

Proverbs 13:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts unreliable and faithful messengers. "A wicked messenger falleth into mischief" warns of destructive communication. Mal'akh rasha yippol bera (מֶלֶךְ רָשָׁע יִפְלֶא בָּרָע) means messenger, envoy, ambassador. When wicked (rasha, רָשָׁע, evil, calamity, harm)—bringing disaster to themselves and those who sent them.

"But a faithful ambassador is health" presents the alternative. Tsir emumim marpe (צִיר אֲמֻנִים מָרְפָא) an ambassador of faithfulness—healing). Tsir (צִיר, envoy, messenger, ambassador) who is emun (אֲמֻן, faithful, reliable) brings marpe (מָרְפָא, healing, remedy, cure). Reliable messengers bring reconciliation, peace, and restoration.

In ancient times without instant communication, messengers wielded enormous power. They could deliver messages accurately or distort them, representing senders faithfully or misrepresenting them. Wicked messengers caused wars, broken treaties, and disasters. Faithful ones brought peace. Christians are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), representing Him to the world. We must faithfully communicate the gospel without adding or subtracting, bringing the healing message of reconciliation. False teachers are wicked messengers who fall into evil; faithful ministers are ambassadors who bring spiritual health through accurate gospel proclamation.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kingdoms depended on messengers for diplomacy, military coordination, and royal decrees. Reliable envoys were highly valued. Proverbs 25:13 compares a faithful messenger to cold snow in harvest—refreshing and valuable. Conversely, unreliable messengers could provoke wars or failed alliances. Israel's kings sent ambassadors to negotiate treaties (2 Kings 18:17-19:37). The messenger's faithfulness determined whether peace or conflict resulted.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. In what ways are you a 'messenger' for Christ, and how faithfully do you represent Him to others?
2. What happens when Christians are 'wicked messengers' who misrepresent the gospel or God's character?
3. How can you ensure you're a 'faithful ambassador' bringing spiritual health to others through accurate biblical truth?

Interlinear Text

מֶרְפָּא:	אָמֹן יְמִ	בְּשֻׁעַ מְלָא כָּ	בְּעִפָּלְתָּ	בְּמִשְׁכָּבְנִ	אֶצְרָרִ	מְרָפָא:
messenger	A wicked	falleth	into mischief	ambassador	but a faithful	is health

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Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 25:13 (Faith): As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.

2 Corinthians 5:20 (Parallel theme): Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Ezekiel 3:18 (Evil): When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

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