

Ecclesiastes 7:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Analysis

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning—lev chakhamim (לב חכמים) indicates where the wise person's thoughts, attention, and values dwell. Beth evel (בֵּית אָבֶל, house of mourning) refers to places of grief, funerals, suffering—contexts that confront mortality and life's meaning. The wise person doesn't avoid such places but gravitates toward them because they teach essential truths about human frailty, life's brevity, and eternal priorities.

But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth—lev kesilim (לב קסלים) contrasts sharply. Beth simchah (בֵּית שְׂמִחָה, house of joy/mirth) represents parties, celebrations, entertainment—contexts that distract from ultimate realities. The fool pursues pleasure and avoids reminders of mortality, living as though death doesn't await. This isn't condemning legitimate celebration (Ecclesiastes affirms joy as God's gift—2:24; 3:12-13; 9:7-9) but critiquing pleasure-seeking that avoids life's sobering truths.

Historical Context

Ancient funerary practices involved communal mourning (Genesis 23:2; 2 Samuel 1:11-12; Jeremiah 9:17-18), while celebrations marked joyous occasions (weddings, harvests, festivals—Deuteronomy 16:13-15). Both were legitimate parts of life. Yet Ecclesiastes insists that the wise learn more from funerals than festivals because mourning confronts mortality and meaning. Job's suffering taught him profound truths (Job 42:5-6). The prophets often experienced grief that deepened their

message (Jeremiah 9:1). Jesus gravitated toward suffering people (lepers, demoniacs, the bereaved), demonstrating where true ministry occurs. Paul listed afflictions as credentials (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). The early church honored martyrs whose deaths testified to eternal priorities. Contemporary culture's entertainment obsession and death-denial epitomize the fool's house of mirth.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Where does your "heart" naturally gravitate—toward entertainment and distraction, or toward contexts that confront life's ultimate realities?
2. How might deliberately spending time in "houses of mourning"—visiting the sick, attending funerals, serving the suffering—cultivate wisdom in your life?

Interlinear Text

בַּבְּיתָם	אֲבָל	אֲבָל	בַּבְּיתָם	בַּבְּיתָם	בַּבְּיתָם
The heart	of the wise	is in the house	of mourning	The heart	of fools
H3820	H2450	H1004	H60	H3820	H3684
שְׁמַךְתָּה:	בַּבְּיתָם:	בַּבְּיתָם:	בַּבְּיתָם:	בַּבְּיתָם:	בַּבְּיתָם:
is in the house	of mirth				
H1004	H8057				

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