

Ecclesiastes 5:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.

Analysis

But those riches perish by evil travail (ve'avad ha'osher hahu be'inyan ra)—'and that wealth was lost through bad business/misfortune.' The noun inyan refers to occupation, affair, or venture—the wealth vanishes through failed enterprise. **And he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand** (veholid ben ve'ein beyado me'umah)—he fathers a child, yet has nothing left to provide.

The 'sore evil' (v.13) now plays out concretely: the hoarded wealth disappears through misfortune or bad decisions, leaving the owner unable to fulfill paternal duty of inheritance. The phrase 'nothing in his hand' (ein beyado me'umah) emphasizes complete emptiness—the grasping hand opens to reveal nothing. This illustrates Jesus's teaching: 'Do not lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal' (Matthew 6:19). The father who focused on accumulation for his son's sake finds his singular focus produces the opposite result. True inheritance is training in godliness (Proverbs 22:6), not merely material transfer.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite culture emphasized generational wealth transfer—fathers were expected to provide inheritances (Proverbs 13:22). The shame of having 'nothing in his hand' for one's son represented profound failure of patriarchal responsibility.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What 'bad ventures' in your life might be threatening to consume the resources God has entrusted to you?
2. How does focusing on leaving material inheritance for children potentially distract from more important spiritual legacy?
3. In what ways can riches 'perish' beyond literal loss—through damaged relationships, lost opportunities, spiritual compromise?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵבֶד	שָׁרֶשׁ	וְאֵת	בְּעֵנִי	עַל	בְּעֵנִי	וְאֵת	וְאֵבֶד
perish	But those riches		H1931	travail	by evil	and he begetteth	a son
H6	H6239			H6045	H7451	H3205	H1121
וְאֵת	בְּיַד	וְאֵת	מְאוֹתָה:				
H369	in his hand	and there is nothing	H3027				
			H3972				

Additional Cross-References

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 2:26 (Parallel theme): For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Haggai 1:9 (Parallel theme): Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

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