

## FOOLS, FOOLS, FOOLS

### *A study of what God has to say in Proverbs and the Old Testament about "Fools."*

What is a fool? What is his nature? How does a person become a fool?

Is he born that way? No, it is a result of choices that he makes in life for which he is responsible.

Does a person become a fool in one sudden action or progressively? As you will see in this study, he becomes a fool as a result of a series of choices, whether over a long period of time or a brief period of time.

There are other questions for which the answers are not so clear. For instance, how does he affect others? Usually, a fool is both destructive to others and contagious to those closest around him.

How should we treat a fool? God has given us answers in His Word and since the ideas of man are always inferior to God's guidance, we should study what God has to say and do what He tells us even when we don't understand or readily agree with what He says.

**Webster's definition:** A fool, an idiot, a windbag (in allusion to the puffed cheeks of a windbag)

1. One who is lacking in reason, or the common powers of understanding; an idiot, an imbecile.
2. A person with little or no judgment, common sense, wisdom, etc.; a silly person; a simpleton.

Webster's definition seems to place an emphasis upon the cognitive mental capacity or development of a person and his actions.

The Scriptural description of fools, while including that which is found in Webster's, is much more complex and thorough.

First, in the Scriptures, and primarily in Proverbs, we will discover that there is more than one type of fool. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that there are several classes of fools, indicated by words that move from the simple to the more advanced condition.

Second, the characteristics described by these words, while including those found in Webster's dictionary, broaden the definition to point out that the mental problems which are associated with a fool are due to the fool's moral problems. Then, in addition to indicating what causes a person to be a fool, the Scriptures also tell how to avoid being a fool and how to relate to a fool as well as describing the consequences of being a fool.

The Scriptural descriptions of a "**fool**," as observed in the Old Testament, are presented in the following Hebrew words:

1. **peth-ee** (6612)

Normally translated "**simple**," this word refers to a naivete or immaturity that is a result of one's own choice and precursor to further digression into the condition of being a fool. The solution to the problems faced by the "**simple-minded**" is to learn and obey the Word of God (Psalm 19:7; 119:130). It was to deal with the problem of the "**simple-minded**" person that Proverbs was written (Pro. 1:4). As is found in the meaning of the other words which refer to the "**fool**," personal choice is involved in the problem of being "**simple-minded**" (Pro. 9:4-6).

2. **kes-eel** (3684)

Appearing about fifty times in Proverbs, and about seventy times total in the Old Testament, this is the most commonly used Hebrew word which is translated "**fool**" in Proverbs. It means one who is dull (unable to discern things of value) and obstinate in moral judgments, not primarily referring to basic intelligence. It emphasizes one's chosen outlook and choices and focuses on a propensity to make bad moral decisions. It seems to be the first step in the downward digression from being just a "**simple-minded**" person to developing the character of a "**fool**" (Proverbs 28:26).

3. **saw-kal** (5528, 5530)

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Even though this word is not found in Proverbs, **saw-kal** expresses an important characteristic of a “fool.” It means one who has a lack in a moral or spiritual sense, and most generally is used to indicate the practical atheism of a person who acts out of a dependence upon his own resources without a dependence upon God. See 1 Samuel 13:13; 26:21; 2 Samuel 24:10; 1 Chronicles 21:8 and 2 Chronicles 16:9.

#### 4. **ev-eel** (191)

This Hebrew word means “*perverse,*” or “*morally deficient,*” and appears about nineteen times in Proverbs. Such a person is lacking in sense and is generally corrupt. He is not only perverse because of his choices (see **kes-eel** above), but he is also insolent and shows a haughty disregard for others and established authority. Thus, his deficiency is a sinful moral perversion, not a mental lack or stupidity. He despises wisdom, is impatient with discipline and does not have a proper fear of God.

#### 5. **loots/lis** (3887)

Though **loots** is not translated “fool,” this Hebrew word seems to describe one of the most advanced class of “fools” and is found seventeen times in Proverbs, being often associated with the “fool” or contrasted with the “wise.” This word is derived from a root that means “*to make mouths at,*” or “*to blow.*” This word describes a character that is so degraded that he is odious to all around him (Pro. 24:9), and when he is expelled from a group, most problems cease to exist (Pro. 22:10).

#### 6. **naw-bawl** (5036)

This word includes the concepts of both **kes-eel** and **ev-eel** and also emphasizes being ignoble and disgraceful. Such a fool’s insensibility to God as well as his moral insensibility has closed his mind to all reason. Though used only three times in Proverbs (17:7, 21; 30:22), this word is well known for its use in Psalms 14:1 and 53:1 where it says, “*The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.*” Most likely this type of “fool” is more advanced, or degraded, than any other type as we see from what he says.

As one studies the meanings and uses of these Hebrew words it becomes apparent that being a “fool” *is a progressive matter resulting from certain choices a person makes in life.* The pathway of self-destruction begins with choice to be “naive” or “simple-minded” about life and relationships. In so doing he chooses not to study, learn and obey the instructions God gives to him in His holy Word. Having begun his path, he is unable to discern value and is obstinate in moral judgments, he then continues with a practical form of atheism, becomes morally deficient and generally corrupt, closes his mind to all logic and reason, and even denies the very existence of God and finally becomes absolutely worthless.

