

Ecclesiastes 10:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The labour of the foolish wearieh every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

Analysis

The labour of the foolish wearieh every one of them (עמל הפסלים תגעה, amal hakseilim teyagge'ennu)—'the toil of fools wearies him,' from yaga (to be weary, exhausted, spent). **Because he knoweth not how to go to the city** (אשֶׁר לֹא יְדַע, asher lo-yada lalekhet el-ir)—literally 'for he knows not to go to the city,' possibly meaning he lacks basic navigational knowledge or can't find the most basic destinations.

This proverb captures folly's futility: the fool exhausts himself through misdirected effort because he lacks fundamental orientation. The phrase 'how to go to the city' likely means basic competence—knowing the way to the central, obvious destination. In ancient agrarian society, 'the city' (ir) represented commerce, governance, civilization itself—not knowing the way there suggests profound incompetence. Alternatively, it may be metaphorical: lacking direction toward life's proper goal. Jesus used similar imagery: 'Enter by the narrow gate... the way is easy that leads to destruction' (Matthew 7:13-14). The fool labors vigorously but toward wrong ends, achieving exhaustion without accomplishment. Proverbs 10:23 states, 'Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.'

Historical Context

Ancient Palestinian geography centered on walled cities as hubs of trade, protection, and governance. Rural populations regularly traveled to cities for

commerce and festivals. Being unable to find the city indicated either severe ignorance or disorientation.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. In what areas might you be expending enormous energy but moving in wrong directions due to lack of wisdom?
2. How does knowing the 'way to the city'—life's proper goal and methods—prevent wasted effort?
3. What is the spiritual 'city' believers should know how to reach, and what keeps people from finding it?

Interlinear Text

לֹא אָשָׁר תִּגְעַל כִּי הַכְּסִיל יִמְעַט ל

The labour of the foolish **wearieth** **H3808**

H5999

H3684

H3021

H834

H3808

עִירָה אֲלֹת לְלִכְתָּב יְדָע

every one of them because he knoweth **to the city** **H5892**

H3045

H1980

H413

H5892

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 57:1 (Parallel theme): The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.

Psalms 107:4 (Parallel theme): They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.

Psalms 107:7 (Parallel theme): And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

Ecclesiastes 10:3 (Parallel theme): Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

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