

Proverbs 29:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.

Analysis

If a ruler hearken to lies (מַשֵּׁל מַקְשִׁיב עַל־דְּבָר־שָׁקָר) —when a ruler (moshel) gives attention to (maqshib, listens/hearkens) deceitful words (debar shaqr, false testimony), **all his servants are wicked** (כָל־מְשֻׁרְתּוֹ רָשָׁעִים). Leadership sets moral tone from the top down. A ruler who rewards falsehood cultivates a court of flatterers, schemers, and corrupt officials.

This principle operates institutionally: when leadership tolerates or rewards dishonesty, the entire organization becomes corrupted. Truthful people either leave or are driven out; only the wicked thrive. We see this in Ahab's court where 400 false prophets surrounded him while Micaiah alone spoke truth (1 Kings 22). Rehoboam's folly in following bad counsel cost him most of his kingdom (1 Kings 12).

Historical Context

Solomon witnessed court intrigue firsthand—Adonijah's conspiracy, Joab and Shimei's treachery. The king's wisdom or folly in choosing advisors determined the kingdom's fate. The proverb warns future rulers that their willingness to hear truth versus flattery shapes the character of their entire administration.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do leaders today—in church, business, politics—create cultures that either reward truth-telling or punish it?
2. What accountability structures prevent rulers from surrounding themselves with deceitful counselors?
3. In what ways might you function as a 'wicked servant' by telling leaders what they want to hear rather than what is true?

Interlinear Text

רָשָׁעִים: מְשֻׁרְתָּתִי כָּל שָׁׁבֵת יְבָל עַל מִקְשָׁתִי בְּנֵי מִשְׁלָחָן
If a ruler hearken to lies all his servants are wicked

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Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 20:8 (Evil): A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

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