

Proverbs 17:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame,
and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

Analysis

A 'wise servant' can rule over a 'disgraceful son' and share inheritance among brothers. This proverb overturns worldly hierarchies: wisdom and character matter more than birth or status. The Hebrew 'bosh' (disgraceful/shameful) emphasizes the son's unworthiness. In God's economy, faithful servants are elevated above unfaithful heirs. This anticipates the gospel: Gentiles grafted in while unfaithful Israel broken off (Romans 11:17-24). Reformed theology emphasizes that election is by grace, not natural descent or human merit. Faithfulness, not pedigree, determines inheritance.

Historical Context

Primogeniture normally guaranteed inheritance to the firstborn son. This proverb's reversal would have been shocking, emphasizing that covenant faithfulness could overturn natural expectations—a theme seen in Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this proverb challenge assumptions about status, privilege, and inheritance?
2. In what ways do you see the principle of 'faithful servants over unfaithful heirs' in God's kingdom?
3. What does this teach about the basis of our standing before God?

Interlinear Text

עֶבֶד	מִשְׁכָּב יל	! מְשָׁל	בֵּן	מִבְּיֹש	וּבֵת וְ
servant	A wise	shall have rule	over a son	that causeth shame	among
H5650	H7919	H4910	H1121	H954	H8432
אֶחָד יִם	יָמֻל ק	נִחְלָה:			
the brethren	and shall have part	of the inheritance			
H251	H2505	H5159			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 10:5 (Parallel theme): He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

Ecclesiastes 4:13 (Parallel theme): Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

Proverbs 19:26 (Parallel theme): He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.

Proverbs 14:35 (Parallel theme): The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.