Wicked and Wickedness

By

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When you hear about someone who is wicked what do you think about? Is like the Wicked witch of the West from the wizard of Oz. Or is like a character from the Tanakh like Jezebel. How does society define wickedness today and does that match what Tanakh says is wickedness. Let's look at the terms in Hebrew that are mostly translated as wicked or wickedness. The word wicked comes from old English.

**wicked** c.1275, earlier wick (12c.), apparently an adj. use of O.E. wicca "wizard" (see wicca). For evolution, cf. wretched from wretch. Slang ironic sense of "wonderful" first attested 1920, in F. Scott Fitzgerald.

**Wicca** An O.E. masc. noun meaning "male witch," curiously taken by Gerald Gardner's followers (c.1954) as an abstract noun meaning "witchcraft" and thus becoming the title of a modern pagan movement. See witch.

**wretch** O.E. wrecca "wretch, stranger, exile," from P.Gmc. *wrakjan (cf. O.S. wrekkio, O.H.G. reckeo "a banished person, exile," Ger. recke "renowned warrior, hero"), related to O.E. wreccan "to drive out, punish" (see wreak). Sense of "vile, despicable person" developed in O.E., reflecting the sorry state of the outcast, as presented in much of Anglo-Saxon verse (e.g. "The Wanderer"). A Ger. word for "misery" is Elend, from O.H.G. elilenti "sojourn in a foreign land, exile."

Unless wicked in Hebrew means witch then it is not likely that meaning of this word is wicked.

The first word in Hebrew we will be looking at that is translated as wicked is Rasha’ (Resh-Shin-Ayin) and it is a verb. You will find this word under reference number 7561 in the BDB (Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon) on page 957. It is also found in the NEHC (New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance) on page 1192. It is something like act guilty.

We find this word used in Qal form (active/stative simple) in:

Daniel/Dani’el 9:15

15 “Now, Yehovah our Elohim—You who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, winning fame for Yourself to this very day—we have sinned, we have acted wickedly (we acted guilty – rasha’nu)."
Here we see that as one who sins we are guilty. We know from other studies that Sin is missing the mark or deviating from the path we are to follow. Thus, when we sin we act as one who is guilty or wrong.

Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 7:17

15 In my own brief span of life, I have seen both these things: sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness, and sometimes a wicked [guilty] one (rasha’ – בְּרָשָׁא) endures in spite of his wickedness [in his evil] ( bara’ato). 16 So don’t overdo goodness and don’t act the wise man to excess, or you may be dumfounded. 17 Don’t overdo wickedness (tir’sha’) and don’t be a fool, or you may die before your time. 18 It is best that you grasp the one without letting go of the other, for one who fears Elohim will do his duty by both.

Shemu’el Bet/2 Samuel 22:22

22 For I have kept the ways of Yehovah
And have not been guilty (רָשָׁאִית) before my Elohim;

Here David is saying to Yehovah that he has kept Yehovah’s ways (דֶּרֶךְ הָיָה) and not brought guilt/Rasha’ on himself. Rasha’ is when one does not keep Yehovah’s ways.

Melekhim Aleph/I Kings 8:47

47 and then they take it to heart in the land to which they have been carried off, and they repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captors, saying: ‘We have sinned (חָטָאנוּ), we have acted perversely (done iniquity – וַהֲבִיאוּנָנוּ), we have acted wickedly (רָשָׁאֲנוּ),’

Here we see that sin having been done then becoming iniquity and thus this is our guilty action.
Divrei HaYamim Bet/2 Chronicles 6:37

36 “When they sin (yechet’u יְחֵטֵעַ) against You—for there is no person who does not sin (lo yecheta לא יחتوا)—and You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and their captors carry them off to an enemy land, near or far; 37 and they take it to heart in the land to which they have been carried off, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned (chata’nu חטאנו), we have acted perversely (done iniquity – he’viynu חֶוְיַעְנוּ), we have acted wickedly (verasha’nu וְרָשָׁעָנָו),’

This is another account of the same prayer by Melekh Shlomo. You will also notice that this is very similar to what Dani’el prayed too.

Tehillim/Psalms 18:22(21)

22 for I have kept to the ways of Yehovah, and have not been guilty (rasha’tiy רָשָׁעָי) before my Elohim;

Here again we see Melekh David saying he has done the ways (derekhiy דְּרֵכֵי) of his Elohim but not done my guilt.

