

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.

Analysis

The Preacher laments a tragic reality: 'For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.' Death is the great equalizer—it erases the distinctions wisdom creates. Both wise and foolish die; both are eventually forgotten. The Hebrew 'zecher' (זֵכֶר, remembrance) indicates lasting memory or legacy. Despite wisdom's advantages in life (verse 14), death nullifies them. This isn't denying that some achieve longer remembrance (Solomon himself is remembered millennia later), but acknowledging that from an earthly perspective, all human memory eventually fades. The verse drives readers toward eternal perspective: only what's done for God endures beyond death (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Historical Context

Ancient cultures valued posthumous legacy—monuments, inscriptions, sons bearing one's name. Yet Ecclesiastes realistically observes that even the most illustrious are eventually forgotten. Egyptian pharaohs built massive pyramids seeking immortal fame, yet many are now nameless. This verse anticipates Jesus's teaching about storing treasures in heaven rather than earth (Matthew 6:19-20). The early church emphasized that believers' names are 'written in the Lamb's book of life' (Revelation 21:27)—eternal remembrance that matters. The Reformers taught that faith's fruit endures eternally even when earthly memory fades.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What legacy are you building—one that will be forgotten, or eternal fruit that outlasts earthly memory?
2. How does recognizing that death equalizes all earthly achievements affect your priorities and ambitions?

Interlinear Text

כִּי H3588	אֵין H369	זֵכֶר וְ H2146	הַחֲכָמִים H2450	עִם H5973	הַכֹּסִיל: H3684
For there is no remembrance of the wise more than man as the fool					
לְעוֹלָם H5769	בִּשְׂכַחְתּוֹ H3528	הַיּוֹמִים H3117	הַבָּאִים H935	לְכָל H3605	
for ever seeing that which now is in the days to come					
נִשְׁכָּח H7911	וְאֵין H349	יָמֵי וָתֵ H4191	הַחֲכָמִים H2450	עִם H5973	
shall all be forgotten And how dieth of the wise more than					
הַכֹּסִיל: man as the fool H3684					

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 1:11 (Parallel theme): There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 (Parallel theme): For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Psalms 88:12 (Parallel theme): Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Exodus 1:8 (Parallel theme): Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

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