

Message #36**Ecclesiastes 10:8-11**

There are many ways that at first glimpse seem to be able to lead you to the top or to success. That word “success” which occurs in **verse 10** is one that means there are certain paths that appear would take one to gain, profit or preeminence (Gesenius, p. 377). At first appearance, these are paths that would seem to take people to the top, but in all reality may take you nowhere.

Solomon came to realize that the key to success was one’s relationship to God. That is why he will conclude this book with his conclusion which is “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:12). In these verses Solomon sets forth this idea:

THE KEY TO SUCCESS FROM GOD’S PERSPECTIVE IS HAVING GOD’S WISDOM, NOT BY HAVING HUMAN PLOTTING, PLANNING OR STRIVING.

From a pure humanistic perspective it would seem that the key to success would be work hard, become strong, tackle projects and make the right moves. Read most books on success and that is basically what they will suggest. But in God’s mind this is not the key to success—having His wisdom is the key and in these verses Solomon brings this point home.

In my opinion, the contextual connection is that Solomon is discussing ways people try to become successful while subordinate to any ruler. The truth is here are some of the manipulative tactics some people use who seem to get promotions. But that does not mean they are really successful as this text will reveal. Truth is most are very foolish in the sight of God.

WRONG PATH #1 – Success does not come through vindictive plots. **10:8a**

The idea of “digging a pit” is the idea of setting a trap for someone so that one might entrap or ensnare them. This imagery is often used in Scripture—Ps. 7:15-16; 9:15-16; 35:6-8; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; Jer. 18:18-23.

There are people who believe that the way to the top is to try to get rid of anyone who stands in their way. These people are manipulative schemers who will do whatever it takes to try and trap a person so they can climb the ladder of success.

WRONG PATH #2 – Success does not come through dominating power. **10:8b-9**

Illustration #1 - The illustration of breaking through a wall. **10:8b**

It takes a lot of brute strength to break through a wall. In Solomon’s day they did not have powerful high-tech equipment that could get the job done. It was all done by hand.

Now there is nothing in this text that would indicate that the person breaking through the wall did not have a right to do it. In fact, in Proverbs 24:31 the wall was in bad shape and needed to be torn down.

Now the majority of snakes found in Palestine are harmless. However, there are a few which are very deadly, especially the cobra. Walls that typically needed to be broken down were walls that usually were overgrown with plant growth and they contained many holes and unkempt areas that were ideal for snakes. Such places offered them shade and cover and were excellent for nests (Amos 5:19).

Solomon's point here is that one had better carefully watch his attack before he just starts using his power to start breaking through a wall, for he may discover that a snake is in the wall and it may bite him and kill him.

It seems to me that Solomon's point is that even when we see someone who needs to be removed or an old stone wall which needs to be torn down, we had better be very careful in using our own power to get the job done, for we may end up being the one who is bitten and hurt.

Illustration #2 - The illustration of quarrying stones . **10:9a**

Solomon certainly knew a lot about quarrying stones because of all of his massive building projects (i.e. I Kings 5:27).

Now the actual root Hebrew word from which the word "quarry" comes is one that means to remove or pluck out (Gesenius, p. 553). Typically stones were used for foundations of buildings. They were large stones. It would be easy to be hurt by one of these stones. If you were using your strength to try and pry or pull one of these large stones out of the side of a hill or mountain, the stone could come free and roll right on you. You could hurt your back just trying to free one of these stones. When you ultimately get the stone free, other stones could come down with it or a cave-in could occur and one could be hurt or crushed. If a person just used his strength to try and quarry a stone without giving thought to the process or approach, he could be hurt in many ways.

Solomon's point is this; if we are just relying on our own strength to try and tackle something like the removal of something big and powerful, we may discover that we are the one who ends up being hurt.

Illustration #3 - The illustration of splitting logs . **10:9b**

The word for "split" is exactly what you would think—it means to divide or separate. However, the word for "logs" is one that speaks of wood that is very strong, firm and powerful (Gesenius, p. 647). The picture here is of a man going up against a very impressive, strong, powerful piece of wood to try to split it.

Solomon's point here is that one had better carefully plan before he tries to topple something powerful and strong for he may wind up being hurt himself.

H. C. Leupold points out that in **verse 8** the building idea is that of tearing down something, but in **verse 9** the building idea is that of constructing something. In other words, stones were quarried and logs were split so new things could be built (Leupold, pp. 240-241).

The warning is be very careful in tearing down the old and building the new by our own strength, for that will come back to haunt us and harm us.

RIGHT PATH #3 – Success does come through God's wisdom. **10:10-11**

The two “if” clauses of these verses go together. They are both designed to give us God's wise approach to being successful. There are two wisdom principles developed in these verses:

Wisdom Principle #1 - Wisdom will bring success much faster than strength . **10:10**

The person who takes the time to sharpen an ax will discover the job will be done much more efficiently and effectively. Wisdom does not just rely on brute strength, but on sharpening the instrument.

Wisdom Principle #2 - Wisdom will bring success much faster than action . **10:11**

If a snake charmer does not think first about what he is doing or take the time to use careful precaution, he can be bitten by the snake or one of his clients can be bitten by the snake and there is no profit to what he has done. A snake charmer needs time to plan and prepare before he acts.

A wise man builds his house upon a rock, not sand. It takes more time, it takes more effort and it takes more planning. But in the end the house built on the rock will withstand the storms.