

Proverbs 20:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

Analysis

An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

This proverb warns against wealth acquired too quickly or easily at life's start. The Hebrew *nachalah* (inheritance) typically referred to land or property passed from parents to children, but here describes any wealth obtained without corresponding effort or maturity. The phrase "gotten hastily" (*mevorakhat barishonah*, literally "hurried/greedy at the first") suggests both speed and improper eagerness—wealth seized prematurely or through questionable means.

The contrast between "beginning" (*rishonah*) and "end" (*acharit*) creates temporal tension: what seems fortunate initially proves cursed ultimately. The passive construction "shall not be blessed" (*lo tevorakh*) indicates divine disapproval—God doesn't bless wealth obtained wrongly or before one is ready to steward it wisely. This reflects the biblical principle that **character development must match resource accumulation**. Premature wealth—through inheritance, lottery, fraud, or shortcuts—often destroys rather than builds because the recipient lacks the wisdom, discipline, and maturity that normally accompany earned wealth.

Historical Context

In ancient Israel's agrarian economy, inheritance of land represented multi-generational wealth and identity. Normally, sons received their inheritance after

their father's death, when they had matured through years of working the land under paternal guidance. The law of the prodigal son (Luke 15:12) shows that demanding early inheritance was culturally shameful—essentially wishing the father dead. The tragic story of Absalom, who seized power prematurely, illustrates this proverb's warning. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature consistently counseled patience in wealth-building and warned against schemes to get rich quickly. The book of Proverbs repeatedly contrasts the steady accumulation of wealth through diligence (Proverbs 13:11) with the fleeting gains of shortcuts. This wisdom remains remarkably relevant in modern contexts of lottery winnings, sudden fame, or inherited wealth without corresponding character formation.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Why does wealth obtained too easily or too early often lead to ruin rather than blessing?
2. How does the process of earning wealth develop character qualities necessary for stewarding it wisely?
3. What modern equivalents exist to 'hastily gotten inheritance'—ways people seek wealth without corresponding maturity?
4. How should parents approach passing wealth to children—what preparation is needed beyond financial resources?
5. In what ways might 'slow' wealth be more blessed than 'fast' wealth, even if the amounts are identical?

Interlinear Text

ל	א	!	אַחֲרֵיתָּהּ	הַ	בְּרֵאשִׁיתָּהּ	הַ	מִבְּרָכָהּ	לָת	נַ	חִלָּהּ
			but the end		at the beginning				An inheritance	
	H3808		H319		H7223		H973		H5159	
תְּבִרָתָהּ:										
thereof shall not be blessed										
H1288										

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:22 (Parallel theme): A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

1 Timothy 6:9 (Parallel theme): But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Proverbs 28:8 (Parallel theme): He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

Proverbs 28:22 (Parallel theme): He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.

Proverbs 23:4 (Parallel theme): Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

Proverbs 28:20 (Blessing): A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

Habakkuk 2:6 (Parallel theme): Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!