

Proverbs 16:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts quantity with quality: 'Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.' The Hebrew 'tsedeq' (righteousness) encompasses both ethical living and right relationship with God. The word 'mishpat' (right/justice) emphasizes legal and moral uprightness. Reformed theology rejects prosperity as the ultimate good, affirming instead that godliness with contentment is true wealth. This verse condemns ill-gotten gain and commends modest means acquired righteously. Material abundance gained through unrighteousness brings God's curse, not blessing.

Historical Context

In ancient agrarian societies, the temptation to gain wealth through oppression, fraud, or injustice was constant. This proverb reminded Israelites that covenant faithfulness mattered more than economic success.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Are there areas where you've prioritized financial gain over righteousness?
2. How does this principle challenge contemporary culture's obsession with wealth accumulation?
3. What would choosing 'a little with righteousness' look like in your current circumstances?

Interlinear Text

בְּלֹא תִּתְבֹּא וְתִּמְרֹב בְּצַדְקָה הַעֲטָה טֹב

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues

H2896

H4592

H6666

H7230

H8393

H3808

מִשְׁפָּט:

without right

H4941

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 37:16 (Righteousness): A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.

Proverbs 15:16 (Parallel theme): Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

Jeremiah 17:11 (Parallel theme): As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

Micah 6:10 (Parallel theme): Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?