not see another sunrise. You may find yourself unexpectedly dead in the next twenty-four hours. Here is some wise advice: Live each day as though it were your last—and one day you'll be right.

Gracious God, since nothing can befall me today without Your express permission, help me to live with excitement and not with fear. Amen.

## SHINING THE LIGHT

- Can you think of an instance where death came suddenly to someone you knew personally?
- What steps have you taken to prepare for your own death? What would you say is the "unfinished business" of your life at this

point?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Nahum 1:2-7; Acts 12:20-25; and Hebrews 2:14-15.

**Ecclesiastes 9:13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:13 This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me:

NET Ecclesiastes 9:13 This is what I also observed about wisdom on earth, and it is a great burden to me:

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:13 κα γε το το ε δον σοφ αν π τ ν λιον κα μεγ λη στ ν πρ ς με

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:13 This I also saw to be wisdom under the sun, and it is great before me:

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:13 I have observed that this also is wisdom under the sun, and it is significant to me:

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:13 I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me:

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:13 Here is another bit of wisdom that has impressed me as I have watched the way our world works.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:13 This also I have seen: wisdom under the sun, and it is great to me.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:13 Here is another example of the wisdom I have acquired under the sun and it strikes me as important:

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:13 On the other hand I saw this wise deed under the sun, which I thought sublime.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:13 I also have seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it made a deep impression on me.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:13 This again I have seen under the sun as wisdom and it seemed great to me.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

- Ec 9:11 6:1 7:15 8:16

## IMPRESSION WISDOM UNDER THE SUN

This passage follows Solomon's reflections on how Life is unpredictable (vv.11–12), Yet wisdom still matters—even if it isn't always honored. Now Solomon offers an observed parable, an example of "wisdom under the sun," which illustrates the quiet power and eventual neglect of wisdom in this world.

**Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me - NLT** "Here is another bit of wisdom that has impressed me as I have watched the way our world works." **NJB** = "Here is another example of the wisdom I have acquired under the sun and it strikes me as important." Solomon highlights the following story as a notable example of wisdom at work in everyday reality. Wisdom may be quiet, overlooked, or humble—but it is still remarkable. Solomon is jaded by life at many points in Ecclesiastes, but here he is stirred, even moved by the brilliance of true wisdom in action.

**William Barrick** - A Lesson from History (Eccl 9:13–18) Wisdom forms the theme of the final section of this chapter. In Ec 9:13–18 "wise" and "wisdom" occur a total of seven times. A specific event involving a besieged city and a wise citizen (Eccl 9:14–15) occupies a key role in the section. On the one hand, the outcome follows the pattern of Eccl 2:16, 4:13–16, and Eccl 9:5—people will eventually forget the wise and their exploits (cp. Ps 31:12; 41:5). In this particular case, the city was small (Eccl 9:14), making the forgetting of one of its more significant citizens all the more poignant (cp. Eccl 9:5). (Elizabeth Huwiler, "Ecclesiastes") On the other hand, wisdom does produce results, including the saving of lives even during a time of war (cp. Eccl 7:12; Prov 20:18; 21:22; 24:5–6). A similar situation arose at Abel Beth-Maacha where a wise woman succeeded in delivering her city, but her name is unrecorded and unremembered (2 Sam 20:14–22).

Does the treatment of the poor man in Ecclesiastes 9: 13-16 surprise you? Today he probably would be hailed as a hero. We would praise the poor man for his ingenuity in saving the city from defeat at the hands of an overwhelming force. We aren't told how he did it—and perhaps the details don't matter. Certainly it was some combination of skill, tenacity, surprise, and perhaps a bit of derring-do that saved the day.

The man does deserve great praise. A ticker-tape parade would not be out of order. In today's world we would certainly name a high school after him along with a boulevard and perhaps a major airport. No doubt he would appear on all the morning news shows, and his life story would be told on a special one-hour biography. It's not hard to imagine that he would receive enough job offers to guarantee that he would never be poor again.

But that's not what happened. Artist Andy Warhol remarked that in the future everyone would get their fifteen minutes of fame and then be forgotten. Certainly we live in a culture of instant gratification where the central question is, "What have you done for me lately?" So after the first round of interviews the poor man is never heard from again. "Hey, let us know when you save another city and we'll be glad to do another interview." So maybe the ultimate treatment of the poor man isn't so surprising after all. That's the way of the world—which makes this story so believable.

