

**Proverbs 21:1 ¶ The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.**

This is yet another statement of the sovereignty of God. Taken as a stand alone it can be very confusing. Taken in context with the whole scripture and what we know of God's character it is not. We know that God gave man the ability to make His own choices.

*Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live...."*

We also know that God is not willing that any person perish in their sin.

*2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Scripture is clear in connecting God's sovereignty over man with His foreknowledge when it comes to His plans for the future.

*Romans 8:29 "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate...."*

*Romans 11:2 "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew."*

In light of that truth, it is beyond amazing that God put in place a plan that would position men perfectly in place and time to weave together man's choice with His purpose. Solomon compares this to a river of water as it flows along a path defined by its banks. God has defined the banks along which the rivers of our lives flow—be we king or commoner.

**Proverbs 21:2 ¶ Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.**

Generally speaking, each person lives their life according to what they determine to be right for self. They don't generally take time to consider their motives. God, however, is most concerned with the motives and intents of one's heart that prompt their actions.

Henry: "The proud heart is very ingenious in putting a fair face upon a foul matter, and in making that appear right to itself which is far from being so, to stop the mouth of conscience."

Guzik quoting Garrett: "Yahweh's power of discernment goes beyond unmasking those who fool others; he even finds out those who have fooled themselves."

**Proverbs 21:3 ¶ To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.**

This truth was very significant at the time that Solomon lived. Their spiritual lives revolved around the sacrifices and offerings made at the temple. In connection with the previous verse, Solomon is emphasizing that God is more concerned with the motives and intents of our hearts. One can go through the motions of worship with a rebellious heart. To do what is right and live according to God's law is to mirror His heart before others and that is what pleases Him more.

Ironside: "It was a common thing for men to forget that sacrifices and offerings were not pleasing to the Lord when uprightness was lacking. He always placed righteousness and equity above ceremonial observances, as He does today. While He was on earth the Lord with-eringly rebuked the Pharisees for their attention to ritualistic details while forgetting justice and integrity. 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice' (Matthew 9:13) was His word."

**Proverbs 21:4 ¶ An high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin.**

Pride, both of demeanor and heart, and wicked deeds are sin. This seems to be an obvious truth. I think Solomon is making the point that pride, a reflection of one's rebellious heart, is just as sinful as actual deeds of wickedness.

**Proverbs 21:5 ¶ The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness; but of every one *that is* hasty only to want.**

I like the wording of the NIV: "*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.*"

To be diligent is to exert careful attention and effort to what you are doing—the very opposite of diligence. The one who is hasty "wants to avoid work, find shortcuts, and cut corners." (Guzik)

Henry: "Those that are hasty, that are rash and inconsiderate in their affairs, and will not take time to think, that are greedy of gain, by right or wrong, and make haste to be

rich by unjust practices or unwise projects, are in the ready road to poverty. Their thoughts and contrivances, by which they hope to raise themselves, will ruin them.”

**Proverbs 21:6 ¶ The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.**

A fortune attained by lying is likely to be lost by those that seek revenge and want to kill you. Vanity also refers to being unsatisfactory. Wealth attained by lying doesn't satisfy like wealth that is honestly attained. A liar is one who has chosen to follow the devil on a path that leads to hell.

*John 8:44* “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

*Revelation 21:8* “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

**Proverbs 21:7 ¶ The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.**

I think the NLT expresses it well: “Because the wicked refuse to do what is just, their violence boomerangs and destroys them.”

The wicked may think that they are getting away with their sin in this lifetime, but in the end your sin will cause your destruction. (See Revelation 21:8 above.) Life is about choices made. Right choices will lead to submission and obedience to the LORD; wrong choices made in rejection of God will lead to your destruction.

**Proverbs 21:8 ¶ The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.**

This emphasizes the truth of the comment I made on the preceding verse. A froward man is one who is perverse and refuses to do what is right. The word “strange” refers to one who is guilty. A person who is perverse is guilty of sin before the LORD. The pure person, on the other hand, is one who is morally clean and in right standing before the LORD because he tries to live in obedience before the LORD.

I couldn't help but think of the following verse: *Matthew 7:20 "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."*

**Proverbs 21:9 ¶ *It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.***

In bible times, the roofs of homes were like additional rooms of the house. Solomon is saying that it is better to live alone in a corner of the roof than to live in a spacious house with a woman (female, wife) that constantly quarrels and causes discord in the family.