In the other forms we find the word used:

Devarim/Deuteronomy 25:1

1 When there is a dispute between men and they go to law, and a decision is rendered declaring the one in the right and the other in the wrong [declare righteous the righteous one and declare guilty (vahir’shiy’u והירשיעו) the guilty one (et-harasha’ אֶת-הָרָשָׁע)].

Here we see there is one who is right found righteous and one who is wrong found guilty.

Nehemyah/Nehemiah 9:33

33 Surely You are in the right with respect to all that has come upon us, for You have acted faithfully, and we have been wicked (done guilt – hir’sha’enu והירשענו).

We again have acted wrongly and are guilty. Here we see that when wrong we should admit our guilt.
Tehillim/Psalms 106:6

6 We have sinned (chata’nu) like our forefathers; we have gone astray (died iniquity – he’viynu), done evil (we did wrong/guilt - hir’sha’nu).

Like the passage from Melekh Shlomo prayer in I kings and 2 Chronicles we see that one sins, it becomes iniquity because we are guilty (done wrong).

Daniel/Daniel 9:5

5 We have sinned (chata’nu); we have gone astray (and we did iniquity - va avinu); we have acted wickedly (we did wrong/guilt – hir’sha’nu); we have been rebellious and have deviated from Your commandments and Your rules.

Here Daniel shows us that same formulas we seen before but also tells us why it occurred. We have rebelled – not kept his ways-and have deviated- turned from doing-mitzvotkha (your commandments) and from umishpateykha (and your judgements).

Daniel/Daniel 12:10

10 Many will be purified and purged and refined; the wicked [guilty ones] (rasha’im) will act wickedly (wrongly/guilty – v’hir’shiy’u) and none of the wicked [ones] (rasha’im) will understand; but the knowledgeable will understand.

Here the guilty ones will act in a guilty way or doing wrongly and they will not understand they are being guilty.

Shemot/Exodus 22:8 (9)

8 In all charges of misappropriation—pertaining to an ox, an ass, a sheep, a garment, or any other loss, whereof one party alleges, “This is it”—the case of both parties shall come before Elohim: he whom Elohim declares guilty (yar’shiy’un) shall pay double to the other.

The one declared in the wrong is guilty. Here this person must pay restitution.
47 After Saul had secured his kingship over Israel, he waged war on every side against all his enemies: against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the Philistines, and the kings of Zobah; and wherever he turned he worsted (yar’shi’a ירשיא) [them].

Melekh Shaul wronged the people around him by attacking them. Here we see it used in a way that denotes wronging someone but not guilt.

Mishlelei/Proverbs 12:2

2 A good man earns the favor of Yehovah, A man of intrigues (mazimot מזימות – plotter/maker of plans), His condemnation (guilt – yar’shi’a ירשיא).

Condemns the man planning to do wrong.

Mishlelei/Proverbs 17:15

15 To acquit the guilty (rasha’ רשא) and convict (and wrong - u’mar’shiy’a למשייה) the innocent (just/right one)—Both are an abomination to Yehovah.

Here to call the guilty just and wrong the just/right one are hated things to Yehovah.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 50:9

9 Lo, Adoni Yehovah will help me—Who can get a verdict (yar’shiy’eni ירשיעני) against me? They shall all wear out like a garment, The moth shall consume them.

Used here in the sense of wrong in being condemned or found guilty.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 54:17

17 No weapon formed against you Shall succeed, And every tongue that contends with you (arise against you) at law (in judgment) You shall defeat [he find guilty me] (tar’shiy’iy ירשיעי). Such is the lot of the servants of Yehovah, Such their triumph through Me

Here we see that one that goes against the judgment of Yehovah he will condemn or find guilty.
The next word in Hebrew we will be looking at that is translated as wicked is Resha’ (Resh-Shin-Ayin) and it is an adjective. You will find this word under reference number 7565 in the BDB (Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon) on page 957. It is also found in the NEHC (New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance) on page 1192. It describes someone or something as being guilty.

Bereshit/Genesis 18:23, 25

23 Abraham came forward and said, “Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty (rasha’ רַשָּׁא)?

25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty (rasha’ רַשָּׁא), so that innocent and guilty (karasha’ קָרָשָׁא) fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

Here Avraham pleads with the messenger of Yehovah who Yehovah is speaking through to Avraham.

Shemot/Exodus 2:13

13 When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender (to guilty larasha’ לְרַשָּׁא), “Why do you strike your fellow?”

Here the one who was wrong in the fight, Moshe was talking to.

