

Jeremiah 12:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

Analysis

This verse announces futile labor: 'They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns.' The Hebrew *chitta* (חִטָּה, wheat) versus *qotsim* (קִצִּים, thorns) reverses expected harvest. 'They have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit.' The Hebrew *nichlah* (נִחַלָּה, be sick, pain oneself) indicates exhausting effort without benefit (*ya'il*, profit). 'And they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD.' 'Revenues' (*tevu'oth*, produce, income) bring shame (*bush*) rather than pride. The 'fierce anger of the LORD' (*charon aph YHWH*) explains the reversal—divine wrath nullifies human labor. The verse echoes covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:38-40) promising futile agricultural labor.

Historical Context

Covenant curses promised that disobedience would result in planting but not harvesting, laboring but not benefiting (Leviticus 26:16, 20; Deuteronomy 28:38-40). During Babylon's invasions, agricultural cycles were disrupted—fields planted could not be harvested due to warfare. The frustration of fruitless labor was both physical (actual crop failure) and theological (covenant curse activation).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does 'sowing wheat but reaping thorns' express the futility of effort under divine judgment?
2. What contemporary applications exist for laboring in ways that cannot profit because they contradict God's purposes?

Interlinear Text

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|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| זָרְעוּ | חֲטִימִים | וְקִלְצוּ יָם | קִלְצוּ רֹו | נָחֲלוּ |
| They have sown | wheat | thorns | but shall reap | they have put themselves to pain |
| H2232 | H2406 | H6975 | H7114 | H2470 |
| לֹא | יִנְעוּ לוֹ | וְבִשּׁוּ | מִתְבּוֹאֵתֶיכֶם | |
| but shall not profit | and they shall be ashamed | of your revenues | | |
| H3808 | H3276 | H954 | H8393 | |
| מִחַר וֶן | אַף | יְהוָה: | | |
| because of the fierce | anger | of the LORD | | |
| H2740 | H639 | H3068 | | |

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 28:38 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it.

Micah 6:15 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine.

Haggai 1:6 (Parallel theme): Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Isaiah 55:2 (Parallel theme): Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Leviticus 26:16 (Parallel theme): I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

Jeremiah 4:26 (References Lord): I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.

Habakkuk 2:13 (References Lord): Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?