

The Proverbs

Lesson 24

Proverbs 21

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

In Solomon's day, the kings of the east dug numerous ditches from a main waterway in order to irrigate parcels of land. He built small dams on each ditch that opened or closed, depending on the king's wishes. Those in the king's favor received water; those out of the king's favor did not. The king's heart led him to bring draught on whom he desired.

Proverbs 21:2 Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts.

This verse contains a common theme in the proverbs; every man has an opinion. Regardless of man's opinion, the LORD ponders about the hearts of men to determine if their opinions align with His.

Proverbs 21:3 To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD rather than sacrifice.

Many people believe and teach that obedience and sacrifice are the most important elements of a relationship with the LORD. Solomon disagrees; righteousness and justice are the most important elements in a godly relationship.

Proverbs 21:4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, is sin.

The haughtiness of the eyes shows the intent of the heart. Wickedness begins in the heart and shines like a lamp through the eyes. A person sees sin, internalizes it in his heart and acts upon it.

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty.

Proper planning determines the success of the desired outcome. A lack of planning leads to disaster; disaster leads to poverty.

Proverbs 21:6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.

Many of the old manuscripts translate the first phrase as "The snares of treasures" instead of "The getting of treasures." In either case, whether a wicked person is buying or selling a treasure through deceit for the purpose of obtaining a profit, it is a senseless act. While seeking to snare others, the liar is snaring himself in the eyes of the LORD.

Proverbs 21:7 The violence of the wicked will drag them away, because they refuse to act with justice.

Ultimate justice will be administered by the LORD. The LORD, will drag into judgment and torment that person who does not treat another justly away.

Proverbs 21:8 The way of a guilty man is crooked, but as for the pure, his conduct is upright.

When Solomon uses the word guilty, he means sinful. The way of a sinful man is difficult and convoluted. The conduct of the pure man is righteous.

Proverbs 21:9 It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

This verse might better read, “It is better to live in the shed on the (flat) roof and exposed to all kinds of weather, than with an argumentative woman and a house full of company.” The theme of a quarrelsome wife is repeated in 25:24 with similar leanings in 19:13, 21:19 and 27:15-16. Solomon makes the point that a wife who is constantly argumentative disrupts the peace and tranquility of the home.

Proverbs 21:10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

Every thought of a wicked person is evil toward everyone.

Proverbs 21:11 When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; but when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.

Even the innocent child can become wise when he sees an evil person punished. How much more knowledge is gained by the wise man when he receives new instruction.

Proverbs 21:12 The righteous one considers the house of the wicked, turning the wicked to ruin.

A person acts righteously when he helps overturn the works of the wicked.

Proverbs 21:13 He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.

The truly poor need the help of the LORD’s people. The one who helps those who are truly poor will find favor with the LORD. Determining who is truly poor can be difficult. Some people are poor because of their decisions; many of them generate a great deal of income that they waste. In this verse, Solomon focuses on those who have no means to provide for themselves, waste nothing and have no place to turn for help. We should never turn such a person away if the LORD has provided the means to give aid.

Proverbs 21:14 A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.

In this verse, Solomon is making a statement of fact; it does not mean that the statement is righteous. A gift may calm the angry man and, in many cases, a bribe will calm “strong anger”; nevertheless, a bribe should never be used by a righteous person to calm an angry man. Exodus 23:8 says, “And you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.” Deuteronomy 16:19 says, “You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.”

Proverbs 21:15 The execution of justice is joy for the righteous, but is terror to the workers of iniquity.

Justice is a two-edged sword. For the righteous, justice brings “joy”; for the wicked, justice brings “terror”.

Proverbs 21:16 A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.

This verse might be better translated, “A man who is wandering from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the lost.” This version translates the Hebrew “rephaim” as “dead” rather than the better meaning, “lost”. True understanding leads people to wisdom. When a person wanders from the place of wisdom, he will find himself in the company of the lost, those without the truth.

Proverbs 21:17 He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

A life filled with worldly pleasure and devoid of attending to daily duties and employment will lead to poverty. Such are the choices that make a man poor and lead his family into poverty. When wine and perfumes are added to the mix, the expensive products decrease the value of the person’s worth. Both wine and perfumes will quickly degrade if not used promptly.

Proverbs 21:18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the treacherous is in the place of the upright.

In God’s plan, in order to protect the righteous, He will punish the wicked man by allowing him to fall into the treacherous traps he has set for others. God will remove the wicked from the way of the righteous.

Proverbs 21:19 It is better to live in a desert land, than with a contentious and vexing woman.

This same theme addresses the woman who is argumentative, yet it adds the idea of vexing which means one who annoys, frustrates or worries, especially about unimportant things. Once again, Solomon is stating a fact; he is not giving an excuse to leave or divorce a wife.

Proverbs 21:20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up.

In Solomon's day, the most precious treasures in every home were not silver or gold but food and oil. Each family needed to store enough food to last through the winter and until the harvest. During that season, the food was rationed for daily needs. The fool did not ration the food, causing the family to fall into poverty.

Proverbs 21:21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor.

Matthew 6:33 offers a good commentary on this verse. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

Proverbs 21:22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

Physical fortifications as well as laws, ordinances and policies offer only false security to a community of people. As such, each item should be thoroughly investigated by the wise and those things which do not provide security must be eliminated and other plans put in place.

Proverbs 21:23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.

Solomon says much about the mouth and tongue. The proverb just stresses the importance of being careful with what is said, to whom it is said and when it is said.

Proverbs 21:24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, who acts with insolent pride.

The word "insolent" means rude because of a lack of respect. Such a man is a mocker of wisdom and the LORD. The three names, "Proud," "Haughty" and "Scoffer" describe the attitude of the mocker of the LORD.

Proverbs 21:25 The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work;²⁶ all day long he is craving, while the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Here, Proverbs 21:25-26 uses four clauses in a proverb for the first time in the book. In his laziness, the sluggard starves. At the same time, the sluggard sees the righteous giving without restrictions to those who are truly poor. Actually, the sluggards should never receive a gift from the righteous. It is a poor and ungodly use of the LORD's resources.

Proverbs 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!

The act of worship by a wicked person is accepted by the LORD when offered with sincere repentance. But when a wicked person offers worship with "evil intent", it is a stench in the nostrils of the LORD.

Proverbs 21:28 A false witness will perish, but the man who listens to the truth will speak forever.

Solomon presents many proverbs with this theme including 6:19, 12:17, 14:5, 14:25, 19:5 and 19:9. The LORD will destroy the unrepentant person who has a lying tongue. The person with truth on his lips will live forever!

Proverbs 21:29 A wicked man shows a bold face, but as for the upright, he makes his way sure.

The wicked will grandstand in defiance. The righteous will give thought to his path in order to assure his destination.

Proverbs 21:30 There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD.

No human can outwit, outthink or outmatch the wisdom of the LORD. Any human who tries to outwit the LORD will fail!

Proverbs 21:31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD.

Deuteronomy 17:16 says, "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'" Prior to Solomon's day, horses were not to be raised or kept in herds by Jews. In 1st Kings 10:29, Solomon breaks the LORD's instruction when the record says, "And a chariot was imported from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver, and a horse for 150; and by the same means they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and to the kings of the Arameans." In spite of Solomon's breaking of the LORD's instruction, the proverb shows that Solomon fully understands that the outcome of any battle is not determined by the equipment put in place but by the desire of the LORD.