We can moan and groan about it but Solomon would say, "Stop whining. The world forgets its heroes." If you're waiting for someone to thank you for doing a good deed, you might have to wait a long time. Doing good is its own reward. And if you do your deeds to be seen by men, you'll have your reward and nothing else to show for it (Matthew 6:1-4). If you do good simply because you have a chance to do it, you might or might not be rewarded on earth, but you will not be forgotten in heaven. This is the promise of Jesus.

As Solomon has reminded us many times, the world is a cruel place, sometimes rewarding the bad guys and punishing the good ones.

More often the good guys are simply forgotten. Better days are coming, but they're not here yet.

Holy Lord, help me to remember that though the good I do today may be quickly forgotten on earth, it will be remembered forever in heaven. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- Why are we so quick to forget the good that others do on our behalf? How do you respond when others fail to appreciate what you do for them?
- Name three people who deserve a "thank you" from you today.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 2 Samuel 9:1-13; Matthew 6:1-4; and Luke 17:11-19.

**Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was once a small city with a few men in it, and a mighty king attacked it, besieging it and building strong siege works against it.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:14 π λ ι ς μ ι κ ρ ὀ ὁ ρ ο ὁ σ π α τ ν χ ρ α κ α ς μ ε γ λ ο υ ς καὶ ὀ ὁ ρ ο ὁ σ π α τ ν χ ρ α κ α ς μ ε γ λ ο υ ς καὶ ὀ ὁ ρ ο ὁ σ π α τ ν χ ρ α κ α ς μ ε γ λ ο υ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:14 suppose there were a little city, and few men in it; and there should come against it a great king, and surround it, and build great mounds against it;

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a small city with few men in it. A great king came against it, surrounded it, and built large siege works against it.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:14 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.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a small town with only a few people, and a great king came with his army and besieged it.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:14 A little city, and few men in it, and a great king hath come unto it, and hath surrounded it, and hath built against it great bulwarks;

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was once a small town, with only a few inhabitants; a mighty king made war on it, laying siege to it and building great siege-works round it.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:14 Against a small city with few men in it advanced a mighty king, who surrounded it and threw up great siegeworks about it.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a small town with a few soldiers in it, and a powerful king came to attack it. He surrounded it and blockaded it.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a little town and the number of its men was small, and there came a great king against it and made an attack on it, building works of war round about it.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:14 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.

- There was: 2Sa 20:15-22 2Ki 6:24-33 7:1-20

### SMALL, SURROUNDED BUT NOT DEFEATED

**There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it**The setup is vulnerability -- Small city, lacking defenses, with few men and thus weak in manpower. Great king speaks of overwhelming power. The upshot is that humanly speaking, the city was doomed.

**Ssurrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it** - Surrounded it points to a complete siege, thus cutting off all hope from the outside. Large siegeworks (what a contrast with the small city) highlighting the picture that this king used maximum force, thus assuring that total conquest was inevitable. The setup is meant to feel hopeless. According to worldly standards. The city should fall. Might should win. The weak should be crushed. But the contrast is intentional—this dark setup magnifies the surprise in Ec 9:15, when wisdom, not strength, delivers the city.

This is a parable of unexpected salvation, similar in tone to: David vs. Goliath (1 Sam 17), Gideon's 300 vs. Midian (Judg 7) and ultimately to Jesus' meekness defeating sin and death (Mk 10:45+).

[William Barrick](#) - **Large siegeworks** (Eccl 9:14) represents the same Hebrew word appearing in Ec 9:12 where it is translated “**net**.” By using the same word, Solomon intentionally associates the siege of the city with those adversities that might suddenly come upon either an individual or a community. (Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes) **Provan** points to the account of the Assyrian king Sennacherib that describes his siege of Jerusalem in the time of King Hezekiah as shutting Hezekiah up in “his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.” (Provan, Ecclesiastes)

**Ecclesiastes 9:15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:15 However, a poor but wise man lived in the city, and he could have delivered the city by

his wisdom, but no one listened to that poor man.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:15 κα ε ρ ν α τ ν δ ρ α π ν η τ α σο φ ν κα δ ι α σ σ ε ι α τ ς τ ν π λ ι ν ν τ σο φ α τ ο κα ν θ ρ ω π ο ς ο κ μ ν σ θ η σ ν τ ο ν δ ρ ς τ ο π ν η τ ο ς κ ε ν ο υ

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:15 and should find in it a poor wise man, and he should save the city through his wisdom: yet no man would remember that poor man.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now a poor wise man was found in the city, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:15 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.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:15 A poor, wise man knew how to save the town, and so it was rescued. But afterward no one thought to thank him.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:15 and there hath been found in it a poor wise man, and he hath delivered the city by his wisdom, and men have not remembered that poor man!