Shemot/Exodus 9:27

27 Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, “I stand guilty (sinned chata’tiy חֲטָאְתִּי) this time. Yehovah is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong [ones] (harasha’im הָרָשָׁאֵים).

Here Pharaoh acknowledges his disobeying of Yehovah’s command and says they are guilty/wrong.

Shemot/Exodus 23:1,7

1 You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty (rasha’ רַשָּׁא) to act as a malicious witness:

7 Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer (rasha’ רַשָּׁא).
A false witness that sheds blood sins and is a guilty one (rasha’)

Bamidbar/Numbers 16:26

26 He addressed the community, saying, “Move away from the tents of these wicked (the guilty ones - harasha’im) men and touch nothing that belongs to them, lest you be wiped out for all their sins.”

Here the guilty ones are being singled out with those who associated with them.

Bamidbar/Numbers 35:31

31 You may not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty (rasha’) of a capital crime; he must be put to death.

One who kills is guilty/wrong there is not redeeming of them. Today this would be shunning of the person from the community.

Tehillim/Psalms 1:1,4-6

1 Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked (guilty ones - rasha’im), or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;

4 Not so the wicked (the guilty ones - harasha’im); rather, they are like chaff that wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked (guilty ones - rasha’im) will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For Yehovah cherishes the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked (guilty ones - rasha’im) is doomed.

Yehovah’s ways are righteous and if we do them we are righteous also. Those who do not do them are rasha’ guilty, wrong will perish from among the righteous. In that day the person would have been cut off which in some cases meant death.

Tehillim/Psalms 10:2-4, 13, 15

2 The wicked (rasha’) in his arrogance hounds the lowly—may they be caught in the schemes they devise! 3 The wicked (rasha’) crows about his unbridled lusts; the grasping man reviles and scorns Yehovah. 4 The wicked (rasha’), arrogant as he is, in all his scheming [thinks], “He does not call to account; Elohim does not care.”
[guilty like the height of his face not will seek/enquire, there is no Elohim all in his thoughts – rasha’ kagoveh ‘apo bal yid’rosh ein Elohim kol mezimotayv
]

We see the thoughts of the guilty one who does not seek Elohim.

13 Why should the wicked/guilty (rasha’ רַשַׁע) man scorn Elohim, thinking You do not call to account?

15 O break the power of the wicked/guilty (rasha’ רַשַׁע) and evil man, so that when You look for his wickedness (rish’o רִשְׁפּוֹ) You will find it no more.

The guilty one will think there is no Elohim to hold him to account and has no fear of being caught. Yet, Yehovah will deal with them.

Tehillim/Psalms 36:2

2 I know what Transgression says to the wicked/guilty (l’rasha’ לִרְשַׁע); he has no sense of the dread of Elohim,

There it is again no fear of Elohim. He knows fully what he is doing this is the attitude of the guilty one.

Tehillim/Psalms 37:21

21 The wicked/guilty (rasha’ רַשַׁע) man borrows and does not repay; the righteous is generous and keeps giving.

Mishlei/Proverbs 12:6

6 The words of the wicked/guilty (rasha’im רָשָׁעִים) are a deadly ambush, But the speech of the upright saves them.

The guilty ones can lead you astray. A righteous person can save you.

Mishlei/Proverbs 21:10

10 The desire of the wicked/guilty (rasha’ רַשַׁע) is set upon(desires) evil (ivatah-ra אִבָּטָה רֵעָה); His fellowman finds no favor in his eyes.
The desire of the guilty is to do harm/bad.

Yehez’qel/Ezekiel 3:18-19

18 If I say to a wicked/guilty [man] (larasha’/רָשָׁע) ‘You shall die,’ and you do not warn him—you do not speak to warn the wicked/guilty (rasha’/רָשָׁע) [man] of his wicked/guilty (har’sha’ah/חָרָשָׁע) course in order to save his life—he, the wicked/guilty (rasha’/רָשָׁע) [man], shall die for his iniquity, but I will require a reckoning for his blood from you. 19 But if you do warn the wicked/guilty (rasha’/רָשָׁע) man, and he does not turn back from his wickedness/wrongness (merash’o/מְרָשַׁה) and his wicked/guilty (har’sha’ah/חָרָשָׁע) course, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have saved your own life.

Here Yehez’qel is saying that we must warn the guilty of their wrongness and wrong ways.

