



## Proverbs - Chapter Twenty One

### III Proverbs 10:1-22:16 - Wise Sayings of Solomon (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty One

To do justice is better than sacrifice. Better to live on the roof than with a quarrelsome wife. No plans can avail against the Lord.

#### Introduction to Proverbs 20:5-21:8 (continued)

The proverbs of this section primarily give teachings about judgement and, to a lesser extent, money. The section is framed by 20:5-7 and 21:8; 20:5 asserts that one must be discerning to understand what another person is really up to, and 20:6 observes that people's pretences of virtue are often false and asks how to find true goodness. Verse 7a of Chapter 20 answers the question of 20:6. While it looks like an empty truism, 20:7a really means that people's behaviour is a good indicator of what they are. The blessing of 20:7b serves as a transition line to the catalogue of proverbs that follows. It begins with the word 'happy' or 'blessed,' a word that often introduces wisdom poems, e.g. Psalm 1:1 and 112:1. At the end, Proverbs 21:8 repeats the basic rule of discernment found in 20:7a: crooked people do evil, and upright people do good.

#### Introduction to Proverbs 21:1-4

Like 20:22-25, this section has three proverbs on divine judgement followed by a fourth proverb that is related but does not explicitly mention the Lord. God is a much higher judge than the king, whom he controls; the Solomonic origin of these passages shows that the king is specifically the Davidic king. People are not vindicated by their own consciences but by God's judgement, which cannot be averted simply with sacrifices and religious rites: ***<<And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than***

*the fat of rams*>> (1 Samuel 15:22). The thing most likely to bring divine judgement on one's head is pride.

<sup>1</sup> The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;  
he turns it wherever he will.

### Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. God holds and can guide the human heart. If God can do this with someone as powerful and noble as a Davidic king, he can do this with any man or woman he chooses. This should build a person's faith that God can guide and change hearts. Sometimes Christians despair when they see the stubbornness and hardness of man's heart against God and his will, but the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and he can guide it wherever he wishes.

The stream of water describes water flowing through a channel or an irrigation ditch, which a skilful farmer can turn to flow wherever he wishes.

A stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. This analogy illustrates how God may guide the heart of man. In moving a river, one does not need to carry each drop of water and place it where desired; if one can shape the banks and guide the direction of the river, the water will go where desired. So God does not need to directly change the human heart to guide it; he may do it simply through arranging other circumstances like banks of a river to guide the flow where he wants it. Derek Kidner commented, "Tiglath-pileser (Isaiah 10:6-7), Cyrus (Isaiah 41:2-4) and Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:21) are all examples of autocrats who, in pursuing their chosen courses, flooded or fertilised God's field as he chose. The principle is still in force."

<sup>2</sup> All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,  
but the Lord weighs the heart.

### Proverbs 21:2

All deeds are right in the sight of the doer. By nature, humankind justifies itself. Sometimes this is done in all sincerity, sometimes with deception, but stubborn pride makes people generally think every way of a man is right in his own eyes: <<*In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes*>> (Judges 17:6 and 21:25).

The Lord weighs the heart. Men and women are confident in their own way, but God knows. People often justify things according to their own hearts - "It was in my heart" or "I must follow my heart" or "In my heart I know" - but God weighs the hearts of men and women, knowing that the heart itself does not justify

anything. This should give each Christian confidence before the Lord, as did his ‘favourite’ disciple: <<*And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him*>> (1 John 3:19-22).

- <sup>3</sup> To do righteousness and justice  
is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

### Proverbs 21:3

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. Personal relationships - what might be called horizontal relationships - are important to God. He wants Christians to display righteousness and justice in this world. Animal sacrifice was a way to walk in right relationship with God - what might be called the vertical relationship. God here says that how a person treats others is more important than how they perform religious ceremonies such as sacrifice. This was the truth missed by the priest and the Levite in Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan; refer to Luke 10:30-36.

- <sup>4</sup> Haughty eyes and a proud heart —  
the lamp of the wicked — are sin.

