

Proverbs 25:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:

Analysis

This proverb commands enemy-love: 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.' Rather than revenge or indifference toward enemies, provide for their basic needs. Verse 22 adds motivation: 'For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.' The 'coals of fire' likely represents shame that may lead to repentance—kindness to enemies exposes their wickedness and may soften their hearts. God promises reward for such love. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 12:20-21, teaching Christians to overcome evil with good. This radical ethic anticipates Jesus' command to love enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures operated on honor-shame and revenge principles—returning evil for evil maintained honor. Against this, both Old Testament law (Exodus 23:4-5) and wisdom taught enemy-love. This countercultural ethic distinguished Israel's covenant morality from surrounding nations' honor codes. Christianity continued and intensified this teaching, with Jesus exemplifying enemy-love on the cross.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Who are your enemies, and how can you practically show them kindness rather than seeking revenge or maintaining distance?
2. How does enemy-love demonstrate God's character and advance the gospel more effectively than revenge?

Interlinear Text

אִם	רָע ב	שׁ נֶאֱבַר	הָאֹכֵל הוּא	לָהֶם	וְאִם
H518	be hungry	If thine enemy	to eat	give him bread	H518
	H7457	H8130	H398	H3899	
	וְאִם	הַשָּׂקֵה הוּא	מַיִם:		
	and if he be thirsty	to drink	give him water		
	H6771	H8248	H4325		

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 5:44 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Proverbs 24:17 (Parallel theme): Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:

2 Kings 6:22 (Parallel theme): And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

2 Chronicles 28:15 (Parallel theme): And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought

them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

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