

Ecclesiastes 1:12 - 2:17

Discourse I: Wisdom, Folly, and Labor

Part A: “Wisdom and Folly Are Emptiness”

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I. Review — Theme: Life under the sun is emptiness.

II. Definitions

A. Hebrew **המכח** *Hokmah* “Technical Skill, Aptitude, Experience, Talent, Good Sense, Wisdom”

1. Root: המכח *Hakam* “Fit, Skilled, Experienced, Able, Talented, Wise”
2. This word does not necessarily imply intelligence.
3. Often Used for Magic Arts as Well
4. Focuses on Action Over Thought

B. Hebrew **תוללוה** *Holeloth* “Madness”

1. Root ללה *Halal* “To Be Delusionional, Confused, Insane, Fooled”
2. May Be Related to the Words for Boasting and Praise (Compare “Hallelujah”)

C. Hebrew **תולכס** *Sikloth* “Folly”

1. Root: לכס *Sakal* “To Be Foolish”
2. The Most Commonly Used Word for “Folly” in Ecclesiastes
3. Probably the Closest to Our Usual Understanding of Folly
4. One Among at Least 4 Other Words Used for “Folly” in the Old Testament
 - i. תלוה *lwweleth*
 - a. May Imply Perversion
 - b. Related to Arabic Word for “To Grow Viscous” (Compare “Thickheaded”)
 - c. Always Considered Morally Bad
 - d. Commonly Found in the Heart of Children
 - e. Most Commonly Used in the Proverbs

- ii. הלבנ *N'vela*
 - a. Intellectual and Moral/Religious Stupidity
 - b. May Be Related to Concept of “Wilting”
 - c. Commonly Used in Regards to Sexual Sins
- iii. הלפת *Tifla*
 - a. “Tasteless, Unseasoned”
 - b. Usually Used Metaphorically
- iv. לסכ *Kisel*
 - a. “Sluggishness or Stupidity”
 - b. Originally Meant “Fatness”
 - c. Sometimes Means “(Over)-Confidence”
 - d. Koheleth calls it evil in 7:25.

III. The Discourse

A. Narrative Background (1:12-15)

1. Koheleth, as king, set his heart and mind to explore everything under the sun.
2. See saw that all the works of man are “an empty breath” / “a striving after wind”, because man cannot change anything.

B. Wisdom and Folly Introduced (1:16-18)

1. Self-delusion and frivolity are chasing after something that can never be achieved,...
2. ...But experience and knowledge only lead to grief.

C. Folly Expounded

1. Pleasures (2:1-8)
 - i. Comedy
 - ii. Alcohol
 - iii. Resorts
 - iv. Wealth
 - v. Music
 - vi. Women
2. Their Reward (2:9-11)
 - i. A Pleased Heart
 - ii. But this is still “an empty breath” / “a striving after wind”.

D. Comparison (2:12-17)

1. Wisdom is better than folly, in the same way that it is better to walk in the light than in the dark.
2. Yet both are meaningless, because
 - i. One can never do anything that has never been done,
 - ii. One will not be remembered, and
 - iii. Everyone dies.

IV. Application & Discussion

- A. Is Koheleth blaming God in v. 1:13 (literally, “God has given an evil to the sons of men to be afflicted”)?**
- B. Does Gen 11:6 conflict with Ecc 1:15? Has communication negated this verse? (See also 7:13.)**
- C. How was it possible for Koheleth to maintain wisdom in the midst of “trying out” madness and folly? (2:3)**
- D. Do you personally feel more pain and grief as a result of being more educated? Do you ever see folly as an escape from that?**
- E. Doesn’t wisdom lead to God, not to grief and pain?**
- F. Was Koheleth justified in “trying out” madness and folly?**
- G. Why is a pleased heart still “emptiness”? (2:10-11)**
- H. How is Koheleth justified in saying the wisdom and knowledge are better than self-delusion and frivolity, when he himself says that the former lead to grief and pain and the latter to a pleased heart?**