

Daniel 4:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Analysis

Daniel's counsel "break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor" offers a remarkable prescription for averting divine judgment. The Aramaic peraq (פְּרָאַק, "break off") means "to tear away" or "sever completely," indicating decisive repentance, not gradual reformation. "Thy sins" and "thine iniquities" use parallel terms emphasizing both specific transgressions and general moral corruption requiring comprehensive turning from evil.

The prescribed remedy connects repentance with social justice: "righteousness" (tsidqah, צִדְקָה) encompasses both moral integrity and just treatment of others, while "mercy to the poor" (chan 'anayya, חָנָנָה) requires active compassion toward the vulnerable. This anticipates prophetic teaching that true repentance manifests in changed behavior, particularly toward society's marginalized (Isaiah 58:6-7, Micah 6:8). Genuine repentance isn't merely internal contrition but produces visible fruit in relationships and social ethics.

The conditional phrase "if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity" recognizes both God's sovereignty and genuine contingency. While God's ultimate purposes remain fixed, human response to prophetic warning can affect timing and severity of judgment. This demonstrates God's desire that sinners repent rather than perish (Ezekiel 18:23, 2 Peter 3:9). Daniel's counsel points to Christ, whose call to

repentance includes both turning from sin and demonstrating kingdom values through love and justice.

Historical Context

Daniel's interpretation came after describing Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great tree cut down, leaving only a stump (representing the king's coming humiliation and restoration). Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature connected royal prosperity with justice, recognizing that oppressive rulers eventually faced divine retribution or popular revolt. Daniel's specific emphasis on mercy to the poor may reflect Nebuchadnezzar's harsh treatment of conquered peoples and exploitation through massive building projects using forced labor.

Archaeological evidence reveals that Nebuchadnezzar's building projects, though magnificent, required enormous resources extracted from conquered territories. The king's pride in these achievements ("Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?"—v. 30) suggests he attributed success to personal prowess rather than divine blessing. Daniel's call to show mercy to the poor offered an alternative path that would acknowledge God's sovereignty and demonstrate transformed priorities.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does genuine repentance manifest in changed behavior toward society's vulnerable and marginalized?
2. In what ways does God's willingness to potentially lengthen tranquility based on repentance demonstrate both His sovereignty and genuine response to human choices?

Interlinear Text

וְחִטְּבֵר יְהִי מֶלֶךְ אֶלָּה |
Wherefore O king let my counsel be acceptable unto thee thy sins

בְּצַדְקָה הַבְּמֵת | וְשִׁעְרָתָה רְגִזָּנָה בְּמַעַן יְהִי
by righteousness and break off and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor

לְשִׁלְׁוֹפָה: אַרְכָּה תְּחִנֵּה הַבָּה |
if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 3:9 (Parallel theme): Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Acts 8:22 (Parallel theme): Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Luke 11:41 (Parallel theme): But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

Acts 26:20 (Parallel theme): But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Proverbs 16:6 (Grace): By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

Proverbs 28:13 (Grace): He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Ephesians 4:28 (Kingdom): Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Ezekiel 18:7 (Parallel theme): And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;

1 Kings 21:29 (Parallel theme): Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

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