### Proverbs 21:4

Haughty eyes and a proud heart — the lamp of the wicked — are sin. Often a proud heart is displayed through a haughty look. There is no shortage of either among humanity. These three things - the look, the heart, and the lamp of the wicked are each called sin. Even the light given out by the wicked can be regarded as sin before God, because they often use the benefit of their reflection in society for evil purpose. Eventually the light will fade and go out altogether: <<*Surely the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of their fire does not shine. The light is dark in their tent, and the lamp above them is put out*>> (Job 18:5-6).

- <sup>5</sup> The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,  
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.

### Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. When good planning is combined with diligent work there will be a harvest of plenty: <<*A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich*>> (Proverbs 10:4).

Everyone who is hasty comes only to want. The one who wants to avoid work, find shortcuts, and cut corners will find that failure instead of plenty. Their path leads surely to poverty, whether physical or spiritual.

- <sup>6</sup> The getting of treasures by a lying tongue  
is a fleeting vapour and a snare of death.

#### Proverbs 21:6

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour and a snare of death. There are some who hope to talk their way into money, and to do it by deception, i.e. by a lying tongue. They plan deals and make promises that are not honest, hoping it can bring them treasures. The hope of great treasure through lying words is a dream of those who are on the path to destruction. They hope to find great treasures with little work, and put their trust in fleeting fantasy instead of in God. For this reason Jesus taught: *<<Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also>>* (Matthew 6:19-21), and: *<<It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God>>* (Mark 10:25).

- <sup>7</sup> The violence of the wicked will sweep them away,  
because they refuse to do what is just.

#### Proverbs 21:7

The violence of the wicked will sweep them away. The wicked often love violence and use it for their own gain. This does not please God, and God allows such people to reap what they have sown: *<<The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight, but the wicked fall by their own wickedness>>* (Proverbs 11:5), and: *<<Then he said to me, 'This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to the writing on the other side. I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones'>>* (Zechariah 5:3-4).

They refuse to do what is just. It is not only what the wicked do; it is also what they do not do. What they do is violence; what they do not do is justice. God cares about both what they do and do not do, cares about both, and will pass judgement

over both: <<*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient*>> (Ephesians 5:6).

<sup>8</sup> The way of the guilty is crooked,  
but the conduct of the pure is right.

#### Proverbs 21:8

The way of the guilty is crooked. Every life is on a path or way, and some people walk a way that is twisted and perverse. Those who walk this crooked path are guilty before God and will not enter the kingdom of heaven: <<*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it*>> (Matthew 7:13).

The conduct of the pure is right. The crooked way belongs to the guilty man, but the Lord's work belongs to the pure man: <<*To the pure all things are pure*>> (Titus 1:15a). The path one chooses to walk will display who they truly are.

<sup>9</sup> It is better to live in a corner of the housetop  
than in a house shared with a contentious wife.

#### Proverbs 21:9

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious wife. The corner of a housetop is not a great place to live. It is small, confined, and exposed to the elements because it is on the roof. Yet in some circumstances the corner of a housetop is a better place to live. To have the whole house but live in constant conflict with a contentious woman is misery: <<*A continual dripping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in the right hand*>> (Proverbs 27:15-16). The same principle would be true for the wife of the contentious man. One would be better off in a more humble living situation and have peace in the home.

Houses in Palestine were generally one or two storied structures, built in the form of a square or rectangle, with an open space in the centre called the court. They had one door which opened into an open space called the porch, and this porch in turn gave access either to the street or opened into the inner court. In this porch there was usually a stairway leading up to the roof, although the stairway may have been on the outside wall. The roof was invariably flat and would normally be surrounded by a parapet to keep those on the roof from falling off. The roof was used in a similar way to a modern back garden as a place of privacy. It was common practice for people to spend time on the roof as it was a cool place to sleep at night and free from the normal aromas within a house, created by fires or cooking. It also provided an area for drying food or crops.

Verses 9 and 19, on the quarrelsome wife, frame this unit on the rewards for the wise and the troubles of the wicked. The wise husband will reflect on what aspects of his behaviour have led his wife to become quarrelsome.

### Introduction to Proverbs 21:10-13

Just as the wicked offers no mercy to his neighbour, so his own pleas for help will not be answered because God both knows and judges the wicked. Although it may take an example of the wicked being punished for the simple to learn, those who are wise take instruction to heart.

