

Ecclesiastes 6:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

Analysis

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire (טוב מראָה (עינים מהלך-נפש)—Literally, 'better what the eyes see than the soul's walking.' The Hebrew nephesh (soul/appetite) constantly roams, craving what is absent. The Preacher advocates contentment with present realities over endless yearning for what we don't have.

Yet even this modest wisdom is **vanity and vexation of spirit** (hevel ū-re'ūt rūah). The phrase 'vexation of spirit' literally means 'shepherding the wind'—a futile attempt to control the uncontrollable. Paul echoes this in Philippians 4:11-12, having learned contentment, but grounds it in Christ's sufficiency rather than philosophical resignation.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature frequently contrasted desire and contentment. The Egyptian 'Instruction of Ptahhotep' (circa 2400 BC) similarly warned against greed. Solomon's unique contribution is showing that even wise contentment, without God, remains 'vapor' (hevel).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'wandering desires' consume your attention instead of gratitude for present blessings?
2. How does contentment 'in the Lord' (Phil 4:4) differ from the Preacher's contentment 'under the sun'?

Interlinear Text

טוֹב	מַרְאֵה	עֵינַיִם	מְהַלֵּךְ	בְּפֶשַׁע	גַּם	זֶה
Better	is the sight	of the eyes	than the wandering	of the desire	H1571	H2088
H2896	H4758	H5869	H1980	H5315		
הַ בָּל	וְרָע	וְרָע	רוּחַ:			
this is also vanity	and vexation	of spirit				
H1892	H7469	H7307				

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (Spirit): I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Job 31:7 (Parallel theme): If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands;