

Time and Chance Overturns Expectations (vv. 11-12)

VERSE 11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle

is not to the warriors (שִׁבְתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לְקָלִים הַמְרוּץ וְלֹא לְגִבּוֹרִים)

[Qal perf.1s. shub turn; “I again” + waw w/Qal infin.constr. ra-ah see + part. tachath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh + part ki that + neg lo + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.p.abs. qal swift + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs.meretz race + waw w/neg lo + d.a.w/prep lamed w/adj.m.p.abs. gibbor mighty man + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. milbamah battle], **and neither is bread to the wise**

nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability (עֵשֶׂר וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן)

וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לְנֹבְנִים [waw w/conj. gam + neg lo + d.a.w/prep lamed

w/adj.m.p.abs. chokmah wisdom + noun m.s.abs. lechem bread + waw w/conj gam + neg lo +

d.a.w/prep lamed w/Niphal part.m.p.abs. bin understand; “the discerning” + noun m.s.abs.

osher wealth + waw w/conj gam + neg lo + d.a.w/prep lamed w/Qal part.m.p.abs. yada know; to

men of ability” + noun m.s.abs. chen favor]; **for time and chance overtake them all**

(כִּי־עַתָּה וְפָנֵעַ יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּל־אֶחָד) [part ki for + noun both s.abs. eth time + waw w/noun m.s.abs.

paga encounter; “chance” + Qal impf.3m.s. qara befall; “overtake” + d.o. + noun

m.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. kol all]).

VERSE 12 Moreover, man does not know his time (כִּי גַם לֹא יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ)

[part. ki + conj. gam + neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. yada know + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam + d.o. + noun f.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. eth time]: **like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare** [כַּדְּגָיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בְּמִצְוֹדָה רָעָה וְכַצְּפָרִים הָאֲחֻזוֹת בַּפֶּחַח] [prep kaph w/noun m.p.abs. dag fish + rel.pro. asher w/Niphal part.m.p.abs. achaz take hold of; “caught” + prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. mesudah net + adj.f.s.abs.ra-ah evil, bad; “treacherous” + waw w/prep kaph w/noun both p.abs. sippor bird + d.a.w/Qal pass.part.f.p.abs. achaz “trapped”+ d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. pach bird trap; “in a snare”], **so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them** [prep kaph w/3m.p.suff. + Qal pass.part.m.p.abs. yaqosh ensnare + noun m.p.constr. ben son + d.a/w/noun m.s.abs. adam + prep lamed w/noun both s.abs. eth time + adj.f.s.abs. ra-ah evil + prep beth w/rel.pro. asher w/Qal impf.3f.s. naphal fall + prep al w/3m.p.suff. “on them” + adv peth-om suddenly]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 11-12

1. In verse 11 Q. looks at life and concludes that “time and chance” determine who succeeds and who does not.
2. In other words, it is not necessarily those who are gifted in some way who reap the benefits of life.
3. In verse 11 there are five examples that are used to demonstrate that things do not always turn out as we might expect.
4. We would expect the fastest person to win a race, the most seasoned and powerful warrior to prevail in battle—that is the most physically capable person is expected to come out on top.
5. We might also expect that the most mentally competent would have the best chance of success in life, but here we see that being “wise” does not guarantee one will enjoy even adequate “food”; nor will “wealth” come to one who is “discerning” (or brilliant); nor will “favor” come to “men of ability/skill” (Qal part yada indicates one who is learned).
6. Everything is subject to the vicissitudes of time and chance over which humans have no control.
7. The unpredictability of life is here made explicit with death.
8. No one knows the when they are going to die.
9. Two examples from the animal kingdom support this idea.

10. Fish may swim freely along, and birds may fly effortlessly along, and then in an instant they are struggling in a trap that will end their lives.
 11. The emphasis in verse 12b is on the unexpectedness and suddenness of life's end.

An Illustrative Story (vv. 13-16)

VERSE 13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me

גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי חֲכָמָה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְגִדּוּלָהּ הִיא אֵלֶי
 [conj gam also + adj.f.s.abs. zeh this
 + Qal perf.1s. ra-ah + noun f.s.abs. chokam wisdom + part tachath under + d.a.w/noun both
 s.abs. shemesh + waw w/adj.f.s.abs. gadol great; “impressed” + pro.3f.s. hu it + prep el
 w/1s.suff. “me”].

VERSE 14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it

עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט וּבְאֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל
 [noun f.s.abs. ir city + adj.f.s.abs.
 qaton small + waw w/noun m.p.abs. ish man + prep beth w/3f.s.suff. + adj.m.s.abs. me-at few,
 little + waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. bo; “came” + prep el w/3f.s.suff. + noun m.s.abs. melek king +
 adj.m.s.ab.s gadol great], **surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it**
 וְסָבַב אֹתָהּ וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מְצוּדִים גְּדֹלִים
 [waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. sabab surround +
 d.o.w/3f.s.suff. “it” + waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. banah build; “constructed” + prep al w/3f.s.
 “against it” + noun m.p.abs. matsod siege works + adj.m.p.abs. gadol great; “large”].