- <sup>10</sup> The souls of the wicked desire evil;  
their neighbours find no mercy in their eyes.

### Proverbs 21:10

The souls of the wicked desire evil. When a wicked man or woman does something evil, it is because their soul desires to do so. Their inward corruption is expressed through their desires. Kidner observed, “An important truth about depravity: men can sin not merely from weakness but eagerly and ruthlessly.”

Their neighbours find no mercy in their eyes. Often the evil that marks the wicked is expressed in their inability to get along with a neighbour. They look upon everyone else with no favour in their eyes. The psalmist provides an example that it would be wise also for Christians to follow: *<<For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness>>* (Psalm 84:10).

- <sup>11</sup> When a scoffer is punished, the simple become wiser;  
when the wise are instructed, they increase in knowledge.

### Proverbs 21:11

When a scoffer is punished, the simple become wiser. There are degrees of fools and their foolishness. A scoffer is hardened in their rejection of wisdom, while the simple are more naïve and inexperienced. A simple man or woman can learn wisdom when they see the scoffer is punished: *<<Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove the intelligent, and they will gain knowledge>>* (Proverbs 19:25), and: *<<Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?>>* (Hebrews 10:28-29).

When the wise are instructed, they increase in knowledge. Wise men and women do not need to learn everything through their own misery or the misery of

other people. The wise can learn as they are instructed and the best instruction comes through the Gospel: *<<Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will>>* (Hebrews 2:1-4).

<sup>12</sup> The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked;  
he casts the wicked down to ruin.

### Proverbs 21:12

The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked. The Lord is a righteous God, and what happens in the house of the wicked does not escape his sight. He sees it and wisely considers it. God considers the house of the wicked with perfect wisdom and justice.

He casts the wicked down to ruin. The wicked are judged for their wickedness. Whatever judgement they receive fits their actions.

**Good and bad alike will be judged by their choices and actions:** *<<Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever>>* (Daniel 12:2-3), *<<The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life>>* (John 5:22-24), *<<He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead>>* (Acts 10:42), *<<For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil>>* (2 Corinthians 5:10), *<<In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching>>* (2 Timothy 4:1-2), *<<But they will have to give an account to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead>>* (1 Peter 4:5).

- 13 If you close your ear to the cry of the poor,  
you will cry out and not be heard.

### Proverbs 21:13

If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard. Although many proverbs tell of poverty caused by bad conduct, other proverbs express God's compassion towards the poor. God cares about the poor and he commands his people to have a compassionate heart towards them: <<*When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it approved; because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper*>> (Job 29:11-12). People will reap what they have sown. It will be measured to them as they have measured it to others. If Christians are silent to those in need, God may arrange it so they will not be heard in their time of need: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*>> (Isaiah 45:15). Adam Clarke commented, "See the conduct of the priest and Levite to the man who fell among thieves; and let every man learn from this, that he who shuts his ear against the cry of the poor, shall have the ear of God shut against his cry. The words are quite plain; there is no difficulty here."

- 14 A gift in secret averts anger;  
and a concealed bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.

### Proverbs 21:14

A gift in secret averts anger. This refers to the offer and taking of a bribe. A bribe achieves its temporary end of avoiding punishment at the expense of true justice: <<*A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it; wherever they turn they prosper*>> (Proverbs 17:8), and: <<*The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice*>> (Proverbs 17:23). In the broader context of vv.10-18, it is clear that, although a bribe may appease the immediate situation, no one can evade justice forever.

A concealed bribe in the bosom, strong wrath. Again, the secret nature of the gift or bribe is indicated. Although morally questionable, it may work with the corrupt leader or official.

### Introduction to Proverbs 21:15-18

When justice is practiced, it is a joy for those who have walked in its ways and a terror to those who have perverted them. Verses 16-18 describe the reality of the terror for the wicked: they have turned from the path that leads to life, loved mere pleasure and luxury to their own impoverishment, and are themselves a ransom – an image that likely reflects the merciless manner in which they treated others.

- 15 When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous,  
but dismay to evildoers.

