

Ecclesiastes 5:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

Analysis

The sleep of a labouring man is sweet (מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד, metukah shenat ha'oved)—literally 'sweet is the sleep of the worker.' The adjective metukah conveys pleasantness and satisfaction. **Whether he eat little or much** (אִם־מְעַט יֹאכַל, im-me'at ve'im-harbeh yokhel)—regardless of quantity consumed. **But the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep** (וְהַשָּׂבַע לְעָשִׁיר אֵינָנוּ וְהַסָּבִיב לוֹ לִישׁוֹן, vehasava le'ashir einennu maniach lo lishon)—prosperity's satiation doesn't permit him to sleep.

One of Scripture's most pointed contrasts: the laborer sleeps soundly regardless of modest means, while the rich man suffers insomnia despite (or because of) abundance. The verb maniach ('permit' or 'allow') suggests wealth actively prevents rest—through anxiety about preservation, fear of loss, complications of management, or the spiritual burden Jesus described: 'the deceitfulness of riches' (Matthew 13:22). Physical labor produces healthy fatigue and clear conscience; wealth accumulation produces restless worry. Proverbs 3:24 promises the righteous, 'When you lie down, you will not be afraid; your sleep will be sweet'—a sweetness dependent on trust in God rather than portfolio size.

Historical Context

Ancient agricultural societies understood labor's rhythm—farmers and craftsmen worked hard physically and rested deeply. The wealthy class, however, faced

constant concerns about property, inheritances, political intrigue, and maintaining status, as royal court life demonstrated.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What anxieties associated with possessions might be robbing you of peace and rest?
2. How does simplicity of lifestyle contribute to 'sweet sleep' in both physical and spiritual senses?
3. In what ways does honest labor bring contentment that wealth accumulation cannot provide?

Interlinear Text

מְתוֹקָה	שְׁנַת	הָעֵבֶד	אִם	מְעַט	וְאִם	הַרְבֵּה
is sweet	The sleep	of a labouring man	H518	little	H518	or much
H4966	H8142	H5647		H4592		H7235

יֵאֵכֶּל	וְהַשָּׂבַע	לְעַשׂ יֵר	אֵיךְ נֹו	מִן יֵר	לֹו
whether he eat	but the abundance	of the rich	H369	will not suffer	H0
H398	H7647	H6223		H3240	

לִישׁוֹן:

him to sleep
H3462

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 3:24 (Parallel theme): When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

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