

Ecclesiastes 10:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

Analysis

The phrase 'full of words' (yarbeh devarim) literally means 'multiplies words,' indicating excessive, endless talking without substance or wisdom. The Hebrew construction emphasizes the fool's inability to stop talking despite having nothing of value to contribute. This contrasts sharply with wisdom literature's repeated emphasis on carefully measured, restrained speech (Proverbs 10:19, 17:28). The rhetorical question structure—'who can tell him?'—emphasizes humanity's fundamental limitation regarding future knowledge, which only God possesses. The repetition of 'what shall be' (mah-sheyihyeh) and 'what shall be after him' (mah-sheyihyeh me'aharav) underscores complete ignorance of both near-term future and distant outcomes beyond one's lifetime. Solomon's point is not merely that fools talk excessively, but that they speak authoritatively and confidently about matters they cannot possibly know. The verse exposes the absurdity of human pretension to comprehensive knowledge, a theme running throughout Ecclesiastes. Only God knows and controls the future; true human wisdom requires acknowledging this fundamental limitation rather than filling the void of ignorance with empty, multiplied words that create an illusion of understanding.

Historical Context

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes circa 935 BC, likely late in life after experiencing the vanity of pursuing wisdom, pleasure, and accomplishment apart from God. Chapter 10 contains practical wisdom about foolishness versus wisdom in daily life. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature emphasized controlled speech as a mark of

wisdom, making verbose fools a common literary target. In Solomon's court culture, where words carried political weight and royal pronouncements shaped policy, the danger of foolish speech was particularly acute. The verse reflects broader biblical warnings about careless speech (James 3:1-12) and false certainty about the future (James 4:13-16). Early church fathers applied this to heretics who multiplied theological speculations beyond Scripture, while Reformation interpreters saw warnings against human philosophical systems claiming comprehensive knowledge apart from divine revelation.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Why does Solomon connect excessive talking with foolishness rather than with eloquence or knowledge?
2. What is the relationship between claiming to know the future and the multiplication of words?
3. How does this verse's warning about speaking beyond one's knowledge apply to modern contexts?
4. What is the proper response to our inability to know the future—silence, trust in God, or something else?
5. How does James 4:13-16 echo and expand on the principle taught in this verse?