There really is no good reason for a person to become such a “fool.” All that is needed for him to save himself from such self-destruction is to read, learn and obey what God tells him to do.

Studying what God tells us about a “fool” will also enlighten us as to how we should relate to such a person. While some of us may feel sorry for such people and think that we can change them, we may learn differently if we will also read, learn and obey what God tells us about relating to such people. One may come to the conclusion that he should not waste his precious time on such people if they refuse to do what God tells them to do. After all, each of us has only a certain amount of time and resources to use. The time and resources we invest in the lives of those who repeatedly refuse to do what God tells them and have chosen a path from which we cannot turn them might, at times, be better spent on those who will assume responsibility for themselves and make the choices that can result in a productive life.

One thing we all should learn from this study is that there are some people with whom we should not associate or allow to be in our group because they will almost always cause discord and destroy harmony and peace.

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#### 3. **saw-kal** (5528, 5530 both from 3688 which is used only in Jeremiah 10:8)

Even though this word is not found in Proverbs, **saw-kal** expresses an important characteristic of a “fool.” It means one who has a lack in a moral or spiritual sense, and most generally is used to indicate the practical atheism of a person who acts out of a dependence upon his own resources without a dependence upon God. See 1 Samuel 13:13; 26:21; 2 Samuel 24:10; 1 Chronicles 21:8 and 2 Chronicles 16:9.

#### STRONG’S ENHANCED DICTIONARY

**5528 saw-kal** v. From 3688; TWOT 1493; GK 6118; Eight occurrences; AV translates as “done foolishly” five times, “turn into foolishness” once, “make foolish” once, and “play the fool” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 to be foolish, be a fool. 1A to make foolish, turn into foolishness. 1B to act or do foolishly. 1c to do foolishly, play the fool.

**5530** – [*ca*kal /saw·kaw/ ] n m. From 5528; TWOT 1493a; GK 6119; Seven occurrences; AV translates as “fool” four times, “foolish” twice, and “sottish” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 fool.

**3688** – [*ka*cal /kaw·sal/ ] v. A primitive root; TWOT 1011; GK 4071; AV translates as “foolish” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 to be foolish, be stupid.

#### THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The verb **5528** usually expresses lack in a moral or spiritual sense. Thus Saul acted as a fool when he usurped the Levitical prerogative in offering sacrifices. There is more involved than simply being an intellectual fool—Saul displayed his utter lack of spiritual comprehension (I Samuel 13:13).

The verb is mostly used in contexts where a man acts out of fear and thus behaves rashly, rather than acting wisely out of a confidence based in God. Thus David recognizes that he acted foolishly in taking the census of Israel in order to determine his military strength. It was a foolish act because he sought his security apart from God (II Samuel 24:10; I Chronicles 21:8). This practical atheism the Babylonians used to call “living in a *ramanishu*,” i.e. living by oneself, on one’s own resources, without dependence on God. But this is the essence of sin. Saul recognizes his own foolish behavior toward David, which was caused by his unfounded fear of him (I Samuel 26:21). Laban accuses Jacob of acting foolish by slipping off at night rather than giving Laban opportunity to give them a proper send-off. Of course Jacob acted out of fear (Genesis 31:28). Hanani, the seer, accuses Asa of playing the fool because out of fear he bribed the Syrians to attack Israel instead of relying on the Lord (2 Chronicles 16:9–10).

David prays that Ahithophel’s counsel will lead to the dire consequences that come from hasty, rash behavior. His prayer was answered when Ahithophel committed suicide (II Samuel 15:31-17:33). God likewise turned the knowledge of pagan diviners into the calamity that stems from such behavior when he sent Cyrus to destroy Babylon (Isaiah 44:25).

#### Hebrew Strongs in H5528 has 8 hits in 8 verses

Genesis 31:28 And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done **foolishly** in so doing.

1 Samuel 13:13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done **foolishly**: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever.

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1 Samuel 26:21 Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the **fool**, and have erred exceedingly.

2 Samuel 15:31 And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into **foolishness**.

2 Samuel 24:10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very **foolishly**.

1 Chronicles 21:8 And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very **foolishly**.

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done **foolishly**: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

Isaiah 44:25 That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge **foolish**;

**The noun 5530: Fool, foolish.** Jeremiah's generation was foolish and without understanding, and yet it was more than a mere lack of understanding (Jeremiah 5:21). Spiritual apostasy is foolishness. This is apparent when people are wise to evil but devoid of the knowledge to do good (Jeremiah 4:22). Ecclesiastes underscores the spiritual and particularly moral misfit who demonstrates to all that he is a fool (Ecclesiastes 10:3, et al.).

**Hebrew Strongs in H5530 has 7 hits in 6 verses**

Ecclesiastes 2:19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a **fool**? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.

Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou **foolish**: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Ecclesiastes 10:3 Yea also, when **he that is a fool** walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a **fool**.

Ecclesiastes 10:14 A **fool** also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

Jeremiah 4:22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are **sottish** children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Jeremiah 5:21 Hear now this, O **foolish** people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

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