

# Ecclesiastes 9:13-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-9/ecclesiastes-911-12/>

*Wisdom is of the utmost value but does not produce the unerring approval of man. Nor can it control circumstances.*

Solomon now turns to a parable from which we can draw a number of lessons, including perspectives about “time and chance” ([Ecclesiastes 9:11](#)).

The story is pretty straightforward. And it connects to the previous verses in many ways. Solomon sets his story in a *small city with few men in it*. To this *small city* comes a *great king*, who *surrounded the small city and constructed large siege works against it*. In the normal course of events, you would expect the *great king* to crush the *small city with few men*. But not in this case.

*Wisdom delivered the city from the siege works of the great king. And the wisdom that delivered the city came from an unexpected place. It came from a poor man. A poor man who would normally be despised and whose words would normally not be heeded. It could be that to the great king his defeat will appear as though it is simply time and chance that overtook him. The great king likely will not know about the wisdom of the poor man that led to his undoing. And, in fact, even in the small city that was delivered no one remembered that poor man. It might well be that from their perspective their deliverance was a matter of time and chance.*

But in this instance, a human agent actually was the source of deliverance. An unexpected source. A *poor wise man*. Solomon draws a principle from this that *wisdom is better than strength*. But Solomon also hastens to acknowledge that wisdom is often unheeded. People tend to decide who to listen to due to their status rather than because of their wisdom, so *the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded*.

Solomon asserts that even though the *wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded*, wisdom is still to be valued above mere *strength*. The battle in this instance is literally not won by the mighty (see [Ecclesiastes 9:11](#)) but by the *poor wise man*. To most people in this story it would appear an unusual event occurred due to time and chance, when in

actuality they are just oblivious to a great resource among them—the *poor wise man*.

This story illustrates the extreme limits of our perspective and further illustrates Solomon's overriding point that we cannot gain comprehensive understanding through human reason and experience. However, the story also illustrates the great impact that can be made upon history by the actions of *wisdom*, even by those who may not be recognized or *remembered*.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>13</sup> Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.<sup>14</sup> There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siege works against it.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.<sup>17</sup> The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.<sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.**