

Psalms 146:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Analysis

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Human mortality starkly portrayed—tetse rucho (רוּחֹה) "his spirit goes out" at death, when ruach (רוּחָה) "breath/spirit" departs. Yashuv le'admato (ישַׁב לְאַדְמָתוֹ) "he returns to his ground"—wordplay on adam (אָדָם) "man" and adamah (אָדָמָה) "ground," recalling Genesis 3:19, "dust you are, to dust you shall return."

In that very day his thoughts perish (bayyom hahu avedu eshtonotav, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֲבָדָנוּ עַשְׁתָּנוֹתָיו)—eshtonot (עַשְׁתָּנוֹת) "plans/schemes" immediately cease at death. The powerful prince who seemed able to help becomes utterly powerless instantly. This demolishes trust in human power and directs faith toward the immortal God alone.

Historical Context

The psalm was likely written post-exilic when Judah existed under successive empires (Persian, Greek, eventually Roman). The temptation to trust in imperial power for security and prosperity was constant. This verse reminded Israel that all empires rise and fall, but Yahweh reigns eternally.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How should the certainty of death inform priorities, ambitions, and what we consider worthy of trust?
2. What 'thoughts and plans' occupy your mind—eternal matters or perishing concerns?
3. How can remembering human mortality without God foster evangelistic urgency?

Interlinear Text

וְיַצֵּא	רְוֹחַם	וְשָׁבַע	לְאָדָם	בַּיּוֹם	בְּהַיּוֹם
goeth forth	His breath	he returneth	to his earth	in that very day	H1931
H3318	H7307	H7725	H127	H3117	
אָבֹד	בְּשָׁתָנְתִּין				
perish	his thoughts				
H6	H6250				

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (Parallel theme): Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Psalms 104:29 (Parallel theme): Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.

Genesis 2:7 (Parallel theme): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Genesis 3:19 (Parallel theme): In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Psalms 33:10 (Parallel theme): The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.

1 Corinthians 2:6 (Parallel theme): Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

Job 27:3 (Parallel theme): All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;

Job 17:11 (Parallel theme): My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart.

Job 14:21 (Parallel theme): His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them.

Isaiah 2:22 (Parallel theme): Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org