

Ecclesiastes 5:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

Analysis

When goods increase, they are increased that eat them (ברבות הטעבה רבבו, אוכלי, birvot hatovah rabbu okhleiha)—when prosperity multiplies, so do the consumers/dependents. The Hebrew okhleiha literally means 'those eating them,' referring to household members, servants, staff, and parasitic hangers-on. **And what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?** (ומה-כשרון לבעליך כי אמראות עיניו) umah-kishron liv'aleiha ki imre'ut einav)—the only advantage is visual observation.

Qoheleth identifies wealth's ironic burden: prosperity attracts dependents proportionally, leaving the owner with mere spectatorship rather than actual enjoyment. The term kishron ('advantage' or 'success') recalls the book's recurring question: 'What profit has man from all his labor?' (1:3). Jesus later warned that 'a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' (Luke 12:15). The wealthy man becomes custodian rather than consumer, watching resources flow through his hands to others—rendering ownership functionally meaningless beyond the psychological satisfaction of 'having.' True contentment comes not from accumulation but from enjoying God's sufficient provision (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Historical Context

Solomon's enormous wealth (1 Kings 10:14-29) required massive administrative apparatus—officials, servants, traders, guards—all 'eating' from royal resources.

His 40,000 stalls of horses and daily provisions (1 Kings 4:22-28) illustrate this principle exactly.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the burden of managing wealth differ from the assumed freedom it promises?
2. In what ways might you be accumulating goods that primarily serve others' consumption rather than genuine contentment?
3. What is the difference between stewardship and mere spectatorship in how you handle possessions?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	רַב	הַטּוֹב	ה	בְּרֻבּוֹת	וּמָה	אֹכֵל	יְהִ	פְּשָׁרוֹן
increase	When goods	they are increased	1			that eat	H4100	them and what good
H7235	H2896	H7231				H398		H3788
is there to the owners	לְבָעֵל	יְהִ	כִּי	אֶם	רְא	יְתָ	עִינֵּים:	
H1167	H3588	H518			H7200	of them	with their eyes	H5869

Additional Cross-References

1 John 2:16 (Parallel theme): For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Habakkuk 2:13 (Parallel theme): Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

Proverbs 23:5 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Ecclesiastes 6:9 (Parallel theme): Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

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