

Ecclesiastes 10:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

Analysis

By much slothfulness the building decayeth (בְּעִצְלָתַיִם יִמָּךְ הַמְקָרֶה, ba'atsaltayim yimmakh hammeqareh)—literally 'through double idleness/sloth, the rafters sink.' The dual form atsaltayim (slothfulness) intensifies the concept—extreme laziness. The verb makh means to sink, collapse, or decay. **And through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through** (וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלוֹף הַבַּיִת, uveshiflut yadayim yidlof habayit)—'and through lowering/slackness of hands, the house leaks,' from dalaf (to drip, leak).

Practical wisdom about consequences of neglect: atsaltayim (slothfulness) causes structural failure—meqareh (roof beams) sink, bayit (house) leaks. The imagery is visceral—delayed maintenance produces collapse. The parallel phrases atsaltayim (sloth) and shiflut yadayim (slack hands) emphasize passivity's destructive power. Proverbs extensively warns against laziness: 'A little sleep, a little slumber... and poverty will come upon you like a robber' (Proverbs 6:10-11). Paul commanded, 'If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat' (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This applies beyond physical buildings to relationships, spiritual life, institutions—whatever goes unmaintained deteriorates. Diligence preserves; sloth destroys.

Historical Context

Ancient Palestinian homes had flat roofs requiring regular maintenance—mud-plaster roofs needed seasonal repair or they'd leak during rains. Neglected timber

beams would rot, causing collapse. This practical reality made the metaphor immediately comprehensible.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What 'buildings' in your life (relationships, health, spiritual disciplines, responsibilities) are suffering from neglect?
2. How does gradual decay through sloth differ from sudden destruction, and why does this make laziness particularly dangerous?
3. What systems of accountability or routine help prevent the 'slackness of hands' that leads to collapse?

Interlinear Text

בְּעֲצָלָתָּ יֵאָמַר	יֵאָמַר	הַמִּקְרָה	וּבְשָׁפָל וְיָדָא	יָדָא
By much slothfulness	decayeth	the building	and through idleness	of the hands
H6103	H4355	H4746	H8220	H3027
יִדְּלָהּ	הַבַּיִת:			
droppeth through	the house			
H1811	H1004			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 14:1 (Parallel theme): Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

Proverbs 20:4 (Parallel theme): The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

Hebrews 6:11 (Parallel theme): And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

Proverbs 21:25 (Parallel theme): The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.

Proverbs 23:21 (Parallel theme): For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

Proverbs 12:24 (Parallel theme): The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.