

Proverbs 20:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

Analysis

The 'sluggard' (Hebrew 'atsel'—lazy person) won't plow in winter due to cold, so he begs during harvest and receives nothing. This illustrates the principle of sowing and reaping. Those who avoid necessary labor when it's difficult will lack when it's time to enjoy fruit. Reformed theology emphasizes diligent work as Christian calling (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Slothfulness is sin—a failure of stewardship and trust in God's providence. This proverb warns that present ease purchased through laziness yields future want.

Historical Context

Palestinian winters (October-March) were the plowing and sowing season, though cold and rainy. Farmers who avoided this difficult work would have no crops to harvest in spring and summer, leading to begging and hunger.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what areas are you avoiding difficult but necessary work?
2. How do you balance rest with the biblical mandate for diligent labor?
3. What 'winter plowing' do you need to do now to avoid future lack?

Interlinear Text

מִן חָרֶף	לֹא עָצָל	יִסְרֶשׁ	וְשָׁאַל
by reason of the cold	The sluggard	H3808	will not plow
H2779	H6102	H2790	therefore shall he beg

בְּאַיִלָּה	בְּקָצָרִים
in harvest	H369
H7105	

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 10:4 (Parallel theme): He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

Proverbs 19:15 (Parallel theme): Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

Proverbs 13:4 (Parallel theme): The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Proverbs 24:34 (Parallel theme): So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.

Proverbs 19:24 (Parallel theme): A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.