

Jeremiah 18:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them.

Analysis

Jeremiah protests the injustice: "Shall evil be recompensed for good?" The rhetorical question expects a negative answer—it's morally outrageous that good deeds receive evil payment. "For they have digged a pit for my soul"—the imagery depicts hunters setting traps for prey. Despite Jeremiah's faithful ministry, his audience plots his destruction.

"Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them"—powerful intercessory language. Jeremiah reminds God (and himself) that he faithfully interceded for his persecutors, seeking to avert divine judgment through their repentance. Like Moses (Ex 32:11-14, 30-32) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:5-9, 12:23), Jeremiah fulfilled the prophetic role of standing between God and people, pleading for mercy.

This verse anticipates Christ, the ultimate Intercessor who prayed for His executioners (Luke 23:34) and continually intercedes for His people (Heb 7:25, Rom 8:34). While Jeremiah's intercession proved insufficient to save Judah, Christ's intercession perfectly accomplishes salvation for all who come to God through Him. The pattern: God's servants suffer unjustly while serving others' spiritual good, pointing to the Suffering Servant who bore sins of many (Isa 53:12).

Historical Context

Prophetic intercession was a standard role—Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, and others stood between God and people, pleading for mercy during judgment. Priestly and prophetic offices both included intercessory functions. Jeremiah's intercession for Judah appears throughout his prophecy (Jer 14:7-9, 11-22, 15:1, 18:20), though God eventually forbade further intercession because judgment was sealed (Jer 7:16, 11:14, 14:11).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do you respond when good deeds receive evil payment—with bitterness or continued faithfulness?
2. What does it mean to stand before God interceding for those who oppose or hurt you?
3. How does Christ's perfect intercession for sinners, including His enemies, transform your approach to prayer and forgiveness?

Interlinear Text

שׁוֹפֵט ה	כִּרְא	בַּשְׁלֵל מ	טֹבַה תְּחִתָּה	רָעַה תְּחִתָּה	בַּשְׁלֵל מ	שׁוֹפֵט ה
be recompensed	H8478	for good	H2896	Shall evil	H7451	for they have digged
H7999			H2896		H3588	H3738
for my soul	H5315	Remember	H2142	that I stood	H5975	before
					H6440	thee to speak
					H1696	H5921
						for good
						H2896
לְבַשׁ יְבָשָׁה	מִקְמָמָה	סְמִתָּה	אֶת	לְבַשׁ יְבָשָׁה	לְדַבֵּר	טֹבַה עַלְיָהּם
for them and to turn away	H7725	thy wrath	H853		H1992	for good
			H2534			H7745

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 35:7 (Parallel theme): For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.

Psalms 57:6 (Parallel theme): They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.

Psalms 106:23 (Judgment): Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.

Psalms 35:12 (Evil): They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.

Psalms 119:95 (Evil): The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

Proverbs 26:27 (Parallel theme): Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

Jeremiah 18:22 (Parallel theme): Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.

Ecclesiastes 10:8 (Parallel theme): He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org