

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner
destroyeth much good.

Analysis

Wisdom is better than weapons of war (טובה חכמה מכלי קרב, tovaḥ chokhmah miklei qerav)—literally 'better is wisdom than implements of war.' The term klei refers to implements, tools, or instruments; qerav means combat or battle. **But one sinner destroyeth much good** (וְאֶחָד יַאֲבִיד טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּה, vechote echad ye'abbed tovaḥ harbeh)—'but one sinner destroys much good,' from abad (to destroy, ruin, perish).

The final assessment balances affirmation and warning: wisdom exceeds military power (returning to v. 14-15's theme—the poor wise man achieved what siege weapons couldn't), yet one chote (sinner, one who misses the mark) can undo vast tovaḥ (good). This sobering note recognizes corruption's disproportionate destructive capacity—one Achan brings defeat (Joshua 7), one Judas betrays Christ (Matthew 26:14-16). The quantitative imbalance (echad—one versus harbeh—much) underscores entropy's law: building requires sustained effort; destruction needs mere moments. Proverbs 6:15 warns similarly: 'suddenly he will be broken beyond healing.' This demands vigilance against sin's infiltration, since even isolated evil can cascade catastrophically.

Historical Context

Israel's history demonstrated this repeatedly: individual sins triggering communal disaster (Achan, David's census, Solomon's idolatry). The corporate nature of covenant community meant one person's sin rippled throughout the nation.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the power of 'one sinner' to destroy 'much good' inform your understanding of personal holiness and corporate responsibility?
2. What areas in your life, family, or church might be vulnerable to disproportionate damage from single points of compromise?
3. How do you balance celebrating wisdom's superiority to power while remaining vigilant against destructive sin?

Interlinear Text

טוֹבָה	חֲכִמָּה	מִכְלֵי	קֶרֶב	אֶחָד	אֶחָד	יִאַבֵּד
good	Wisdom	than weapons	of war	sinner	but one	destroyeth
H2896	H2451	H3627	H7128	H2398	H259	H6

טוֹבָה	הַרְבֵּה
good	much
H2896	H7235

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 7:1 (Parallel theme): But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

Joshua 7:5 (Parallel theme): And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

Ecclesiastes 9:16 (Parallel theme): Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

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