#### Proverbs 21:15

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but dismay to evildoers. When a person is just, i.e. righteous and godly, in their inner self, it gives them joy to be just. Their good works flow out of who they are: <<*But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith*>> (James 2:18). For Christians to really walk in the way God wants them to walk, they need to be transformed on the inside. Those who work iniquity also show what is in their heart, and it should make them tremble under the judgement of God. Instead of the joy of the just, they will experience destruction.

- 16 Whoever wanders from the way of understanding  
will rest in the assembly of the dead.

#### Proverbs 21:16

Whoever wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead. There are two paths or ways a man or woman can walk. It is dangerous to begin on the way of understanding but not to continue on it. To some extent this became tragically true of Solomon, the author of these Proverbs; refer to 1 Kings 11:1-11. The departure from the way of understanding does not have to be calculated and deliberate; it may feel like wandering. If one wanders from the way of understanding, they may well end up in the assembly of the dead. The path a person walks on - and remains on - is of the utmost importance.

- 17 Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want;  
whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich.

#### Proverbs 21:17

Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want. To find success and prosperity, there must be a measure of discipline and self-denial. The person who loves pleasure lacks this discipline and self-denial, and often ends up in poverty.

Whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich. In this proverb wine and oil represent the luxuries of life. There is an appropriate way to enjoy wine and oil without setting one's heart on them; but if these are loved beyond proper measure, it is a pathway to poverty, i.e. will not be rich. The same can be applied to the love of money that brings material rewards but often spiritual poverty as Paul explained: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in*

*their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains>> (1 Timothy 6:10).*

This proverb and Paul do not imply that pleasure or wine or oil are wrong in themselves, but when they are enjoyed apart from thanksgiving to God, or enjoyed more than following in God's paths, they will destroy a person's life.

<sup>18</sup> The wicked is a ransom for the righteous,  
and the faithless for the upright.

### Proverbs 21:18

The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the faithless for the upright. This is a way of saying that the righteous will ultimately succeed and will triumph over the wicked. God promises that in the end, all his righteous and upright will be lifted above the wicked and the unfaithful: <<*The righteous are delivered from trouble, and the wicked get into it instead*>> (Proverbs 11:8), and: <<*For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you*>> (Isaiah 43:3). Clarke wrote, "God often in his judgements cuts off the wicked, in order to prevent them from destroying the righteous. And in general, we find that the wicked fall into the traps and pits they have dug for the righteous."

Of course, what Solomon could not have known is that ultimately it would be the righteous that would become a ransom for the wicked: <<*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water*>> (1 Peter 3:18-20).

<sup>19</sup> It is better to live in a desert land  
than with a contentious and fretful wife.

### Proverbs 21:19

It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife. The life of a desert outcast is better than the life of marriage to a quarrelsome woman. In a previous proverb (v.9) it was thought better to live in the corner of a rooftop than with a contentious woman. This proverb removes the man from the house entirely and sets his better place in the wilderness. Verse 9 spoke of the contentious woman; this proverb adds the idea of anger to the picture and sets the unfortunate man even further from the house, i.e. in a desert land. This shows the great value of peace and happiness in the home.

Verses 9 and 19, on the quarrelsome wife, frame this unit on the rewards for the wise and the troubles of the wicked. Once again, the wise husband will reflect on what aspects of his behaviour have led his wife to become contentious and fretful. Equally the proverb can be applied to a woman living with a contentious husband.

### Introduction to Proverbs 21:20-22:1

This unit is held together by an *inclusio* or literary bookends consisting of three verses at 21:20-22 and three verses at 21:30-22:1. In v.20, wealth is achieved by wisdom and lost by folly, but v.21 speaks of pursuing righteousness and kindness; Proverbs 22:1 teaches that one should choose a good name, emblematic of being a righteous and kind person, over wealth. Thus, Proverbs 22:1 answers 21:20-21; wisdom can enable a person to achieve prosperity, but one should always pursue a good name through righteousness and kindness over riches. Proverbs 21:22, which speaks of the importance of wisdom in a military action, i.e. besieging a city, is answered by Proverbs 21:30-31, which assert that no wisdom can avail against the Lord and that however carefully one may plan a military action, victory is in the hands of the Lord. The whole unit teaches that success comes by wisdom, but that no amount of intelligence can stand against the Lord's sovereign will, and that in the end a good and kind heart is better than great wealth and power.

