

Ecclesiastes 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.

Analysis

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me—the Hebrew 'miqreh' (מִקְרֶה, happeneth/fate) refers to what befalls or occurs to someone, here specifically death. Despite wisdom's real advantages (2:13), both wise and foolish face identical mortality. The Preacher's internal dialogue ('said I in my heart') reflects honest wrestling with this disturbing reality.

And why was I then more wise?—if death equalizes all outcomes, what ultimate advantage does wisdom provide? This isn't rejecting wisdom's temporal benefits but questioning whether those benefits justify the effort when final results prove identical. **Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity** (hevel, הֶבֶל)—vapor, breath, transience. From a purely earthly perspective ('under the sun'), wisdom's advantages appear temporary and ultimately meaningless. Yet the verse's despair drives readers toward a crucial truth: lasting significance requires eternal perspective. Paul later affirmed: 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable' (1 Corinthians 15:19). Only resurrection hope validates wisdom's pursuit.

Historical Context

Ancient wisdom traditions generally promised that wisdom leads to prosperity and long life, while folly brings destruction (Proverbs 3:1-2; 10:27). However, experience often contradicted this neat formula—righteous sufferers like Job faced

catastrophe, while wicked people sometimes prospered (Psalm 73). Ecclesiastes honestly confronts this discrepancy without abandoning faith. Solomon's later life validated this verse—despite unmatched wisdom, he faced the same death as any fool, and his kingdom split after his death (1 Kings 12), demonstrating wisdom's limited power to prevent eventual loss. Post-exilic Judaism developed resurrection theology partly to resolve this tension—Daniel 12:2-3 promises that the wise will 'shine as the brightness of the firmament' in resurrection. Jesus's resurrection vindicates wisdom's pursuit by guaranteeing eternal outcomes transcend earthly mortality (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that death eventually equalizes all earthly achievements affect your motivation and perspective on pursuing wisdom and success?
2. What hope beyond the grave transforms wisdom from ultimately futile pursuit into eternally significant investment?

Interlinear Text

אָנִי יְהוָה said H559	אָנִי יְהוָה H589	בְּלִבִּי י I in my heart H3820	כַּמֶּקֶרֶת ה As it happeneth H4745	הַכָּסִיל to the fool H3684	שָׁגָם even to me H1571	אָנִי יְהוָה H589
יִקְרֶה נִי so it happeneth H7136	וְלִי מָה H4100	חָכָם מִתִּי wise H2449	אָנִי יְהוָה H589	אָז Then H227	וְיִתֵּן ר and why was I then more H3148	
וְדַבַּרְתִּי Then I said H1696	בְּלִבִּי י I in my heart H3820	שָׁגָם even to me H1571	זֶה H2088	הַכָּל: that this also is vanity H1892		

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 6:8 (Parallel theme): For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (Parallel theme): I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.