Yehez’qel/Ezekiel 18: 20,21,23,24,27

20 The person who sins, he alone shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness/wrongness (varish’at/varish’at חָטָאת/חָטָאת) of the wicked/wrong (yarasha/yarasha/יָרָשָׁה) shall be accounted to him alone.

21 Moreover, if the wicked/guilty (vaharasha’/וָרָשָׁע) one repents of all the sins (chattatayv/כְּחַטְאָתִי) that he committed and keeps all My laws (chuqotay/כְּחוּקֵותי) and does what is just (mishpat/מִשְׁפָּט) and right (utz’dakah/עֶתְדָּכָה) he shall live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions he committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness he has practiced, he shall live. 23 Is it my desire that a wicked/guilty (rasha’/רָשָׁע) [person] shall die?—says Adoni Yehovah. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways (miderekhav/מִדְרֵכָּה) and live (vachayah/וַחֲיָה). 24 So, too, if a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does wrong, practicing the very abominations that the wicked/guilty (harasha’/חָרָשָׁע) [person] practiced, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he did shall be remembered; because of the treachery he has practiced and the sins he has committed—because of these, he shall die.
27 And if a wicked/guilty (רָשָׁע/רָשָׁע־נִי) person turns back from the wickedness/wrongness (מֵרְשַׁת־נָּאָה/מֵרְשַׁת־נָּאָה) that he practiced and does what is just and right, such a person shall save his life.

Here Jehovah states that if one who is guilty/wrong in not following his ways turns and follows Jehovah way then he saves his life.

Yehez’qel/Ezekiel 33:8,9,11,12,14,15, 19

8 When I say to the wicked/guilty (לְרָשָׁע/רָשָׁע) man, you shall die,” but you have not spoken to warn the wicked/guilty (רָשָׁע) man against his way, he, that wicked/guilty (רָשָׁע) man, shall die for his sins, but I will demand a reckoning for his blood from you. 9 But if you have warned the wicked/guilty (רָשָׁע) man to turn back from his way, and he has not turned from his way, he shall die for his own sins, but you will have saved your life.

This tells the righteous ones are to warn the people then their saves own life. Otherwise he forfeits his life too. Some say this applies to us today also. While I agree we should do this as a practice with our brothers. I don’t think this is a mission to warn the world of it guilt.

10 Now, O mortal, say to the House of Israel: This is what you have been saying: “Our transgressions (פּוֹשְׁעָי/פּוֹשְׁעָי) and our sins (חֲטָטֵינו/חֲטָטֵינו) weigh heavily upon us; we are sick at heart about them. How can we survive?” 11 Say to them: As I live—declares Adonay Jehovah—it is not My desire that the wicked (הַרָשָׁע/הַרָשָׁע) shall die, but that the wicked (רָשָׁע) turn from his [evil] ways and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil (הֲרֵעִים/הֲרֵעִים) ways, that you may not die, O House of Israel!

Notice this is directed to Yehez’qel to warn the children of Yisrael. He does not want the death of the guilty not does he take pleasure in it. Only that the guilty or wrong one turn and follow Jehovah’s ways and that he takes pleasure in.

12 Now, O mortal, say to your fellow countrymen: The righteousness of the righteous shall not save him when he transgresses, nor shall the wickedness/wrongness (מֵרְשַׁת־נָאָה/מֵרְשַׁת־נָאָה) of the wicked/guilty (הַרָשָׁע/הַרָשָׁע) cause him to stumble when he
The righteous shall not survive through his righteousness when he sins. 13 When I say of the righteous “He shall surely live,” and, relying on his righteousness, he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; but for the iniquity that he has committed he shall die. 14 So, too, when I say to the wicked/guilty (larasha’) (לָרָשָׁהוּ), “You shall die,” and he turns back from his sinfulness (mechatta’to) (מְחַטֶּא תָּו) and does what is just (mishpat) and right (utz’daqah)—15 if the wicked/guilty (rasha’) (רָשָׁה הַלְּדֹה) man restores a pledge, makes good what he has taken by robbery, follows the laws of life (bachuqot hachayim) (בְּחֻקָּי וְחָיִים), and does not commit iniquity—he shall live, he shall not die.

The righteous who do wrong are not saved. Only the ones who do right are saved. Those who follow the statues/practices of life (torah) and does not do sin (chattat) and do Iniquity (aval).

Malakhi/Malachi 3:18

18 And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked (larasha’), between him who has served Yehovah and him who has not served Him.

Here we see the righteous serve Yehovah and the guilty/wrong ones don’t serve him.