<sup>20</sup> Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise,  
but the fool devours it.

### Proverbs 21:20

Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it. The wise man or woman lives a life blessed by God, and sometimes that blessing is shown in material things: <<*In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked*>> (Proverbs 15:6), and: <<*Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil – this is the gift of God*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:19). They may have desirable treasure and good oil in their home. The foolish person would have trouble gaining what the wise man or woman has. They do not have the character of life or blessing of God that leads to prosperity. Yet even if they were to gain it, it would not last. Their foolish nature dominates as they squander it.

<sup>21</sup> Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness  
will find life and honour.

### Proverbs 21:21

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honour. Each life is on a path, and here the path is righteousness and mercy. This is the path of wisdom, God's path for those who will listen and surrender to him. The path of righteousness and mercy is not easy and is often opposed and mocked. Yet it is rewarded, and rewarded richly with life, righteousness and honour: <<***They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land***>> (Psalm 25:13), and: <<***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled***>> (Matthew 5:6). The wise path is worth it.

<sup>22</sup> One wise person went up against a city of warriors  
and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted.

### Proverbs 21:22

One wise person went up against a city of warriors and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted. The walls of a city are difficult obstacles, especially the city protected by mighty warriors. Yet with wisdom one can overcome such obstacles: <<***I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength***>> (Proverbs 8:14). The wise man can accomplish things impossible for others. Because the wise man enjoys the blessing and guidance of God, he can defeat obstacles as difficult as a trusted stronghold. This is true in military situations and in practical life; wisdom and ingenuity have won many battles and destroyed many strongholds. It is also true in spiritual life. Cities and strongholds that stand against the progress of the believer can be broken down with the wisdom and power of God. Kidner noted, "The truth that wisdom may succeed where brute force fails (confirmed by Proverbs 24:5-6), has many applications, not least to spiritual warfare."

<sup>23</sup> To watch over mouth and tongue  
is to keep out of trouble.

### Proverbs 21:23

To watch over mouth and tongue is to keep out of trouble. What people say is important, and some of the instruments of speech are the mouth and tongue. It is good to guard against what is said and not to speak everything that comes to mind. Unguarded words can bring a lot of trouble: <<***If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless***>> (James 1:26). Having the wisdom to guard the mouth and tongue will keep people from many troubles. The person who guards their speech is the opposite of the scoffer of v.24.

- 24 The proud, haughty person, named 'Scoffer',  
acts with arrogant pride.

#### Proverbs 21:24

The proud, haughty person, named 'Scoffer', acts with arrogant pride. Of the many types of fools, the scoffer is one of the worst. He is known to be proud and haughty, thinking himself better than others and even better than God: <<*Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other insolent men said to Jeremiah, 'You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, "Do not go to Egypt to settle there"; but Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon'*>> (Jeremiah 43:2-3). The proud and haughty man will be known by his actions; his life will be marked with great pride, arrogant pride. In many ways such people resemble the devil and his attitude towards his Creator God. It was the reason he fell from grace and the reason why he faces ultimate destruction in the lake of fire.

- 25 The craving of the lazy person is fatal,  
for lazy hands refuse to labour.

#### Proverbs 21:25

The craving of the lazy person is fatal. The lazy man has desire; he just does not have the initiative or the energy to fulfil it. His life of unfulfilled desire is unsatisfying and feels as if it kills him. This is a death to self, but not in the good and blessed way described by Jesus for his disciples: <<*and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me*>> (Matthew 10:38), and: <<*Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it'*>> (Luke 9:23-24).

Laziness leads to constant greed and craving, whereas the diligence of the righteous allows them to be generous; refer to the comment made on 10:4.

Lazy hands refuse to labour. Having the desire for good, for blessing and for prosperity, but not the desire to work, the lazy man lives a life of constant frustration and disappointment. He does not know the satisfaction of earned achievement.

- 26 All day long the wicked covet,  
but the righteous give and do not hold back.

## Proverbs 21:26

All day long the wicked covet. The reference is likely to the lazy man of the previous proverb. With his desire, that lazy man covets greedily and he does it all day long - yet the desire is unfulfilled because he does not work towards it.

