

The Wise Man and the Fool Share the Same Fate (vv. 12-17)

VERSE 12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly (וְהוֹלִלּוּת וְסִכְלֻת)

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לְרֵאוֹת חֲכָמָה [waw w/Qal perf.1s. panah turn + por.1s. ani I + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. ra-ah see; “consider” + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + waw w/noun holeluth madness; from vb. chalal to be insane + waw w/noun f.s.abs. sikluth folly; from vb. sakal be foolish]; **for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done** [conj. ki for + interrog. mah what? + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam man + pref. asher w/Qal impf.3m.s. bo come + adv. achare after + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. melek king + d.o. marker + rel.pro. asher what + adv. kebar already + Qal perf.3m.s.w/3m.s.suff. ashah do]?)

VERSE 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness (מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ)

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ יִתְרוֹן לְחֲכָמָה מִן־הַסִּכְלֻת פִּיתְרוֹן הָאוֹר [waw w/Qal perf.1s. ra-ah see + pro.1s. ani I + rel.pro. asher w/adv yesh exist; “excels” + noun m.s.abs. yitron advantage + prep lamed w/d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. chokmah + prep min more than, from + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. sikluth folly + prep ki w/noun m.s.abs. noun m.s.abs. yitron “excels” + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. or light + prep min more than + noun m.s.abs. choshek darkness].

VERSE 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness

(וְהַחֲכָם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְהַכִּסִּיל בְּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ) [d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise + noun f. dual constr.w/3m.s.suff. ayin eye + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. rosh head + waw w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kisil fool + prep beth w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. choshek darkness + Qal part.m.s.abs. halak walk].

And yet I know that one fate befalls them both (אֲנִי שִׁמְקָרָה אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כֻּלָּם)

וַיֵּדַעְתִּי גַם [waw w/Qal perf.1s. yada know + part. gam alike; “yet” + pro.1s. ani + perf.pro. asher + noun m.s.abs. miqreh happening; “fate” + adj.m.s.abs. echad one + Qal impf.3s. qara befall, happen + d.o. marker + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. kol all; “both”].

VERSE 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me

וְאִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי כְּמִקְרָה הַכְּסִיל גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרַנִּי) [waw w/Qal perf.1s. amar say + pro.1s. ani + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart; “to myself” + prep ki w/noun m.s.constr. miqreh fate + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. ksil fool + conj gam also + pro.1s. ani me + Qal impf.3m.s.w/1s.suff. qarah befall].

Why then have I been extremely wise (וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אִזּוֹ יוֹתֵר) [waw w/interrog.

mah “why?” + Qal perf.1s. chakam be wise + pro.1s. ani + part az then, so + noun m.s.abs. yother better; “extremely”].)?”

So I said to myself, "This too is vanity (וְדַבַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל) [waw w/Piel

perf.1s. dabar speak; “said” + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/1s.suff. leb heart + pro.rel. asher w/conj gam too + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity].”

VERSE 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool

כִּי אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְחָכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל לְעוֹלָם בְּשֹׁכֶבֶר) [part ki for + neg.adv. ayin no + noun m.s.constr. zikkraon remembrance + prep lamed w/d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise + prep im with + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kesil fool + noun m.s.abs. olam “lasting”],

inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten [נִשְׁכַּח הַכֹּל הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים] **בְּשִׁכְבְּרִי** [prep beth w/rel.pro.w/adv. kesar already; “inasmuch” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. yom day + d.a.w/Qal part.m.p.abs. bo “coming” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + Niphal perf.3m.s. shakach forget]).

And how the wise man and the fool alike die (וַאֲיֵךְ יָמוּת הַחֲכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל) [waw w/interj. ek how? + Qal impf.3m.s. muth die + d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise + part im with + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kesil fool]!

