Ecclesiastes 11:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Analysis

The Preacher offers enigmatic counsel: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.' The Hebrew 'shalach' (שָׁלַח, cast) means send forth or release. 'Bread upon the waters' likely refers to maritime trade—sending goods by ship—or charitable giving without expectation of immediate return. The promise 'thou shalt find it after many days' suggests that generous investment, though risky and delayed, will eventually yield return. This verse teaches principled risk-taking and generous giving: don't hoard resources fearfully but invest them faithfully, trusting eventual return. Jesus taught: 'Give, and it shall be given unto you' (Luke 6:38). Paul emphasized that generous sowing yields generous harvest (2 Corinthians 9:6). The verse challenges both miserly hoarding and reckless speculation, counseling wise, generous investment.

Historical Context

Ancient maritime trade was risky—ships could sink, cargoes be lost, journeys delayed. Yet merchants 'cast bread upon waters' by investing in ventures that might not return for months or years. The verse could also reference Nile flooding in Egypt—farmers sowed seed on receding floodwaters, trusting eventual harvest. Early church fathers applied this to charity: give generously without calculating immediate return, trusting God's eventual reward (Matthew 6:3-4). The Reformers emphasized that believers should be generous with both material resources and gospel proclamation, trusting God for results. The Puritans valued both productive commerce (wise investment) and generous charity (trusting God's provision).

Modern readers see wisdom for both financial stewardship and missional engagement.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Where is God calling you to 'cast bread upon waters'—taking wise risks in generosity, business, or ministry without demanding immediate return?
2. How does faith in God's eventual provision free you from fearful hoarding or reckless speculation?

Interlinear Text

שַׁלַּ֥ח	לַחְמְךָ֖	עַל	פְּנֵ֣י	הַמָּ֑יִם	כִּ֛י	בְרֹ֥ב	הַיָּמִ֖ים
Cast	thy bread	H5921	upon	the waters	H3588	it after many	days
H7971	H3899		H6440	H4325		H7230	H3117

תִּמְצָאֶֽנּוּ׃
for thou shalt find
H4672

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 11:6 (Parallel theme): In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Proverbs 19:17 (Parallel theme): He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Hebrews 6:10 (Parallel theme): For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Matthew 10:42 (Parallel theme): And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

2 Corinthians 9:6 (Parallel theme): But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Isaiah 32:20 (Parallel theme): Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.

Luke 14:14 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Isaiah 32:8 (Parallel theme): But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.

Proverbs 22:9 (Parallel theme): He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

Matthew 25:40 (Parallel theme): And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.