The righteous give and do not hold back. The lazy man experiences constant disappointment, but the righteous man or woman - who, by implication, works hard - has so much that he gives and does not spare: <<*If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens*>> (Leviticus 25:35), and: <<*He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on'*>> (Mark 12:41-44). They are so blessed that they have enough for themselves and to give generously.

<sup>27</sup> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;  
how much more when brought with evil intent.

## Proverbs 21:27

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. God said, to obey is better than sacrifice. Religious ceremonies do not cover over a wicked life, and God may regard those religious ceremonies as an abomination. The sacrifice of the wicked that God abhors is a kind of lie, a false pretence of piety: <<*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves the one who pursues righteousness*>> (Proverbs 15:8-9).

How much more when brought with evil intent. The religious ceremonies of the wicked are bad enough; they are even worse when made with wicked intent: <<*Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever presents a grain-offering, like one who offers swine's blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and in their abominations they take delight*>> (Isaiah 66:3), <<*Of what use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me*>> (Jeremiah 6:20), and: <<*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings*

*of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon>>* (Amos 5:21-22). When a sacrifice is offered, the priest or observers may not be able to see wicked intent, but God certainly can.

<sup>28</sup> A false witness will perish,  
but a good listener will testify successfully.

### Proverbs 21:28

A false witness will perish. God is against all liars, but a false witness is a special type of liar. The primary idea is of one who lies in court, such as those who gave false witness at the trial of Jesus in Matthew 26:60.

A good listener will testify successfully. This proverb has in mind another kind of injustice in the court - the judge or lawyer in the court who hears the false witness, is able to discern the falsehoods, coming to a just and fair verdict.

The contrast of a false witness with one who hears indicates that a person who testifies falsely has chosen not to listen carefully to either the matter at hand or the requirements that a witness act justly. Both the person and the perjury of such a witness will ultimately perish, because it is the Lord who clearly sees and judges these things and causes the word of the faithful witness to endure: <<*Truthful lips endure for ever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment*>> (Proverbs 12:19), <<*A false witness will not go unpunished, and a liar will not escape*>> (Proverbs 19:5), and: <<*A false witness will not go unpunished, and the liar will perish*>> (Proverbs 19:9).

<sup>29</sup> The wicked put on a bold face,  
but the upright give thought to their ways.

### Proverbs 21:29

The wicked put on a bold face. One characteristic of the wicked is that they may be unsympathetic to others. Their face is hard and unfriendly to others, especially towards those in need. A bold face is a futile attempt to cover up or compensate for a path that is wicked, but the upright does not need a cover-up because they are wise in attending honestly to their ways.

The upright give thought to their ways. The upright man or woman does not face the same obstacles the wicked man faces. His way is established and made sure.

*The Jews failed to give thought to their ways before God when they returned to the land from exile and life was not as it should have been: <<But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord's temple, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to*

*draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you>> (Haggai 2:15-19)*

Proverbs 21:30-22:1 form the final three verses of the *inclusio* described in the introduction to Proverbs 21:20-22:1 above.

<sup>30</sup> No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel,  
can avail against the Lord.

### Proverbs 21:30

No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the Lord. To fight against God is to fight a losing battle: <<*I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me*>> (Job 10:2), and: <<*Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond*>> (Job 40:2). One can never succeed against the sovereign of the universe. These are three similar terms used to express wisdom and right knowledge. God is the God of all wisdom and understanding and counsel, so those things are always for him and never against the Lord.

<sup>31</sup> The horse is made ready for the day of battle,  
but the victory belongs to the Lord.

### Proverbs 21:31

The horse is made ready for the day of battle. In the days these proverbs were written, the effective use of the horse in the war could be overwhelming against the enemy. These horses had to be trained; it was wise to prepare the horse for the day of battle.

The victory belongs to the Lord. Although it is wise to make the best preparations for battle, ultimately one should not trust in horses or preparation, but in God himself: <<*Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help and who rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!*>> (Isaiah 31:1). Deliverance is of the Lord, not only of horses and preparation. Clarke commented, "We often give the credit of a victory to man, when they who consider the circumstances see that it came from God."