

Proverbs 20:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

Analysis

Ill-gotten gain may seem 'sweet' initially—providing immediate pleasure and satisfaction. But eventually 'his mouth shall be filled with gravel'—the outcome is bitter, painful, and destructive. Bread obtained through deceit, theft, or fraud brings momentary gratification but ultimate ruin. The metaphor of 'gravel' suggests both worthlessness and injury; what seemed nourishing becomes indigestible and harmful. This reflects God's moral order: sin always pays wages, and stolen pleasure turns to lasting pain. The apparently successful wicked will face both temporal consequences and eternal judgment. Better to earn honest bread, even if scarce, than feast on dishonest abundance that becomes ashes.

Historical Context

Biblical law prescribed restitution for theft and fraud (Leviticus 6:1-7). Beyond legal penalties, the proverb warns of the internal corruption and ultimate divine judgment that follow dishonest gain.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Are you tempted to take shortcuts or compromises for quick gain?
2. What 'sweet bread' might actually be poisoning your soul?

Interlinear Text

עֵדֶךָ ב	לְ אִישׁ	לֶחֶם	שֶׁ קָר	! אַחֲר	יִמְלֵא	פִּי יְהו
is sweet	to a man	Bread	of deceit	but afterwards	shall be filled	his mouth
H6156	H376	H3899	H8267	H310	H4390	H6310

דָּחַץ:
with gravel
H2687

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (Parallel theme): Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

Hebrews 11:25 (Parallel theme): Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;