

Ecclesiastes 4:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.

Analysis

For out of prison he cometh to reign (כִּי־מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יָצָא לְמֶלֶךְ, ki-mibeit hasurim yatsa limlokh)—literally 'from the house of prisoners he went out to become king.'
Whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor (כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נֹלַד רָשׁ, ki gam bemalkhuto nolad rash)—even one born into royalty can become impoverished.

The contrast intensifies: the wise youth rises from prison to throne (recalling Joseph in Genesis 41), while the native-born royal descends into poverty through folly. The 'house of prisoners' (beit hasurim) emphasizes the depth of the reversal—chains to crown. Meanwhile, being 'born in his kingdom' suggests inherited privilege squandered through foolishness. This illustrates Ecclesiastes' recurring theme that circumstances don't determine outcomes—wisdom and folly do. God's sovereignty operates through such reversals: 'He brings down one and exalts another' (Psalm 75:7). The Gospel ultimately reveals the greatest reversal: Christ, though rich, became poor so we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Historical Context

Ancient monarchies typically passed power dynastically, making this prisoner-to-king scenario exceptional yet memorable (Joseph, Moses, David all experienced dramatic elevation). The instability described reflects the tumultuous period of the divided kingdom.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge assumptions that circumstances determine destiny?
2. What 'prisons' (literal or metaphorical) might God use as preparation for greater responsibility?
3. In what ways does spiritual poverty or wealth matter more than material circumstances?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	מִבֵּית	הַסּוּרִים	יָצָא	לְמַלְכוּת	כִּי	גַם	בְּמַלְכוּת
H3588	H1004	H612	he cometh	to reign	H3588	H1571	in his kingdom
			H3318	H4427			H4438
וְנֹלַד				רָשָׁה			
whereas also he that is born				becometh poor			
H3205				H7326			

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 41:14 (Parallel theme): Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

Job 5:11 (Parallel theme): To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety.

Lamentations 4:20 (Parallel theme): The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.

2 Kings 24:6 (Kingdom): So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.

2 Kings 25:7 (Parallel theme): And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

2 Kings 24:12 (Kingdom): And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

Daniel 4:31 (Kingdom): While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.