

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** (פִּי-בָּהֶבֶל בָּא) —the stillborn arrives with the same hevel (vapor/breath/vanity) that characterizes all earthly existence. **And departeth in darkness** (וּבְחַשָּׁךְ יְלֵךְ) —it passes immediately from womb to grave without experiencing life's light. **And his name shall be covered with darkness** (וּבְחַשָּׁךְ שָׁמוֹן יְכָפֵה) —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

perpetuate, no achievements to remember, no descendants to carry on family line. Yet Ecclesiastes provocatively suggests this anonymity is preferable to a life that accumulates blessings without capacity for enjoyment. This challenges ancient (and modern) assumptions that mere existence, longevity, and accumulation constitute inherent goods regardless of quality of life or relationship with God.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge the modern assumption that existence is always preferable to non-existence, regardless of life's quality or meaning?
2. What does the comparison between a stillborn and a blessed but unsatisfied person teach about what truly gives life value and meaning?

Interlinear Text

בַּ	כִּי	בַּ	בַּ	אֵ	בַּ	וּבְחַ	שָׁחַ	יְלִ	וּבְחַ	שָׁחַ	וְשָׁמֶן
H3588	in with vanity	H1892	For he cometh	H935	H2822	H1980	in darkness	H2822	in darkness	H8034	and his name

בְּכָסָה:
shall be covered
H3680

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