VERSE 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me (וְשָׂנְאֵתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) [waw w/Qal perf.1s. shana hate + d.o. + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. chayyim life + part. ki for + adj.m.s.abs. ra evil, bad; “grievous” + prep al above + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. ma-aseh work + rel.suff.w/Niphal perf.3m.s. ashah do \ part tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun)]; **because everything is futility and striving after wind** (הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוּת רוּחַ) [part. ki for + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol all + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity + waw w/noun f.s.constr. re-uth striving or chasing + noun both s.abs. ruach wind]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 12-17

1. In this section the author reflects on the merits of wisdom as opposed to folly.
2. Here Solomon addresses the question as to whether wisdom has any advantage over folly.
3. Folly is a lack of good sense, prudence and foresight on the part of individuals who refuse to live by the rules that bring success to those who conduct their lives otherwise.
4. Wisdom in this context refers to conduct that is generally accepted as bringing success to those who act responsibly.
5. It does not refer to the wisdom set forth in Proverbs.
6. That wisdom involves living life according to the dictates of Bible doctrine.
7. The wisdom that Solomon adhered to in his quest for earthly pleasures is the wisdom that lead to material and physical enjoyment.
8. That wisdom he affirms in v. 9 did not disappoint him (“My wisdom stood by me.”).

9. It enabled him to achieve all that he set his hands to accomplish.
10. The wisdom that guides humans to achieve their goals has a short-coming (v. 12b).
11. In v. 12b Solomon relates it to himself and those who were to come after him sharing the same royal niche.
12. What the wisdom that guides humans down the path to success can never achieve anything that “has not already been done.”
13. This harks back to: “there is nothing new under the sun.”
14. Solomon’s grandiose achievements did not break new ground.
15. He makes an observation with respect to this wisdom that brought him success in vv. 13-14a.
16. Wisdom clearly has an advantage over folly.
17. And that advantage is the difference between light and darkness (v. 13).
18. The term for ‘advantage’ occurs in 1:3 and 2:11, for ‘profit’ (*yitron*).
19. Folly yields no such advantage.
20. In v. 14a Solomon goes on to explain “that the wise man’s eyes are in his head” indicating that such an individual knows where he is going.
21. But the fool on the other hand goes through life walking in darkness.
22. Wise people can ‘get on’ in the world but the fool keeps stumbling over obstacle.
23. This is illustrated by Prov. 22:3, “The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple-minded go on and is punished for it.”
24. The first half of v. 15 is a rather bland affirmation of the benefit of wisdom over folly.
25. But in v. 14b he goes on and asserts that the absolute contrast between wisdom and folly, ultimately breaks down.
26. The fact is that “the same fate befalls them both.”
27. That ‘fate’ is not made explicit until v. 16.
28. The word ‘fate’ (*miqreh*) describes what happens to a person as opposed to what he does to himself (cf. Ruth 2:3; 1Sam. 6:9; 20:26; Eccl. 2:14, 15; 3:19; 9:2, 3).
29. Someone might say, “By chance I came across an old acquaintance.”
30. From the human perspective it appears that something happens by chance, but that does not rule out divine intervention.
31. That ‘fate’ is death
32. In v. 15 he acknowledges that the ‘fate’ that overtakes the fool “will also befall [him].”
33. This fact is unsettling to him as his inner dialogue resumes in v. 15.
34. The hard reality for him was his that the principle stated in v. 14 casts a dark shadow over the whole wisdom enterprise.
35. Facing the brutal fact that he will not escape the fate of the fool he calls into question his efforts to be “extremely wise.”
36. Remember that this was Solomon’s conclusion while he was coming out of his state to reversionism.
37. “Why then have I been extremely wise” represents his jaundiced view of this foolish quest for wisdom and what it brought him temporally.
38. He labels his time as a seeker for wisdom, fame and pleasure as “vanity.”
39. In v. 16 he laments that not only is it death that torments him, but that his very memory “will be forgotten” with the passage of time.
40. He will be forgotten along with his achievements, like all others who pursue worldly advantages with no regard for what follows death.

41. Contrast this verse dealing with remembrance with Prov. 10:7 “The memory of the righteous is blessed. But the name of the wicked will not.”
42. Finally, at the end of v. 16 he makes explicit what that awful ‘fate’ is.
43. The key to all this is the fact that there was a transition between his STA driven approach to life during those years he was in reversionism.
44. The great man Solomon who started his career (Ph 2) with such a tremendous orientation to God and his place in God’s plan got himself in such a dark place.
45. In this transition he makes the startling statement “So I hated life.”
46. Furthermore, that which had brought Solomon much pleasure and success “was grievous to [him].”
47. It is amazing that he got himself in a place where he exhibited no hope beyond this life.