**Proverbs 21:10 ¶ *The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.***

Evil men like to do what is evil; they are not merciful or kind to anyone. They are only motivated by pleasing self.

**Proverbs 21:11 ¶ *When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.***

I liked the NLT: *"A simpleton can learn only by seeing mockers punished; a wise person learns from instruction."*

The scornful person is one who is full of contempt and has no respect for God or His word. He is obviously going to do what is wrong. Those that are simple learn by seeing such a person being punished for their sin. It's much like a child that learns by watching his older siblings being disciplined for wrongdoing. The wise person learns from paying attention to and accepting what he is taught (in context, assuming a godly instructor).

**Proverbs 21:12 ¶ *The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.***

Noting that the words "man" and "but God" are not in the original Hebrew, I tend to think that other translations make more sense, e.g., the NIV: *"The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin."*

Scripture is clear in declaring that God is omniscient; He knows everything that is going on at all times.

*1 Chronicles 28:9 "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts:"*

*Job 34:21–22 "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."*

*Proverbs 15:3 "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."*

*Jeremiah 23:24 "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD."*

*Hebrews 4:13 "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

Scripture is also clear that the wicked will be destroyed.

*Psalms 37:38 "But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off."*

*Psalms 145:20 "The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy."*

*Philippians 3:18–19 "(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction...."*

*2 Thessalonians 1:7–9 "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power...."*

**Proverbs 21:13 ¶ Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.**

One who refuses to recognize the needs of the poor who cry out for help will find that no one will heed his cry when he finds himself in need. This is yet another example of the law of reaping and sowing.

*Galatians 6:7 "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."*

**Proverbs 21:14 ¶ A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.**

This is an odd thing for Solomon to teach his sons; he seems to be condoning bribery as a means of appeasing someone's anger. It may be true, but it is sinful.

Ironside took a more positive view of this verse: "Nothing so readily defeats hatred and anger as doing good to one who harbors malice. It must be done quietly and unpretentiously, so that others are not made aware of it. For there is danger that well-meant kindness, done openly in the sight of all, may be mistaken for hypocrisy, designed to deceive onlookers. But what passes between two parties in private will not be misunderstood, if it is not mentioned afterwards. This is how Jacob sought to turn aside the assumed wrath of Joseph (Genesis 43:11-14).

**Proverbs 21:15 ¶ It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction *shall be* to the workers of iniquity.**

This verse is basically saying that the righteous rejoice to see justice done, but the wicked observe it with dismay and consternation. As I observe the different responses in politics today, I would say that the wicked are driven to fury and insanity when they see justice done. Obviously, the context implies that justice is in accordance with God's word. The wicked will end up being destroyed. (See verses under comments for verse 12.)

**Proverbs 21:16 ¶ The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.**

My paraphrase: The person that goes astray from the path of wisdom dwells among the dead. I believe the reference is to Godly wisdom and those who are spiritually dead. I think Lot choosing to dwell in the vicinity of and eventually in Sodom would be a prime example from scripture.

**Proverbs 21:17 ¶ He that loveth pleasure *shall be* a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.**

Those whose hearts are focused on the pleasures and luxuries of life will end up poor, including those that love wine. It's not wrong to enjoy life or even a bit of wine in moderation as long as it doesn't interfere with making wise decisions and maintaining the right priorities in life.

**Proverbs 21:18 ¶ The wicked *shall be* a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.**

I think the NLT gets the right idea: *"Sometimes the wicked are punished to save the godly, and the treacherous for the upright."*

I think the story of the Jews taking possession of the Promised Land is a prime example of this truth.

**Proverbs 21:19 ¶ It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.**

This verses goes hand-in-hand with verse 9, using a different comparison. Solomon declares it to be better to live in the desert or wastelands than with a woman (wife) that is always promoting strife and anger in the home. The benefit of the desert or wastelands—peace and quiet.

**Proverbs 21:20 ¶ There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.**

The word "treasure" references a storehouse or depository. The teacher seems to be saying that the wise person stays prepared with a proper storehouse of the things that are of benefit to a comfortable life. The foolish man, however, uses up everything he has without regard for the future.

