

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Analysis

Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin—the Hebrew basar (בָּשָׂר, flesh) means your whole person, not just physical body. Careless speech (peh, פֶּה, mouth) leads to guilt requiring sacrifice or judgment. Rash vows create obligations one cannot fulfill, thus causing sin.

Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error—the mal'akh (מַלְאָךְ, angel/messenger) may refer to the priest who received vow-offerings (Malachi 2:7) or to God's angelic witness. Claiming shegagah (שְׁגָגָה, error/mistake) doesn't excuse broken vows—they were voluntary commitments. **Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?**—unfulfilled vows provoke divine qatsaph (קִצְפָּה, anger/wrath), resulting in cursed labor. This echoes Haggai 1:6-11, where disobedience brought frustration to work. The warning is severe: treat God's name and your word with utmost seriousness.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite worship involved priests who mediated between people and God. When someone made a vow, they would eventually bring the vow-offering to the priest. Attempting to retract a vow by claiming it was a mistake would not be accepted—the vow had invoked God's name as witness. Leviticus 5:4-6 addresses rash oaths requiring guilt offerings. Numbers 30 allows fathers and husbands to nullify certain vows immediately, but personal vows stood. The seriousness of

God's anger at broken vows reflects covenant theology: God keeps His word absolutely, and His people must reflect His character. New Testament parallels appear in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), who lied about their offering and faced immediate judgment. The principle remains: God takes His name and our word seriously.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Have you ever tried to excuse a broken commitment to God by calling it a "mistake" or minimizing its importance?
2. How does the warning that God might "destroy the work of thine hands" motivate careful speech and promise-keeping?

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