

Ecclesiastes 11:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

Analysis

The Preacher acknowledges human limitations: 'As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.' The verse employs two mysteries—wind/spirit ('ruach,' רוח, meaning both wind and spirit) and fetal development—to illustrate comprehensive ignorance of God's works. Ancient peoples didn't understand meteorology or embryology; these natural processes remained mysterious. The comparison teaches epistemic humility: if basic natural processes exceed human understanding, how much more do God's comprehensive purposes? This verse anticipates Jesus's teaching to Nicodemus: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth... so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). Spiritual realities transcend human comprehension, requiring faith beyond sight.

Historical Context

Ancient peoples observed wind patterns and pregnancy but lacked scientific understanding of either. The ruach (wind/spirit) was particularly mysterious—invisible yet powerful, unpredictable yet purposeful. Psalm 139:13-16 similarly marvels at fetal development as God's mysterious work. The verse teaches that if natural processes exceed understanding, divine purposes certainly do. This anticipated Job's experience: God answered Job's questions by asking about creation's mysteries (Job 38-41), teaching that finite humans cannot comprehend infinite wisdom. Jesus used similar logic: if earthly things are mysterious, how

much more heavenly realities (John 3:12)? The Reformers emphasized that God's wisdom surpasses human reason, requiring humble faith. Modern science has explained meteorology and embryology, yet deeper mysteries remain—consciousness, quantum mechanics, divine providence.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What mysteries in God's providence perplex you, and how does this verse counsel humility and trust despite incomplete understanding?
2. How does acknowledging limits to human knowledge prevent both arrogant rationalism and anti-intellectual obscurantism?

Interlinear Text

כַּאֲשֶׁר רַ	אֵינְךָ	תִּדְעַ	מֶה	דֶּרֶךְ	הָרוּחַ
H834	H369	As thou knowest	H4100	not what is the way	of the spirit
		H3045		H1870	H7307
כַּעֲצָמֵי יָם	בְּבֶטֶן	הַמְלֵאָה	לֹא	כִּי	
nor how the bones	do grow in the womb	of her that is with child			
H6106	H990	H4392		H3602	H3808
תִּדְעַ	אֵת	מַעֲשֵׂה הַ	הָאֱלֹהִים	אֲשֶׁר רַ	יַעֲשֶׂה הַ
As thou knowest	H853	not the works	of God	H834	who maketh
H3045		H4639	H430		H6213
הַכֹּל:					
H3605					

Additional Cross-References

John 3:8 (Spirit): The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Psalms 92:5 (Parallel theme): O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

Ecclesiastes 8:17 (References God): Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

Romans 11:33 (References God): O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Isaiah 40:28 (References God): Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

Psalms 104:24 (Parallel theme): O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

Ecclesiastes 7:24 (Parallel theme): That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

Psalms 40:5 (References God): Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Job 5:9 (Parallel theme): Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number:

Job 37:23 (Parallel theme): Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.