

Proverbs 12:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts the inner states and outcomes of evil versus peace. "Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil" identifies the source of wickedness. Mirmah (מִרְמָה, deceit, treachery) resides in lev (לֵב, heart) of chorshey ra (חֹרְשֵׁי רָע, those who devise/plow evil). The verb charash (חָרַשׁ) means plow, engrave, fabricate—suggesting deliberate, calculated wickedness. Evil doesn't happen accidentally; it's cultivated like crops.

"But to the counsellors of peace is joy" presents the blessed alternative. Yo'atsey shalom (יוֹאֲתֵי שְׁלוֹמִים, counselors of peace) experience simchah (שִׂמְחָה, joy, gladness, rejoicing). Those who plan and promote peace—wholeness, harmony, well-being—find genuine gladness. This isn't superficial happiness but deep satisfaction from doing good.

The proverb establishes moral psychology: what we cultivate in our hearts produces corresponding emotions. Plotting evil breeds deceit, anxiety, and inner corruption. Counseling peace produces joy. Jesus blessed peacemakers as God's children (Matthew 5:9) and promised His peace to disciples (John 14:27). Paul commands pursuing "things which make for peace" (Romans 14:19). Hebrews 12:14 urges following "peace with all men, and holiness." The gospel makes peace with God (Romans 5:1), enabling believers to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern courts depended on counselors who either promoted wise governance and international peace or plotted intrigue and war. Israel's kings had advisors whose counsel shaped national destiny. Ahithophel's advice was esteemed but turned traitorous (2 Samuel 16-17). Conversely, wise counselors like Daniel served foreign kings with integrity, promoting peace and justice. This proverb commends those who use influence for shalom rather than selfish schemes.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What thoughts are you 'plowing' or cultivating in your heart—evil or peace?
2. How can you be a 'counselor of peace' in your spheres of influence (family, workplace, church, community)?
3. In what ways does the gospel of peace transform both our inner state and our relationships with others?

Interlinear Text

מִדְּמָה	בְּלֵב	חֲרָשֵׁי	רָע	לְיוֹעֲצֵי י
Deceit	is in the heart	of them that imagine	evil	but to the counsellors
H4820	H3820	H2790	H7451	H3289
שְׁמֵחָהּ: שָׁלֹוּ				
of peace	is joy			
H7965	H8057			

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 5:9 (Peace): Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Zechariah 6:13 (Peace): Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org