

Psalms 140:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.

Analysis

Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him. The final imprecatory petition returns from vivid judgment imagery (v. 10) to more measured statement of justice principles. "Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth" (ish lashon bal-yikon ba-aretz, אִישׁ לְשׁוֹן בָּלְיִקּוֹן בָּאָרֶץ) focuses on verbal evildoers. Ish lashon (אִישׁ לְשׁוֹן, "man of tongue") is idiomatic for slanderer, false accuser, malicious gossip—one who weaponizes speech. Kun (כְּנָאָבֶד, "be established, stand firm, endure") in negative form (bal-yikon, בָּלְיִקּוֹן) means "not be established." David prays that slanderers will not find secure position, lasting influence, or permanent success in society.

This prayer seeks justice at societal level. When slanderers prosper, truth suffers and innocent people are destroyed. God's righteous order requires that truth-speakers be established while liars be uprooted. Proverbs repeatedly warns that "a false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape" (Proverbs 19:5, 9). Society functions properly only when truth is valued and lies are exposed.

"Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him" (ish chamas yetsudenu le-madchefot, אִישׁ חָמָס יִצְעַד לְמַדְחֵפֶת) declares poetic justice through hunting metaphor. Chamas (חָמָס, "violence") describes physical brutality, injustice, oppression. Tsud (צָד, "hunt") suggests pursuing prey relentlessly. Madchephah (מַדְחֵפָה, "overthrow, thrust, push down") implies repeated blows driving someone down. The violent man becomes the hunted; evil itself pursues him. This reflects

Proverbs 13:21: "Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed." Sin carries inherent consequences—violence breeds violence, and the violent ultimately suffer violence themselves (Matthew 26:52, Revelation 13:10).

Historical Context

David's concern that "evil speakers not be established" reflects his experience with slander's destructive power. Saul's court was filled with informants and accusers who poisoned the king against David (1 Samuel 24:9, 26:19). Doeg the Edomite's report about Ahimelech helping David resulted in massacring 85 priests and their families (1 Samuel 22:9-19)—slander leading to mass murder. During Absalom's rebellion, Shimei cursed David publicly with false accusations (2 Samuel 16:5-8). These experiences taught David that societies where slanderers prosper become unjust and dangerous. Proverbs, largely written by Solomon (David's son), repeatedly condemns lying tongues (Proverbs 6:16-19, 12:19, 12:22, 19:5). The ninth commandment forbids bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16), with Mosaic law prescribing that false accusers receive the punishment they sought to inflict on the accused (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does it look like for 'evil speakers not to be established in the earth,' and how can believers work toward this through promoting truth?
2. How does the principle that 'evil shall hunt the violent man' (poetic justice) provide comfort to victims while warning perpetrators?
3. How should Christians balance Jesus's call to forgive enemies with David's prayers that evil not prosper and that justice be done?

Interlinear Text

אִישׁ	לְשׁוֹן	בָּל	וְיִכְלֹא	בְּאֶרֶץ
Let not an evil speaker	H3956	H1077	be established	in the earth
H376			H3559	H776
אִישׁ	סְמַךְ	עַבְדָּו	וְיִצְחַקְתָּ	לְמַדְחַקְתָּ
Let not an evil speaker	the violent	evil	shall hunt	to overthrow
H376	H2555	H7451	H6679	H4073

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 34:21 (Evil): Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

Proverbs 18:21 (Parallel theme): Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Isaiah 3:11 (Evil): Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Proverbs 17:20 (Parallel theme): He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.

Proverbs 13:21 (Evil): Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.

Psalms 9:16 (Evil): The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah.

Proverbs 6:17 (Parallel theme): A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

Proverbs 12:13 (Evil): The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.