

Proverbs 28:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.

Analysis

The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor (נָגִיד חָסֵר תְּבוּנָה, nagid chasar tevunot verav ma'ashaqqot)—נָגִיד (nagid, 'prince, ruler, leader') who is חָסֵר (chaser, 'lacking, devoid of') תְּבוּנָה (tevunah, 'understanding, insight, intelligence') becomes רַב (rav, 'great, abundant in') מַעֲשֵׂקָה (ma'ashaqqah, 'oppression, extortion'). Ignorant leadership multiplies injustice—not from malice but from incompetence.

But he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days (שֹׁנֵא בִצְעַת יֵאֲרִיךְ יָמָיו, sone vetza ya'arikh yamim)—שֹׁנֵא (sane, 'to hate, detest') toward בִּצְעַת (betza, 'unjust gain, dishonest profit, greed') leads to אֲרַךְ (arakh, 'to lengthen, prolong') of יָמָיו (yamim, 'days, life'). Rejecting corrupt gain secures lasting life. Jethro counseled Moses to appoint leaders who 'hate covetousness' (Exodus 18:21); greed shortened Achan's days (Joshua 7) and Judas's (Matthew 27:3-5).

Historical Context

Ancient kingship concentrated vast power; without wisdom, rulers became tyrants. Solomon's prayer for wisdom rather than wealth (1 Kings 3:9-12) stands as the ideal; Rehoboam's foolishness split the kingdom (1 Kings 12). The Dead Sea Scrolls emphasize that Israel's future messianic king must be wise, not merely powerful.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this proverb challenge the idea that 'good intentions' excuse incompetent leadership?
2. What areas of influence in your life require greater understanding to avoid unwitting oppression?
3. Where might covetousness be subtly shortening your effectiveness and legacy?

Interlinear Text

נָגִיד	חָסֵד	בְּיָבוֹנָה	וְכִבֹּד	מַעֲשֵׂה אֹת
The prince	that wanteth	understanding	is also a great	oppressor
H5057	H2638	H8394	H7227	H4642
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר	כִּי צָעַק	יִאָּרְךָ יוֹמָיו	יָמָיו:	
but he that hateth	covetousness	shall prolong	his days	
H8130	H1215	H748	H3117	

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