

## More Advice Regarding the King (vv. 16-20)

**VERSE 16** Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad [inexperienced] and whose

princes feast in the morning (אֵי-לָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֵלֶכֶךָ נָעַר וְשָׂרִיךָ בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכְלוּ) [part. I

“Woe” + prep lamed w/2f.s.suff. + rel.pro.w/noun m.s.constr.w/2f.s.suff. melek king + noun m.s.abs. na-ar boy, youth, lad + waw w/noun m.p.constr.w/2f.s.suff. sar prince + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. boqer morning + Qal impf3m.p. akal eat; “feast”]).

**VERSE 17** Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes

eat at the appropriate time -- for strength and not for drunkenness (וְלֹא בַשְּׂתִי וְאֶשְׂרִיךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֵלֶכֶךָ בְּ-חֹרִים וְשָׂרִיךָ בָעֵת יֹאכְלוּ בְּגִבּוּרָה

[interj. ashar happiness + noun both s.abs. eretz land + rel.pro.w/noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. melek king + noun m.s.constr. ben son + noun m.p.abs. bor nobility + waw w/noun m.p.constr.w/2m.s.suff. sar prince + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun both s.abs. eth time “at the appropriate time” + Qal impf.3m.p. akal eat + prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. gegburah strength + waw w/neg lo + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. shethi drinking; only here; “drunkenness”]).

**VERSE 18** Through indolence the rafters [roof] sag, and through slackness the

house leaks (בְּעֲצֵלְתֵימָם יִמְדָּה הַמְּקָרָה וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדָיִם יִדְלָף הַבַּיִת) [d.a.w/prep beth

w/noun f. dual abs. atslelah only here and Prov. 10:26; “indolence” + Niphal impf.3m.s. makak be low; “sagg” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. qorah beam; “rafters” + waw wprep beth w/noun f.s.abs. shipheluth sinking + noun f. dual yad hand; “slackness” + Qal impf.4m.s. dalap drip; “leaks” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. bayith house]).

**VERSE 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and**

**money is the answer to everything** (לֶחֶם וַיַּיִן יִשְׂמַח חַיִּים וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת־הַכֹּל)

לְשִׂחוֹק עֲשִׂים [prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. shechoq laughter; “for enjoyment” + Qal part.m.p.abs. ashah do; “prepare” + noun m.s.abs. lechem bread; “a meal” + waw w/noun m.s.abs. yayin wine + Piel impf.3m.s. shamach rejoice; “makes...merry” + adj.m.p.abs. chay life + waw w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. keseph silver; “money” + Qal impf.3m.s. anah answer + d.o. + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol “to everything”]).

**VERSE 20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your**

**sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man** (אֶת־תְּקַלֵּל וּבַחֲדָרֵי מִשְׁכַּבְּךָ אַל־תְּקַלֵּל עֲשִׂיר)

גַּם בְּמַדְעֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֵל [conj gam also + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. madda

knowledge; “in your bechamber” ?? + noun m.s.abs. melek king + neg al not + Piel impf.2m.s.

jussive qalal curse + waw w/prep beth w/noun m.p.constr. cheder chamber; “rooms” + noun

m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. mishkab couch; “sleeping” + neg al + Piel impf.2m.s. jussive qalal curse

+ adj.m.s.abs. ashir rich man], **for a bird of the heavens will [may] carry the sound**

**and the winged creature will [may] make the matter known** [כַּנְפַיִם] יִגִּיד הַדָּבָר

כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיד אֶת־הַקּוֹל וּבַעַל (הַכַּנְפַּיִם)

[part ki for + noun m.s.abs. oph bird +

d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. shamayim + Hiphil impf. 3m.s. halak; “will carry” + d.o. + d.a.w/noun

m.s.abs. qol voice; sound + waw w/noun m.s.constr. ba-al owner; “creature” + d.a.w/noun f.

dual abs. kanap winged + Hiphil impf.3m.s. nagad make known + noun m.s.abs. dabar word;

“matter”]).