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:15 But there was in that town a poverty-stricken sage who by his wisdom saved the town. No one remembered this poor man afterwards.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:15 But in the city lived a man who, though poor, was wise, and he delivered it through his wisdom. Yet no one remembered this poor man.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:15 A poor, wise person was found in that town. He saved the town using his wisdom. But no one remembered that poor person.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:15 Now there was in the town a poor, wise man, and he, by his wisdom, kept the town safe. But no one had any memory of that same poor man.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:15 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.

- yet: Ge 40:23 Es 6:2,3

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

1 Corinthians 1:27 ) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

Mark 6:3-6 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

Hebrews 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

A king receiving praise in the city square,  
while the real deliverer walks away alone.

**GREAT DELIVERANCE  
NO GRATITUDE**

**But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom-** This man had no status, but possessed



the wisdom to save the city. Wisdom, not weapons or wealth, was the means of salvation.

**Yet no one remembered that poor man** Despite his impact, the **poor wise man** was ignored afterward. Solomon's point is that wisdom is effective but often unappreciated, especially when it comes from the humble or poor. Wisdom can deliver but the world doesn't always reward or remember it.

*Wisdom matters more than power—  
but it is often overlooked.*

**Tommy Nelson** Give me a wise man over a powerful man any day. A person who is not that brilliant or talented but loves the Bible, has a humble heart, and is willing to obey God will accomplish great things. Wisdom will whip power every single time....However, the text ends on a minor note. If you do have wisdom, don't think anyone will notice. The poor man who delivered his city was forgotten. How unjust! How unfair! In this world, you will never receive the recognition and appreciation you deserve.

**William Barrick** - The margin of NASU notes that "he delivered" could be translated alternatively as "he might have delivered" (Eccl 9:15). Some commentators prefer to see the verb as speaking of a hypothetical situation. (Gordis, Koheleth) However, the context appears to favor an actual past event, since Solomon claims to have observed the situation he describes (Eccl 9:13).

**Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:16 Then I said: "Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, And his words are not heard.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I concluded that wisdom is better than might, but a poor man's wisdom is despised; no one ever listens to his advice.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:16 κα ε πα γ γαθ σοφ α π ρ δ ναμιν κα σοφ α το π νητος ξουθενωμ νη κα λ γοι α το ο κ ε σιν κου μνοι

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:16 And I said Wisdom is better than power: yet the wisdom of the poor man is set at nought, and his words not listened to.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:16 And I said, "Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heeded."

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:16 So even though wisdom is better than strength, those who are wise will be despised if they are poor. What they say will not be appreciated for long.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:16 And I said, 'Better is wisdom than might, and the wisdom of the poor is despised, and his words are not heard.' --

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I say: Wisdom is more effective than brute force, but the wisdom of a poor man is not valued: no one listens to what he has to say.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded."

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:16 Though I had said, "Wisdom is better than force," yet the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words go unheeded.

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength," even though that poor person's wisdom was despised, and no one listened to what he said.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:16 Then I said, Wisdom is better than strength, but the poor man's wisdom is not

respected, and his words are not given a hearing.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.

- **Wisdom:** Ec 9:18 7:19 Pr 21:22 24:5
- **the poor:** Pr 10:15 Mk 6:2,3 Joh 7:47-49 9:24-34 1Co 1:26-29 Jas 2:2-6

The world may rush past unaware  
of wisdom of a poor man

## BETTER THAN STRENGTH YET STILL IGNORED

**So** - Term of conclusion. This verse follows the short parable (Ec 9:13–15) in which a poor wise man saves a small city from destruction—but afterward is forgotten. Now Solomon offers his reflective conclusion: Wisdom is truly better than brute force, yet it is often unappreciated, especially when it comes from the poor. This teaches us both to prize wisdom and to acknowledge the world's broken system of values.

**I said, "Wisdom is better than strength."** Solomon affirms that wisdom outperforms raw power—as seen in the poor man who saved the city.

**But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded** Even though he had great wisdom, people refused to listen. The source of the message (a poor man) caused it to be ignored. Solomon's words urge us to pursue wisdom, even if the world scorns it—and to honor wisdom, even when it comes from humble vessels. Words of truth are often ignored because of the speaker's status.