VERSE 15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by

his wisdom (וּמָצָא בָּהּ אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכָם וּמִלְטָהוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בְּחִכְמָתוֹ וְאָדָם) [waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. matsa find + prep beth w/3f.s.suff. “in it” + noun m.s.abs. ish man + adj.m.s.abs. misken poor here and in v. 16 & 4:13 only + adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise + waw w/Qal perf.3m.s.w/3f.s.suff. malat deliver + pro.3m.s. he + d.o. + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. ir city + prep beth w/noun f.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. chokmah wisdom].

Yet no one remembered that poor man (וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַמִּסְכֵּן הַהוּא)

[waw w/noun m.s.abs. adam + neg lo + Qal perf.3m.s. zaka remember + d.o. + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. ish man + d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. misken poor + d.a.w/pro.3m.s. hu him].

VERSE 16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength (אֲנִי טוֹבָה חִכְמָה מִגְבוּרָה)

וְאִמְרָתִי [waw w/Qal perf.1s. amar say + pro.1s. ani + adj.f.s.abs. tob “better” + noun f.s.abs. chokmah + prep min w/noun f.s.abs. geburah might])."

But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded

(וְחִכְמַת הַמִּסְכֵּן בְּזוּיָהּ וְדִבְרָיו אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים) [waw w/noun f.s.constr. chokmah + d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. misken poor + Qal pass.part.f.s.abs. bizzayon contempt; “is despised” + waw w/noun m.p.constr.w/3m.s.suuff. dabar word + adv. ayin not + Niphal part.m.p.abs. shama hear, listen to].

ANALYSIS: VERSES 13-16

1. Once more, Qohelet uses an anecdote (cf. 4:7-8) to suggest that though wisdom has a limited affect, it does not always lead to a gain for its possessor.
2. This does not refer to the wisdom that comes from divine viewpoint.
3. In this example he asserts that this made a strong impact on him (“and it impressed me”).
4. What is presented here is an example of wisdom that goes unappreciated or rewarded for a great service rendered.
5. In verse 14 the story begins with setting the scene.

6. The action takes place in “a small city” having only “a few people.”
7. The emphasis on smallness in the first part of the verse serves to contrast what is coming, namely “great king” and “large siege works.”
8. In other words, he imagines a totally lopsided battle.
9. From the perspective of manpower, the city doesn’t stand a chance.
10. But in verse 15 against all expectations the city is rescued, and by a surprising source, “a poor but wise man.”
11. Though the means is unspecified, the poor man saves the city through the use of wisdom.
12. The story highlights the value of wisdom.
13. Q. makes it clear that the man’s wisdom effected the city’s deliverance, notwithstanding the man’s financial status.
14. Q. remains silent on the how, only that the man did it.
15. Note as well that this story illustrates the truth that “the battle is not to the mighty.”
16. As Q. has done previously, he praises wisdom only to turn around and depreciate it.
17. The climax of the story is that though the poor wise man used his wisdom to deliver the city, “no one remembered that poor wise man.”
18. His point is that human wisdom is fine in the short term but is rendered meaningless on the long run because of the way this man was treated.
19. The upshot of this story for Qohelet is that “wisdom is better than strength” as it was wisdom that delivered the small city from the powerful king.
20. Verse 16 taken within this context is that even though the poor man’s advice delivered the city, no one paid any further attention to him.
21. This idea is expressed in 4:13-16.

Wisdom’s Superiority (vv. 17-18)

VERSE 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting

of a ruler among fools (דְּבַרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנִחָת נִשְׁמָעִים מִזְעָקַת מוֹשֵׁל בְּכֶסֶלִים) [*noun*

m.p.constr. dabar word + adj.m.p.abs. chakam wise + prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. nachath rest;

quietness + Niphal part.m.p.abs. shama hear + prep min w/noun f.s.constr. ze-aqah outcry;

“than the shouting” + Qal part.m.s.abs. mashal rule; “ruler” + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun

m.p.abs. kesil fool]).

VERSE 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much

good (טוֹבָה חִכְמָה מִכְלֵי קָרֶב וְחוּטָא אֶחָד יִאַבֵּד טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּיה) [*adj.f.s.abs. tob + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + prep min w/noun m.p.constr. kali utensil; “weapons” + noun m.s.abs. qerib “war” + waw w/Qal part.m.s.abs. chata sin; “sinner” + adj.m.s.abs. echad one + Piel impf.3m.s. abad destroy + noun f.s.abs. tob good + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be great/much; “much”*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 17-19

1. The subject of wisdom continues in these two verses, but there is no obvious connection with the preceding example story.
2. The assessment of wisdom is positive.
3. Two better-than proverbs conclude this chapter.
4. The section is not an unalloyed praise of wisdom, since the concluding half of verse 18 admits that it takes very little to spoil the gains of wisdom.
5. There is an advantage to quiet words of the wise even compared with “a leader of fools.”
6. The idea seems to be that the words of the wise are worth hearing not that they are always heeded.
7. The positive assessment of wisdom continues with a second better-than proverb in verse. 18.
8. Here wisdom is superior to weapons of war.
9. Then he notes that it takes very little to destroy something that is good.
10. This proverb may be placed here because of the story in vv. 13-16.
11. His point is that it only takes “one” person to spoil the work of the wise.
12. Hence, human wisdom in the good sense as its limitations.

**END: Ecclesiastes Chapter Nine
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