**ANALYSIS: VERSES 16-20**

1. Generally, verses 16-17 are taken together showing a contrast between an immature, inexperienced ruler and a mature, experienced leader.
2. The contrasts between the two verses include 'Woe,' and 'Blessed,' 'the king as inexperienced,' 'the king' as 'a son of nobility, and 'princes', that 'feast in the morning', versus 'princes' that 'feast at the proper time.'
3. The Hebrew term translated 'lad' (*na-ar*) can mean 'boy, youth, child' or even 'servant.'
4. In many passages *na-ar* refers to a 'servant' is still translated 'young man' (Gen. 22:3; 1 Sam. 14:1; 21:2-6).
5. There is an interesting parallel between these verses and 1 Kings 3:7, where Solomon uses *na-ar* to describe himself as inexperienced.
6. He even refers to himself as one who 'does not know how to go out and come in.'
7. Which is a very close statement concerning the fool in Ecclesiastes 10:15 that 'they do not know how to go to a city.'
8. There is a fine line between inexperience and incompetence.
9. Solomon calls himself a *na-ar*, which stresses inexperience.
10. Such inexperience could lead to incompetence of the fool.
11. Of course incompetence did not happen during the early stages of Solomon's career because he asked God for wisdom.
12. The king in verse 16, however, is not only 'inexperienced,' but is incompetent, which is underscored by the 'Woe' that begins this verse and by the conduct of his 'princes' who 'feast in the morning.'
13. There is not just a problem with eating in the morning, but feasting in the morning suggests debauchery, which is inappropriate as the contrast with verse 17 demonstrated (eating 'for strength and not for drunkenness').
14. The function of verse 17 is to show the blessing that a responsible king brings to a country, which stands in stark contrast to verse 16.
15. 'Woe' is pronounced on a 'land' where the inexperience of a king leads to foolish and corrupt behavior by the leaders of the land.
16. The proverbs of verses 18 & 19 should be interpreted as independent sayings.
17. The proverb in verse 18 states that "through indolence/laziness/slothfulness the rafters/roof sags and through slackness/inactivity the house leaks."
18. The kind of roofs here were flat roofs and covered with material, such as lime, that needed constant attention to keep them from leaking.
19. The concept of inactivity (e.g. 'slackness') is a phrase that literally means, 'the lowering of the hands.'
20. It reminds one of the proverbs in Proverbs 24:33-34 "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest. Then your poverty will come as a robber, and your want like an armed man.'
21. It is amazing how quickly things can deteriorate through lack of attention.
22. Just as a little laziness, which results from inactivity can cause great damage to a house.
23. The connection between the proverb in verse 18 and the one in verse 19 depends upon how one takes verse 19.
24. It has been taken by interpreters in a positive sense and in a negative sense.

25. If taken in a positive sense the proverb is a contrast between laziness which leads to the destruction of a house, and the benefits that come from having money to enjoy a well prepared meal accompanied with wine.
26. This understanding of verses 18 & 19 parallels the contrast between the incompetent king and experienced king in verses 16 & 17.
27. “Money is the answer (Qal impf. *anah* ‘to answer’) to everything must be taken within the context of the entire proverb, and not as a panacea for life in general.
28. The proverb in verse 20 clearly deals with a king.
29. As the concluding proverb in this section it reinforces the main theme of the section that something small can cause a lot of damage.
30. This verse warns against even thinking bad things about a king and the wealthy.
31. Something so small and hidden as a bad thought about the king or something so small as a bad word spoken in a bedroom can get a person in trouble.
32. The proverb does not address how the thought or word spoken might get to the king or the wealthy, but uses proverbial sayings as the justification for this warning, “for a bird in heaven may carry your voice and a winged creature may declare the matter” (notice the change from ‘will’ to ‘may’).
33. The point is not now the thought or word may get out but in some way it likely will get out.
34. The main point here is that a person needs to be careful in what one thinks and what one says, even in secret against those who are more powerful than they are.
35. Something like a thought or secret word, can cause great damage.
36. Does this mean that people of power and means cannot be criticized?
37. Of course not.
38. What this proverb is guarding against is thoughts and words that are not factually based.
39. Also, not the use of the term ‘curse’ (Piel impf. *qalal* be of little account, be slight, curse) which indicates an corrupt motive.
40. For instance, thoughts and words based on jealousy.

**END: Ecclesiastes Chapter Ten**  
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**Jack M. Ballinger**