**Tommy Nelson** Even if you are wise, most people won't care. If you commit yourself to walking with God and serving Him, God will be pleased and you will have great joy. But a lot of people will think you are missing out on life. That's the way it is....Even though this world may not applaud wisdom now, when all is said and done, it's what will carry you through the inequities of life. Revere God, learn His Word, and obey Him in a holy, enjoyable life.

These are incredibly practical ideas. Enjoy life and work hard with wisdom and holiness, realizing that no one cares about it but God Himself. Hold on to these ideas simply because they are true. Even in difficult times, remember that your day will come. (See [A Life Well Lived: A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes - Page 154](#))

**Daniel Akin** - The idea of wisdom being better than strength is captured in the well-known belief that "the pen is mightier than the sword." The problem, as we have seen, is that wisdom from a person considered unimportant by society is either not heeded, or it is heeded and he or she is not given appropriate recognition. Not only does God use weak people (1 Cor. 1:18–31+), but he enshrines their memory—as a quick read of the Gospels will show. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes, ...](#))

**Charles Swindoll** - Wise counsel is never popular, rarely obeyed, and seldom remembered (Ecclesiastes 9:16) Yes, wisdom is ultimately better than power, but Solomon didn't paint a picture of life as it ought to be. He scratched out a realistic sketch of the way things really are. Be wise, but remember that in the world's eyes wise living won't receive the lauds and honor it deserves. Seek God's will and walk by the Spirit in the home and the workplace, but don't expect to be patted on the back. (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World ...](#))

**William Barrick** - The story about the wise man draws out four conclusions: (1) Wisdom proves superior to might (Eccl 9:16a), (2) people do not always respect or honor wisdom (Eccl 9:16b), (3) powerful people can make it difficult to listen to the voice of wisdom (Eccl 9:17), and 4) no matter how superior wisdom might be, one foolish act by a sinner can destroy the good results of wisdom.<sup>50</sup>

**Walter Kaiser** - The conclusions to be drawn from this parable are found in Ec 9:16–18. (1) Wisdom, that gift that comes from the fear of God (Prov. 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 15:33), is a greater asset than strength, even though it is despised and left unheeded by the masses (9:16a). Such a triumph of wisdom over brute force as in the parable of 9:13–16 was no doubt fresh in Solomon's mind. For when David's general, Joab, besieged the small city of Abel in Israel, where the insurrectionist Sheba had taken refuge, a wise woman called to Joab from the city wall and delivered the city in her wisdom (2 Sam. 20:16–22). The other side of the coin is that (2) wisdom is not always heeded (9:16b). Only in emergencies can the quiet words of wisdom be heard. Therefore, (3) men must have a certain mental disposition and spirit of receptivity if wisdom is to be heard (9:17). The clamor of demagogues and self-styled bosses is a striking contrast to words of quiet instruction delivered by wise men of God. (4) "Wisdom is power," to restate an old proverb, but one sinner (or ruler) who in his folly and self-willed obstinacy refuses to accept "wisdom" thereby destroys much good and many a kingdom, too (9:18). (Borrow [Quality Living](#))

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:17 Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

NET Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise are heard in quiet, more than the shouting of a ruler is heard among fools.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:17 ἄ γοι σοφ ν ν νάπα σει κο ονται π ρ κρᾱυγ ν ξουσιαζ ντων ν φροσ ναις

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise are heard in quiet more than the cry of them that rule in folly.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:17 The calm words of the wise are heeded more than the shouts of a ruler over fools.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:17 Better to hear the quiet words of a wise person than the shouts of a foolish king.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise in quiet are heard, More than the cry of a ruler over fools.

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:17 The calm words of the wise make themselves heard above the shouts of someone commanding an army of fools.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:17 "The quiet words of the wise are better heeded than the shout of a ruler of fools"--!

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:17 One should pay more attention to calm words from wise people than shouting from a ruler of fools.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise which come quietly to the ear are noted more than the cry of a ruler among the foolish.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

- Ge 41:33-40 1Sa 7:3-6 Pr 28:23 Isa 42:2,4 Jas 1:20 3:17,18

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 9:13 The woman of folly is boisterous, She is naive and knows nothing.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." But you were not willing,

James 3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

Wisdom is often quiet but powerful.  
Roaring does not prove one right.

### **POWER OF QUIET WISDOM BETTER THAN RULER'S ROAR**

**The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.** Wisdom doesn't need to shout. God's Word reminds us: what is true may come quietly, and its power lies in substance, not spectacle. This verse calls us to listen carefully, value substance over style, and pursue the voice of godly wisdom, even when it is soft and humble.