The next word in Hebrew we will be looking at that is translated as wickedness is Rasha’ (Resh-Shin-Ayin) and it is a noun masculine. You will find this word under reference number 7562 in the BDB (Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon) on page 957. It is also found in the NEHC (New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance) on page 1194. It is guiltiness.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 9:26-27

26 I prayed to Yehovah and said, “Adoni Yehovah, do not annihilate Your very own people, whom You redeemed in Your majesty and whom You freed from Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Give thought to Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and pay no heed to the stubbornness of this people, its wickedness/wrongness (rish’o) (רִשְׁע עוֹן), and its sinfulness (chatt’to) (חֲטָא תָּו).

Here we see that in sin they do wrong and are guilty. Moshe is asking for the forgiveness of the children of Yisrael.

Shemu’el Aleph /I Samuel 24:14
As the ancient proverb has it: ‘Wicked/wrong deeds (resha’) come from wicked (merasha’im) men!’ My hand will never touch you.

In the Hebrew it is render better as from guilty ones comes guiltiness/wrongness.

4 Because you fast in strife and contention, And you strike with a wicked/wrongness (resha’) fist! Your fasting today is not such As to make your voice heard on high.

5 Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when Yehovah is favorable? 6 No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness/wrongness (resha’), And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke.

Instead of doing wrongness and being guilty, we should take off the wrongness/guilt on us and our brothers.

20 We acknowledge our wickedness (rish’enu), Yehovah—The iniquity (‘aon) of our fathers—For we have sinned (chata’nu) against You.

In asking forgiveness we must acknowledge the wrong we have done to Yehovah. And as seen earlier we must also restore that which was stolen, or damages to those we have wronged too.

11 lawlessness (violence-hechamas) has grown into a rod of wickedness (lamatteh resha’). Nothing comes of them, nor of their abundance, nor of their wealth; nor is there preeminence among them

Here we see that violence becomes wrongness too. In this case we see it as a rod which one would use to do harm (evil) with.

The last word in Hebrew we will be looking at that is translated as wickedness is Rish’ah’ (Resh-Shin-Ayin-Hey) and it is a noun feminine. You will find this word under reference number 7564 in the BDB (Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon) on
It is also found in the NEHC (New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance) on page 1194. It is guiltiness.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 9:4,5

4 And when Yehovah your Elohim has thrust them from your path, say not to yourselves, “Yehovah has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues”; it is rather because of the wickedness/wrongness (morisham מָרִישָׁם) of those nations that Yehovah is dispossessing them before you. 5 It is not because of your virtues and your rectitude that you will be able to possess their country; but it is because of their wickedness/wrongness (morisham מָרִישָׁם) that Yehovah your Elohim is dispossessing those nations before you, and in order to fulfill the oath that Yehovah made to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The nations before them we wrong in not following the ways of Yehovah. Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaqov were all living in the land and as examples to the peoples around them. Thus the people could have seen a servant of Yehovah and followed them. Just as Beni Yisrael was to be an example to the peoples around them, they could have followed the example or inquired of their success in their undertakings.

Mishlei/Proverbs 11:5

5 The righteousness of the blameless man smooths his way, But the wicked/guilty (rasha’ רָשָׁה) man is felled by his wickedness/wrongness (barish’ato בָּרִישָׁתוֹ). A guilty one is brought down by his being wrong in his ways.

Mishlei/Proverbs 13:6

6 Righteousness protects him whose way is blameless; Wickedness/wrongness (verish’ah וְרֵישָׁה) subverts the sinner. Wrongness causes the sinner harm.

Malakhi/Malachi 3:15

15 And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil/wrongness (rish’ah רִשָּׁה) and endured; they have indeed dared Elohim and escaped.”

Here the wrong doers test Elohim in thinking they have escaped punishment.
19 For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers ('oseh – makers לְשׂוןאֲדָמָהּ of evil/wrongness (rish'ah דְּרִשְׁאָה) shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said Yehovah of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs.

Here we have seen that what is translated, as wicked/wickedness is guilt and wrongness in not doing the ways of Yehovah. It is by keeping his ways that we do right and are righteous. But when we do our own ways, which are not of his, we are wrong. Thus, we are found guilty like a judge pronouncing sentence upon a matter and finding one right and the other wrong we see that rasha’, resha’, rish’ah are all telling us that this is a action, person, or something done which is in opposed to Yehovah. So we should focus our attentions to his ways and do them that we will not be found to be rasha’ or guilty and in the wrong.