

Fools (vv. 12-15)

VERSE 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a

fool consume him דְּבַרֵּי פִי־חָכָם חֵן וְשִׁפְתוֹת כְּסִיל תִּבְלַעְנֶנּוּ [noun m.p.constr. *dabar* words + noun m.s.constr. *peh* mouth + adj.m.s.abs. *chakam* wise + noun m.s.abs. *chen* favor, grace + waw w/noun f. dual constr. *shapah* lip + noun m.s.abs. *kesil* fool + Piel impf.3f.s.w/3m.s.suff. *bala* swallow; “consume”];

VERSE 13 the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked

madness תְּחִלַּת דְּבַרֵּי־פִיהוּ סִכְלוֹת וְאַחֲרֵית פִּיהוּ הוֹלְלוֹת רָעָה [noun f.s.constr. *tehillah* beginning + noun m.p.constr. *daba* word + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. *peh* mouth: “talking” + noun f.s.abs. *sikluth* foolishness + waw w/noun f.s.abs. *acharith* end + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. *peh* mouth “of it” + noun f.s.abs. *holeluh* madness + adj.f.s.abs. *ra-ah* evil; “wicked”].

VERSE 14 Yet the fool multiplies words וְהִסְכֵּל יִרְבֶּה דְּבָרִים [waw w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. *sakal* fool + Hiphil impf.3m.s. *rabah* be much + noun m.p.abs. *dabar* word].

No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him

לֹא יָדַע הָאָדָם מַה־שִּׁיְהִי וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ [neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. *yada* know + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. *adam* man + interrog. *mah* what? + rel.pro. w/Qal impf.3m.s. *hayah* be; “will happen” + waw w/rel.pro. *asher* “and who” + Qal impf.3m.s. *hayah* be, happen + prep *min* w/adv. *achri* after interrog. *mah* “what” + Hiphil impf.3m.s. *nagad* tell + pro. *lamed* w/3m.s.suff. “him”]?

VERSE 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go

to a city (אֶל-עִיר) עֵמֶל הַכְּסִילִים תִּיגַעְנוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע לָלֶכֶת [noun m.s.constr. amal
toil + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. kesil fool + Piel impf.3f.s.w/3m.s.suff. yagea be weary + rel.pro.
asher + neg lo + Qal perf.3m.s. yada know + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. halak walk, go +
prep el to + noun f.s.abs. ir city)].

ANALYSIS: VERSES 12-15

1. These verses present a series of proverbs that deal primarily with the words of the fool.
2. This section presents the damage caused by the words of the fool and the total incompetence of the fool.
3. In verse 12 there is a contrast between the words of the wise man and the words of the fool.
4. Q. does not simply say ‘the words of the wise man’ but he says “the words of the mouth of the wise man” thus emphasizing the instrument of speech.
5. The words of the wise man are characterized as words that win “favor.”
6. The Hebrew word “gracious” (*chen*) along with the words of the fool leads to the translation “win favor.”
7. The words of the wise man have positive benefits in the lives of those who hear him.
8. In contrast to this, the proverb goes on to say that “the lips of the fool destroy him.”
9. In other words, his ignorant speech brings harm to the fool.
10. The word “consume” (*bala*) means ‘to swallow up’ which is idiomatic for destruction.
11. Note Prov. 14:3 “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back. But the lips of the wise will protect him.”, and 18:7 “A fool’s mouth is his ruin. And his lips are the snare of his soul.”
12. Something as small as words which flow from a person’s mouth can lead to his destruction (cf. Jam. 1:26; 3:5, 6, 8).
13. The proverb of verse 13 sets forth the both the beginning of the words of the fool and the end of the words of the fool.
14. There is nothing to commend about the words of the fool from the inception as they are characterized as “folly.”
15. But things get worse as “the end of it [words] is wicked madness.”
16. This could be translated “evil delusion” or even “racing madness.”
17. The self-delusion of the fool damages himself and those who take him seriously.
18. The fool progresses in his life uttering opinions and views that are completely misguided and at odds with how things really work.
19. The fool’s speech is nonsense, but it is dangerous nonsense (Prov. 18:7 see in pt. 11).
20. The proverb in verse 14 continues provides further insight into the delusion of the fool.
21. Verse 14a states the obvious—the fool is refuses to monitor his speech even when he is shown the fallacy of his pronouncements.
22. The fool “multiplies [his] words” showing no restraint.
23. The second half of verse 14 provides a statement about the future and the inability of anyone to predict “what will happen” or “what will come after him.”

24. It is in the form of a question and expects a negative answer.
25. Man's inability to predict the future is a theme presented elsewhere in Ecclesiastes (8:7).
26. The fool, however, never stops talking about what will be.
27. The proverb of verse 15 continues the progression of the fool into foolishness by moving beyond the speech of the fool to his actions.
28. Verse 15 features the incompetence of the fool.
29. The reason "the toil of the fool wearies him" is because he does not follow the tried and true method of getting a day's work accomplished.
30. He goes about things the wrong way and so he is even more tired than a normal worker who follows instructions.
31. The fool is so exhausted that he becomes disoriented with something so simple as finding his way to his home ("that he does not know how to go to a city.").