

Proverbs 12:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.

Analysis

This proverb presents a principle of divine protection and justice. "There shall no evil happen to the just" makes a sweeping promise. Lo-ye'unneh latsaddiq kal-aven (לא־יאנה לצדיק כל־און), no evil/iniquity shall happen to the righteous. The verb anah (אנה) means to meet, befall, happen. The promise isn't that righteous people avoid all difficulty, but that no ultimate, destroying evil will overtake them.

"But the wicked shall be filled with mischief" announces the opposite fate. Resha'im male' ra (רשאים מלאו רע, the wicked are filled with evil). They don't merely encounter evil—they're saturated with it. Their lives overflow with trouble, consequences, and calamity resulting from their choices.

This proverb must be read with biblical nuance. Righteous people suffer (Job, Joseph, David, Jesus' disciples), yet God sovereignly works all things for their good (Romans 8:28). No evil has final victory over the justified. Psalm 91:10 promises: "There shall no evil befall thee." Psalm 121:7 declares: "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil." While the wicked accumulate disasters from their sin, believers are kept by God's power (1 Peter 1:5). Christ bore the ultimate evil—God's wrath against sin—so believers never face condemning judgment (Romans 8:1).

Historical Context

This promise would have special meaning for covenant Israel. Deuteronomy 28 detailed blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Righteous Israelites

who kept covenant enjoyed God's protection, while the wicked faced accumulating judgments. Post-exilic Jews, having experienced Babylonian captivity, understood corporate application—national righteousness brought security, while wickedness brought exile. Yet individual exceptions (Job's suffering, wicked prosperity) required faith in God's ultimate justice beyond this life.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile this promise with the reality that godly people sometimes suffer greatly?
2. In what sense does 'no evil happen' to the righteous when considering eternal rather than merely temporal outcomes?
3. How does Christ's bearing the ultimate evil (God's wrath) on our behalf guarantee this proverb's fulfillment for believers?

Interlinear Text

וְלَا יִאֱתֵה הָרָשָׁעַ יְמִינָה לְאָצְדָּקָה כִּי אַתָּה יְמִינָה
H3808 happen H6662 to the just H3605 There shall no evil H205 but the wicked H7563 shall be filled H4390

בְּעֵבֶד:

with mischief

H7451

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 3:13 (Parallel theme): And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

Psalms 91:10 (Evil): There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

Proverbs 1:31 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

Revelation 18:6 (Parallel theme): Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

Romans 8:28 (Parallel theme): And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Proverbs 14:14 (Parallel theme): The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Habakkuk 2:16 (Parallel theme): Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.