*Human rulers will always outshout wise counselors,  
and fools prefer the former*  
-- Charles Swindoll

**Charles Swindoll** - The quiet, reasonable, wise person who gently dispenses godly counsel is often trampled underfoot because the rat race isn't won that way. You see, people often prefer the loudest authority or the latest self-help fad to the wise counselor who calmly speaks the unpopular truth. (See [Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook: Finding Joy in a World ...](#))

**Daniel Akin** - The quiet words of a wise person are superior to the boisterous shouts of politicians who want to call attention to themselves. Truth is conveyed through the mouth of a wise person, while the loud shouts of rulers are nothing but demagoguery. A country labeled a "superpower" but which is littered with foolish rulers is in trouble. (See [Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes. ...](#))

**William Barrick** - What are "the words of the wise heard in quietness" (Eccl 9:17)? Does the statement mean "heard in quietness" (referring to the words being spoken in quietness or calm) or "in quietness is heard" (those who hear should listen to the words in quietness, without interruption)? (51 Eaton, Ecclesiastes) The parallel ("the shouting of a ruler among fools") indicates the first understanding. Some commentators prefer to take the word "heard" in the sense of "hearable" or "worth hearing." (52 Whybray, Ecclesiastes) Thus, the words of the wise spoken quietly or calmly possess value and ought to be taken seriously. (53 Cf. Longman, Ecclesiastes) The wise also face disrespect among their fellow citizens (cp. Matt 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44).

**"Learn to Listen Quietly"** In a world where the loudest voices dominate, God invites us to tune our ears to quiet wisdom: The still small voice of the Holy Spirit, the whispered truth of Scripture, the humble correction of a godly friend. You may never stand on a stage or shout your message, but if you speak with God's wisdom, you are heard where it matters most. Likewise, learn to ask: "Am I chasing noise, or listening for wisdom?" The loudness of a leader doesn't prove he is right. Resist the pull of influencers and loud personalities without substance. Look for wisdom in unlikely, quiet places—especially among the humble.

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**Ray Pritchard** - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - QUIET WORDS OF THE WISE Ecclesiastes 9:17-18

It had been a "jumpy" kind of day. I got up a little earlier than usual because I had so much to do. I piled some books in my car and left for church, hoping to do two days' work in one. By 11:00 A.M. I was frazzled. Nothing had gone particularly wrong, but nothing had gone especially right either. And I had two afternoon appointments, a church meeting that night, and another appointment after that. It was just going to be one of those frustrating days that you just plow through with your head buried in your work.

So I went downstairs to pick up my mail. Among the clutter of newspapers and junk mail was a letter from a friend. I didn't open it at first because . . . well, because I was frazzled and who needs trouble when you feel frazzled?

But when I opened it, the letter wasn't that way at all. My friend began by writing, "You are always so busy greeting parishioners and visitors after the morning service that I am reluctant to say 'Hi!'" He went on to thank me for a recent sermon and to comment on how he was trying to apply it in his own life.

Then he added a word about a mutual friend, whose wife recently died. He even sent along a copy of a nice letter that our friend had written, thanking him for his letter of condolence.

There followed two paragraphs of encouragement concerning specific areas of our church life. The letter ended with a simple line: "Ray, keep the faith and your thoughtful leadership going!"

That was all. Just a nice letter of encouragement from a friend. But the Lord arranged it so that I would receive it on a day when I felt more frazzled than thoughtful.

When I put the letter down, a smile broke across my face and I felt relaxed for the first time all day. My frazzle quotient dropped by 75 percent.

Solomon reminds us that "an anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up" (Proverbs 12:25). Commentator Robert Alden notes, "Today doctors are just beginning to estimate the terrible effects stress has on the physical body, yet look at the same truth expressed in this ancient book!" Another writer said, "Who has not in himself had this experience, how such a word of friendly encouragement from a sympathizing heart cheers the sorrowful soul, and, if only for a time, changes its sorrow into the joy of confidence and of hope!"

My friend's letter did all that and more. Frazzle was down, stress was down, worry was down; joy was up, peace was up, good cheer was up. All that, and it wasn't even noon yet!

It's amazing how much good you can do with a few words of encouragement.

My Father, I pray for the gift of being a load-lifter today. Amen.

#### SHINING THE LIGHT

- What person comes to your mind when you think of the phrase "quiet words of the wise"? Would anyone think of you in that regard?
- Ask God to use you as a "load-lifter" this week.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 18:21; Ephesians 4:29; and Colossians 3:8.