**Proverbs 21:21 ¶ He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.**

To follow after righteousness is to strive to live according to God's law. That includes following after mercy, showing loving-kindness toward others. Those who who strive to live such a life promote a healthy life that is characterized by righteousness and deserving of honor. This is a general principle that is not always proven true in relationships in our sin-infected world; but it is a principle that always proves true in our relationship to the LORD. We will reap the full benefits of living such a life as part of our eternal rewards.

This verse reminds me of a verse in Micah.

*Micah 6:8 "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*

**Proverbs 21:22 ¶ A wise *man* scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.**

This is a hard verse. After reading through the different translations, I do get the sense that the focus is on spiritual combat. There are many examples in scripture of those that are more powerful physically being defeated by those that go to battle with faith in the LORD as their deliverer—e.g., David vs. Goliath, the Israelites against the kingdoms of the giants, etc. Every time the people of God gain a victory in faith, the false gods of the wicked are proven impotent. For some reason, however, people are determined to put their faith in false gods instead of the one true God. How foolish!

EBC Abridged comments on the importance of wisdom: “In a war victory is credited not so much to the infantry as to the tactician, the general who plans the attack.”

And that is a valid observation regarding physical warfare. In the context of this book, however, wisdom is directly related to being obedient to the LORD. So, I tend to think the focus is on spiritual battles that can also impact physical battles.

**Proverbs 21:23 ¶ Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.**

To “keep” one’s mouth is to guard what comes out of it. One who carefully controls what he says will avoid a lot of heartache. Sadly, I speak from experience!

Henry: “Keep thy heart, and that will keep thy tongue from sin; keep thy tongue, and that will keep thy heart from trouble.”

Every time I read about the tongue, I think of these verses from James.

*James 3:5–10 “Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”*

**Proverbs 21:24 ¶ Proud *and* haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.**

One who is proud and arrogant is apt to scorn or mock others. He/she is extremely conceited and arrogant.

Such people are to be pitied. It is quite unlikely that they will humble themselves to the point of recognizing that they are sinners in need of salvation.

**Proverbs 21:25 ¶ The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. Proverbs 21:26 He coveteth greedily all the day long; but the righteous giveth and spareth not.**

The slothful person is a lazy person. His laziness and refusal to work will eventually lead to his death. He is full of covetousness. The only way such a person can survive is if others choose to provide for him/her.

The righteous person works hard and is ready and willing to provide for the needy. One does no favor for the lazy person, however, if they do not connect giving to helping them by providing motivation to work for what they receive.

**Proverbs 21:27 ¶ The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?**

I think the NLT expresses the heart of this verse: *“God loathes the sacrifice of an evil person, especially when it is brought with ulterior motives.”*

People are willing to go through all kinds of rituals to put on a front or for other personal objectives. The problem, however, is that God sees the heart; He knows our motives. He abhors sacrificial rituals with no real intent to honor Him.

*Matthew 15:7–8 “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”*

*1 Samuel 15:22 “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”*

**Proverbs 21:28 ¶ A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.**

Well, the translations certainly add confusion to this verse. It seems to me to be drawing a contrast between a false witness and one who testifies to the truth of what he heard or saw. The Hebrew for “constantly” makes reference to truthfulness. The testimony of a false witness can lead to destruction—of himself or of the innocent. A truthful witness will lead to justice.

One commentator notes that the false witness will have his testimony destroyed or that he will be punished. Sadly, that is not always the case today (or in time past). Jesus was convicted on the testimony of false witnesses. It will, however, always prove true when the LORD comes to rule on His throne.

*Jeremiah 23:5-6 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*

**Proverbs 21:29 ¶ A wicked man hardeneth his face: but *as for* the upright, he directeth his way.**

A hardened face makes reference to one who is impudent, shameless and brazen. He puts on a front to intimidate. Such a person looks on others with contempt.

One who is upright, however, has no need to put on a front because he acts with wisdom, understanding and intelligence before the LORD. Others respond to him out of respect.

**Proverbs 21:30 ¶ *There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.***

**Proverbs 21:31 The horse *is* prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the LORD.**

There is no man wise enough to provide counsel that can defeat the LORD. He is wiser and stronger than any man, plan or weapon. You can plan your battle carefully and use the best weapons, but victory rests in the hands of the LORD.