

Proverbs 13:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.

Analysis

This proverb establishes the moral principle of retributive justice. "Evil pursueth sinners" pictures sin's consequences actively chasing wrongdoers. Chatta'im terad'ef ra'ah (תָּרַדֵּף רָאָה, sinners—evil pursues). Radaf (רָאָף, pursue, chase, persecute) suggests relentless hunting. Evil doesn't just happen to sinners—it hunts them down like prey.

"But to the righteous good shall be repayed" promises divine recompense. Ve'et-tsaddiqim yeshallelm-tov (וְאֶת-צַדִּיקִים יִשְׁלַמּוּתָבוֹ, but the righteous—good will be repaid). Shalam (שְׁלָמָם, repay, recompense, restore, make peace) indicates full payment. God ensures the righteous receive tov (טוֹב, good, welfare, prosperity).

This principle reflects God's moral governance. Sin carries built-in consequences that pursue perpetrators. Numbers 32:23 warns: "Be sure your sin will find you out." Galatians 6:7 teaches: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Evil pursued Haman (Esther 7:10), Ahab (1 Kings 22:37-38), and Judas (Matthew 27:5). Conversely, God repays the righteous—sometimes temporally, always eternally. While believers face trials, Romans 8:28 promises all things work together for good. Christ's atonement broke sin's pursuit, and God will fully repay believers with eternal glory (2 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4).

Historical Context

Israel's history demonstrated this principle. National sin brought Assyrian and Babylonian conquest—evil pursued them. Individual examples include Achan (Joshua 7), Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27), and Ananias/Sapphira (Acts 5). Conversely, righteous figures like Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai experienced divine recompense. The covenant promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28), validating this proverb's truth.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Have you experienced sin's consequences 'pursuing' you through guilt, broken relationships, or other natural results?
2. How does understanding that God will repay the righteous provide comfort when facing present injustice or suffering?
3. In what ways has God already begun repaying you with good as a believer, and what ultimate repayment awaits at Christ's return?

Interlinear Text

שׁׁוֹבֵב	יְשִׁלְמָה	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי
sinners	pursueth	Evil	H853	but to the righteous	shall be repayed	good	
H2400	H7291	H7451		H6662	H7999	H2896	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 32:10 (Evil): Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

Proverbs 13:13 (Parallel theme): Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

Psalms 140:11 (Evil): Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.

Genesis 4:7 (Sin): If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

Numbers 32:23 (Sin): But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

Acts 28:4 (Parallel theme): And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

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