#### **Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.**

KJV Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good."

NET Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

BGT Ecclesiastes 9:18 γαθ σοφ α π ρ σκε η πολ μου κα μαρτ νων ε ς πολ σει γαθωσ νην πολλ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: and one sinner will destroy much good.

CSB Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much good.

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

NIV Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

NLT Ecclesiastes 9:18 Better to have wisdom than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

YLT Ecclesiastes 9:18 Better is wisdom than weapons of conflict, And one sinner destroyeth much good!

NJB Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is worth more than weapons of war, but a single sin undoes a deal of good.

NRS Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one bungler destroys much good.

NAB Ecclesiastes 9:18 "A fly that dies can spoil the perfumer's ointment, and a single slip can ruin much that is good."

GWN Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

BBE Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than instruments of war, but one sinner is the destruction of much good.

RSV Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

- better: Ec 9:16
- sinner: Jos 7:1,5,11,12 22:20 1Sa 14:28,29,36-46 2Sa 20:1,2 2Th 2:8-12 2Ti 2:16-18 3:8 4:3,4 Tit 1:10,11 Heb 12:15,16

#### **Related Passages:**

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Joshua 7:1; 10-12 (SIN OF ACHAN BROUGHT DEFEAT TO ALL ISRAEL) But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel. (7:10-12) So the LORD said to Joshua, "Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? 11 "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things. 12 "Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you

anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst.

Galatians 5:9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

What wisdom builds can  
be destroyed by one sin!

## FRAGILE FRUIT OF WISDOM DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF ONE SIN

**Wisdom is better than weapons of war** Solomon affirms that wisdom has more power for good than military force. Wisdom can prevent war (e.g., through negotiation or foresight). Also wisdom can resolve conflict or save lives without violence.

**but one sinner destroys much good.** - Note Solomon's emphasis of "one" showing how little it takes from the one who acts wickedly and/or rebelliously to ruin much good! It only takes one wicked person to undo the blessings or accomplishments of many. Like one traitor ruining peace. One corrupt leader devastating a nation like Hitler did. One moral failure bringing down a ministry (sadly too many modern examples to mention!)

This verse reveals a tension Solomon has seen in the world. On one side wisdom is incredibly powerful, but on the other side, its fruit is fragile and can be undone by even one sinful act. The Fall in Genesis 3 is an example of how a perfect creation was destroyed by one act of rebellion!

[William Barrick](#) - Eccl 9:18b reminds readers that even wisdom can be foiled: "but one sinner destroys much good." In the biblical account of Israel's entry into Canaan and the disastrous defeat at Ai, the example of Achan's disobedience provides just such an occurrence (Josh 7:1–26).

At this point in the book, Kidner observes that Solomon "has made his case against our self-sufficiency."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, he has "finished his work of demolition. The site has been cleared: he can turn to building and planting."<sup>55</sup> **Kidner** lays out the closing chapters as reminders to be

- sensible (Eccl 10)
- bold (Eccl 11:1–6)
- joyful Eccl 11:7–10
- godly (Eccl 12)<sup>56</sup>

Questions for study:

- In what ways does God reveal His control over your life?
- Why do we fill our lives with distractions and squander what little time we have to insignificant worries?
- What other hard questions can you think of besides, "Why did you walk away from your family?"?
- In what ways can Christians enjoy God's gifts "under the sun"?
- How can we prepare ourselves and our families for our inevitable departure from life "under the sun"?

**Warren Wiersbe** summary conclusion of this chapter - Since death is unavoidable and life is unpredictable, the only course we can safely take is to yield ourselves into the hands of God and walk by faith in His Word. We don't live by explanations; we live by promises. We don't depend on luck but on the providential working of our loving Father as we trust His promises and obey His will. As we walk by faith, we need not fear our "last enemy," because Jesus Christ has conquered death. "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:17–18). Because He is alive, and we live in Him, we don't look at life and say, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" Instead, we echo the confidence expressed by the Apostle Paul: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:57–58, NKJV). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**"Guard What Wisdom Builds"** You may have built something beautiful: A ministry A marriage A reputation A legacy of peace But Solomon warns: One sin can undo much good. This doesn't call for despair—it calls for holy vigilance: Stay humble. Guard your heart (Pr 4:23). Don't let pride or bitterness take root. Don't compromise, thinking it's small. Also, be encouraged that wisdom is still better than weapons—even if it must be protected. Wisdom accomplishes more than violence. Don't underestimate the destructive power of "just one" sin.



