

Ecclesiastes 7:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Analysis

Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish (אל-תירשׁה הרבָה וְאֶל-סָחוּר סָכָל), al-tirsha harbeh ve'al-tehi sakhal)—If verse 16 warns against self-righteous excess, verse 17 warns against presuming on grace. 'Over much wicked' doesn't permit moderate wickedness but warns against deliberately escalating in evil. 'Foolish' (sakhal) describes moral stupidity—rejecting wisdom's path.

Why shouldest thou die before thy time? (לֹמַה תָּמַת בְּלֹא עַתָּה), lamah tamut belo itekha)—'Before thy time' suggests natural lifespan versus premature death through folly. Proverbs repeatedly warns that sin shortens life: 'The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short' (Proverbs 10:27). While exceptions exist (verse 15 acknowledges them), the general principle holds—self-destructive behavior brings consequences. Romans 6:23 declares 'the wages of sin is death.' The verse warns against testing God's patience or assuming His grace licenses sin (Romans 6:1-2).

Historical Context

Ancient Israel witnessed consequences of escalating wickedness: Saul's jealousy led to madness and suicide (1 Samuel 31:4); Ahab's idolatry brought premature death (1 Kings 22:34-38); Uzziah's presumption resulted in leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:19-21). The principle extends to nations: when wickedness reaches fullness, judgment falls (Genesis 15:16, Daniel 8:23). Church history shows individuals and movements that presumed on grace while pursuing wickedness—Nicolaitans

(Revelation 2:6), libertines, antinomians. Paul repeatedly warned against using freedom as license for sin (Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 2:16). This verse, paired with verse 16, establishes balance: avoid both self-righteous legalism and presumptuous license. Fear God and walk in His ways.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Are you presuming on God's grace in any area, assuming forgiveness permits ongoing sin?
2. What 'foolish' choices might be shortening your effectiveness or even your life? What repentance is needed?

Interlinear Text

ל פה	סכְּ ל	תְּהִ י	אַל	הַרְבֵּה	תְּרַשֵּׁע	אַל	וְ	תְּמִיתָה
H4100	H5530	H1961	H408	H7235	H7561	wicked	Be not over much	why shouldst thou die
						H3808	H6256	before thy time
								H4191

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 10:27 (Evil): The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

Acts 12:23 (Parallel theme): And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Psalms 55:23 (Parallel theme): But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

Job 22:16 (Parallel theme): Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood:

Acts 5:10 (Parallel theme): Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

Acts 5:5 (Parallel theme): And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

1 Samuel 25:38 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died.

James 1:21 (Parallel theme): Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.