

Ecclesiastes 6:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

Analysis

Continuing the comparison, the Preacher describes the stillborn's experience: **For he cometh in with vanity** (כִּי־בָהֶ֫בֶל בָּא, ki-vahevel ba)—the stillborn arrives with the same hevel (vapor/breath/vanity) that characterizes all earthly existence. **And departeth in darkness** (וַיִּחְשֶׁךְ יָלֶ֫חֶךְ, u-vachoshekh yelekh)—it passes immediately from womb to grave without experiencing life's light. **And his name shall be covered with darkness** (וַיִּחְשֶׁךְ שְׁמוֹ יִכְסֶ֫ה, u-vachoshekh shemo yekhuseh)—nameless, unmemorialized, leaving no legacy or reputation.

The stillborn's obscurity seems tragic, yet the Preacher argues it's preferable to a life of blessed accumulation without satisfaction. The triple reference to darkness emphasizes obscurity and non-existence. Yet this very obscurity spares the stillborn from experiencing life's frustrations, laboring without reward, and suffering the peculiar torment of possessing everything while enjoying nothing. The passage assumes that existence without the capacity to enjoy God's good gifts is worse than non-existence—a sobering commentary on what makes life worth living.

Historical Context

Ancient cultures had various burial and memorial practices for stillborns—some provided minimal burial, others none at all, reflecting the child's lack of social identity. The emphasis on darkness and namelessness reflects ancient values: identity came through name, legacy, and memorial. A stillborn had no name to

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2