

# Ecclesiastes 8:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)

## Analysis

**When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth**—the Preacher describes his investigative method: wholehearted intellectual pursuit ('applied mine heart,' natati et-libi, נָתַתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי combined with empirical observation ('to see the business,' lir'ot et-ha'inyan, לִרְאוֹת אֶת-חָיַן). This represents comprehensive investigation—both theoretical reflection and practical observation.

**For also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes**—this phrase likely describes either the Preacher's own exhaustive investigation (staying awake to observe continuously) or humanity's restless striving. The absence of sleep symbolizes relentless human activity and anxiety. Despite comprehensive investigation, verse 17 concludes that humans cannot fully comprehend God's work—even tireless effort cannot penetrate divine mysteries completely. This humbles human reason while validating honest intellectual pursuit within creaturely limitations.

## Historical Context

Solomon's encyclopedic knowledge required extensive observation and study (1 Kings 4:29-34). Ancient sages pursued wisdom through disciplined investigation—Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom texts demonstrate similar comprehensive approaches. Yet Ecclesiastes uniquely acknowledges that even exhaustive study

encounters limits: God's ways transcend human comprehension (Isaiah 55:8-9). Post-exilic Judaism wrestled with mysterious providence—how could covenant-faithful people experience exile and hardship? Daniel's example shows faithful study combined with humble acknowledgment of revelation's limits (Daniel 12:8-9). Paul later taught that current knowledge remains partial: 'now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12). The Reformers emphasized Scripture's sufficiency for salvation while acknowledging God's secret counsel remains mysterious (Deuteronomy 29:29).

## Related Passages

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**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How do you balance vigorous intellectual pursuit with humble acknowledgment of creaturely limitations in understanding God's ways?
2. What areas of your life reflect anxious, sleepless striving rather than wise investigation combined with restful trust?

## Interlinear Text

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רָאָה: פָּקַדְתִּי הַלְּבִבִּי לְדַעַת פָּאָשׁ רָאָה:  
H834 When I applied H5414 H853 mine heart H3820 H3045 to know H2451 wisdom H7200 and to see

גַּם כִּי בְּאָרֶץ עַל נָעַשׂ הַר בְּעֵנִי אָתָּה:  
H833 the business H6045 H834 that is done H6213 H5921 upon the earth H776 H3588 H1571

בַּיּוֹם שֶׁבַת הַיּוֹם אֵין כֵּן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה שֶׁבַת הַיּוֹם:  
for also there is that neither day H3117 nor night H3915 sleep H8142 with his eyes H5869 H369

רָאָה:  
and to see  
H7200

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 127:2** (Parallel theme): It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

**Ecclesiastes 2:23** (Parallel theme): For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

**Ecclesiastes 1:13** (Parallel theme): And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.