

Proverbs 16:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.

Analysis

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Mesilat yesharim sur mera (מְסִלַּת יֵשָׁרִים סוּר מֵרָע, the highway of the upright—departing from evil). Mesillah (מְסִלָּה, highway, raised road) represents the upright person's characteristic path—avoiding evil. Shomer darko shomer nafsho (שׁוֹמֵר דַּרְכּוֹ שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ, guarding his way guards his soul). Careful living preserves life. The proverb teaches that righteousness isn't passive goodness but active evil-avoidance. Believers must flee temptation (1 Corinthians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:22) and pursue righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11).

Historical Context

Ancient highways enabled commerce and travel but also brought dangers. Staying on the raised road avoided ditches, marshes, and ambushes. Similarly, the upright's moral highway keeps them safe from evil's dangers. Israel's history showed that departing from God's way brought calamity while keeping it brought life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Christ is the way (John 14:6), and walking in Him preserves souls eternally.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Is your life characterized by actively departing from evil or merely avoiding obviously bad things?
2. What does 'keeping your way' look like practically in terms of guarding your heart, eyes, relationships?
3. How does walking in Christ as the Way (John 14:6) preserve your soul eternally?

Interlinear Text

מָסַלַת	שְׁרִים	ס ור	מִכָּע	שִׁמְר	נֶפֶשׁוֹ
The highway	of the upright	is to depart	from evil	preserveth	his soul
H4546	H3477	H5493	H7451	H8104	H5315
נֶצַּר	דִּרְכּוֹ				
he that keepeth	his way				
H5341	H1870				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 35:8 (Parallel theme): And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

Proverbs 10:9 (Parallel theme): He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.

Proverbs 19:16 (Parallel theme): He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.

Revelation 3:10 (Parallel theme): Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.