

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 (בְּרִבּוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רַבּוּ אוֹכְלֶיהָ, 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?** (וְיִמָּה־כִּשְׁרוֹן לִבְעֵלֶיהָ כִּי אִם־רְאוֹת עֵינָיו, umah-kishron liv'aleiha ki im-re'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

בְּרִבּוֹת	הַטּוֹב הַ	רַב וְ	אוֹכְלֵי יָהּ	וְמָה	כְּשֶׁרוֹן
increase	When goods	they are increased	that eat	H4100	them and what good
H7235	H2896	H7231	H398		H3788
לְבַעַל יָהּ	כִּי	אֵם	רָא יֵת	עֵינָיו:	
is there to the owners	H3588	thereof saving	H7200	of them with their eyes	
H1167		H518		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.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org