

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 (שְׁנַת הַעֲבָד, 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 וְאִם-הַרְבָּה יִאֱכֵל, im-me'at ve'im-harbeh yokhel)—regardless of quantity consumed. **But the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep** (וְשָׁבֵע לְעַשֵּׂיר אַיִלָּנוּ, 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

רַבָּה	הִיא	מִתְוקָה	שָׁן	תְּ	כְּעֵבֶד	שָׁן	תְּ	אָמֵן	מַעַט	אָמֵן	רַבָּה	הִיא	מִתְוקָה	
is sweet	The sleep	of a labouring man			H518	little		H518	or much					
H4966	H8142	H5647				H4592			H7235					
לֹא	מִפְנֵי	אֵיכֶן	אֵיכֶן	לֹא	לְעֵשֶׂר	יְרֵא	וְפִשְׁבַּע	אֵיכֶן	לֹא	מִפְנֵי	אֵיכֶן	לֹא	לֹא	
whether he eat	but the abundance		of the rich		H369	will not suffer			H0					
H398	H7647		H6223						H3240					
לְשִׁוָּן:														
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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