

Ecclesiastes 10:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

Analysis

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child (אִילָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׁמָלֶךְ נָעָר, i-lakh erets shemalkekha'ar)—'woe to you, land, whose king is a youth.' The term na'ar can mean a child or simply an immature/inexperienced person. **And thy princes eat in the morning** (וְשָׁרֵךְ בְּבָקָר וְאַכְלָוּ, vesarekha baboqer yokhelu)—and your officials feast at morning, suggesting indulgence and neglect of duty.

Qoheleth pronounces i (woe, alas) over nations suffering from immature leadership and irresponsible officials. A na'ar king lacks the wisdom, experience, and gravitas for governance—Rehoboam exemplified this, rejecting elders' counsel for young advisors' foolishness (1 Kings 12:8-14), dividing the kingdom. 'Princes eating in the morning' suggests starting the day with feasting rather than work—dereliction of duty, focusing on pleasure over responsibility. Isaiah pronounced similar judgment: 'My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them' (Isaiah 3:4). Paul qualified elders as 'not a recent convert' (1 Timothy 3:6), recognizing maturity's necessity. Nations prosper under mature, disciplined leadership; they suffer under immature self-indulgence.

Historical Context

Ancient monarchies frequently struggled with succession when kings died young, leaving child-heirs vulnerable to manipulation by advisors and regent intrigue. Joash (crowned at seven, 2 Kings 11:21) and Josiah (crowned at eight, 2 Kings 22:1) were exceptions requiring extraordinary divine intervention.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do immaturity and self-indulgence in leadership—whether political, ecclesiastical, or familial—harm those under their care?
2. What character qualities distinguish mature leadership from merely young age or recent position?
3. In what areas might you be exercising influence while still 'a child' in wisdom or discipline?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֹהֶיךָ אֵין	לְגֹזְעָה	אֵין	שָׁמַלְכְּךָ הַנְּעָר	וְאֵשֶׁב	וְאֵלֹהֶיךָ
Woe	H0	to thee O land	when thy king	is a child	and thy princes
H337		H776	H4428	H5288	H8269
וְאֵלֹהֶיךָ בְּבֹאָלָה	בְּבֹאָלָה				
in the morning	eat				
H1242	H398				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 3:12 (Parallel theme): As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.

Jeremiah 21:12 (Parallel theme): O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the

oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

2 Chronicles 13:7 (Parallel theme): And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them.

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