

Ecclesiastes 3:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

Analysis

I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it (רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַיָּגוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֹנֹת בּוֹ, ra'iti et-ha'inyan asher natan Elohim livnei ha'adam la'anut bo). The word 'inyan' (יָגוֹן) means business, task, or occupation—the range of human activities. The verb 'la'anut' (לְעֹנֹת) can mean to be occupied, afflicted, or humbled. God has given humanity the 'travail' (יָגוֹן, inyan) of working within time's constraints and seasons' cycles.

This isn't punishment but providential design. God assigns humans the task of laboring within temporal limitations—we cannot add to His works (v. 14), we cannot know the future (v. 11), we must work within appointed times (v. 1-8). This 'exercise' (la'anut) serves a pedagogical purpose: teaching dependence, humility, and trust. The travail isn't meaningless but educational. It drives us to fear God (v. 14) and receive each day as His gift (v. 13). Paul later affirms that creation's bondage to futility serves God's purposes (Romans 8:20-21), groaning that prepares for redemption.

Historical Context

The Hebrew term 'sons of men' (בְּנֵי הָאָדָם, b'nei ha'adam) emphasizes humanity's creaturely status—we are Adam's descendants, made from dust, subject to mortality. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom often portrayed humans as servants of the gods, assigned burdensome labor (as in the Atrahasis Epic). However, Ecclesiastes presents a distinctively biblical perspective: God assigns human travail not as

divine exploitation but as pedagogical discipline that teaches wisdom, humility, and dependence. For post-exilic Israel, the 'travail' of rebuilding after Babylonian destruction felt overwhelming—yet Ecclesiastes taught that such labor, though difficult, comes from God's hand and serves His purposes.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What 'travail' has God given you 'to be exercised in,' and how might this difficulty be teaching you dependence and trust?
2. How does viewing your labor as God-assigned (rather than self-chosen) change your attitude toward its difficulties and limitations?

Interlinear Text

רָאִיתִי	אֶת	הַטֶּעַלִּי	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	אֱלֹהֵי	לְבָנָי
I have seen	H853	the travail	H834	hath given	which God	to the sons
H7200		H6045		H5414	H430	H1121
הָאָדָם	לְעֵלֹא	בָּוֶה:				
of men	to be exercised	H0				
H120	H6031					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 3:19 (Parallel theme): In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Ecclesiastes 2:26 (References God): For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather

and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

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