

Romans 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

Analysis

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law—ὅσοι γὰρ ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον (hosoi gar anomōs hēmarton), literally "as many as sinned lawlessly." Ἀνόμως (anomōs) refers to Gentiles without Torah's written revelation. The future ἀπολοῦνται (apolountai, "will perish") indicates final destruction. Paul's point: ignorance of Mosaic Law doesn't create immunity; Gentiles face judgment based on the moral knowledge they possess (1:19-20, 2:14-15).

And as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law—ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον (hosoi en nomō hēmarton) describes Jews who possess Torah. Διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται (dia nomou krithēsontai, "will be judged through/by law"). Possessing God's law intensifies accountability rather than excusing transgression. The law becomes witness for the prosecution, not the defense, since none keep it perfectly (3:20, Galatians 3:10).

The symmetry is devastating: Gentiles perish despite lacking Torah; Jews are condemned precisely because they have it yet violate it. Neither group escapes—one judged by natural revelation and conscience, the other by written scripture. This anticipates 3:9's conclusion: "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." The only escape is Christ's righteousness imputed by faith (3:21-26).

Historical Context

Jewish theology debated Gentile salvation. Some rabbis taught righteous Gentiles observing Noahide laws could be saved; others believed all Gentiles were condemned. Most Jews saw Torah as privilege ensuring salvation if observed. Paul collapses both views: Torah doesn't save (it condemns lawbreakers), and Gentiles aren't automatically lost (they're judged by the light they have). This neutralizes Jewish presumption while maintaining moral accountability for all.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How has possessing Scripture—biblical knowledge, doctrinal understanding—increased my accountability before God?
2. Do I treat the Bible as a shield protecting me from judgment or a mirror revealing my need for Christ's righteousness?
3. If Gentiles without Torah are judged by the moral knowledge they have, how seriously do I take the 'light' God has given me?

Interlinear Text

ὅσοι	γὰρ	ἀνόμως	ἥμαρτον	ἀνόμως	καὶ	ἀπολοῦνται	
as many as	For	without law	have sinned	without law	also	perish	
G3745	G1063	G460	G264	G460	G2532	G622	
καὶ	ὅσοι	ἐν	νόμου	ἥμαρτον	διὰ	νόμου	κριθήσονται·
also	as many as	in	the law	have sinned	by	the law	shall be judged
G2532	G3745	G1722	G3551	G264	G1223	G3551	G2919

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 9:21 (Word): To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

Galatians 3:10 (Word): For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

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