

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Proverbs 21

21.1. King Solomon, from his own experience, here gives his testimony of the power and glory of the King of kings. Whether the king be willing or unwilling, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth (Revelation 19.6) even in the heart of one whose natural inclination is most mightily to oppose Him. So it was with Pharaoh before Solomon's time and Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus afterwards. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the Lord (Daniel 4.37), Cyrus did not (Isaiah 45.4) but, for all that, the King of kings did have his way. Every monarch, every ruler shall likewise succumb willingly or unwillingly to His sway. The courses of mighty rivers may be turned, lesser streams tumble hither and thither and these are pictures of the invisible influences within the heart of a king. Mighty affairs of state which direct the history of nations are so influenced. The King of kings is no less able, and no less active, in directing the hearts of all people. And, in the hearts of believers, The Saviour is "the head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1. 22-23).

21.2. The writing on the wall convicted Belshazzar, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Daniel 5.27). We have already read (16.2), "the LORD weigheth the spirits." It is picture language again, for "pondereth" derives from a Latin word meaning "weight" as in "ponderous" and "pound." So the Lord not only weighs our actions but evaluates them and pronounces a verdict upon them as in Daniel 5.27. Of course, we think we're right; and a sincere person will only take a course of action if he/she believes in the rightness of it. But, still, it may not be right. There are many imponderables which we cannot fathom; furthermore, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17.9) and, with the best of intentions, we may not know the concealed motives of our own hearts. Rather than always insisting that our ways are right, it is wise constantly to submit them at every stage to the guidance of the Lord.

21.3. A person may fulfil all the requirements of religious service externally but, by unfair or uncharitable dealings with people, be totally unacceptable to God. It would be a good time now to reflect on the Saviour's instructions by reading Matthew 6. The Saviour also said, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy

brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matthew 5.23-24).

21.4. Pride, however it shows itself, is hated by God. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11.29). "Ploughing" may be understood in two ways here. It could be a part of the activities of life put to represent the whole, as if it was said that every activity of the sinner is sin, simply because he is unrepentant before God. Or, just as we use the picture that someone "ploughed right on regardless" to describe insensitivity and the riding roughshod over people's affairs and feelings, it may refer particularly to the hurt which a proud person causes to the feelings of others.

21.5. "Diligence" and "hastiness" are contrasted. "Hastiness" includes what we would now call acting in haste, without due consideration or study, or weighing up the pros and cons. But it may also denominate simple carelessness. Either way it does not achieve success. The bedrock of achievement is care; giving time and thought to all the issues and involvements of our lives.

21.6. This is quite a complicated proverb which needs some unravelling. To obtain wealth (or promotion, or any other aim) by lying is to be in breach of the 9th commandment for that commandment equates any lie as hurting a neighbour quite as much as specifically bearing false witness. If in breach of one of God's commandments then we are under the condemnation of Almighty God. "Vanity", which is the theme of Ecclesiastes - "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (1.2) - means emptiness, meaninglessness. Ecclesiastes describes the condition of one (like Solomon) who has backslidden and therefore finds that nothing seems to be working together for good. It describes the state in which a person may find himself which will lead to destruction if unrepented of and, in any case, will minimise fruitfulness of character while it lasts. So, unless wealth so obtained is forfeited, willingly or regretfully, there can be no ultimate benefit obtained through it. The tossing to and fro is most likely a picture of rough seas, as in Psalm 107. 25-27; it could remind us of the tossing of a ball, but actually that is not a picture ever used in the scriptures. Taking the picture of stormy waves we are being told by the Holy Spirit that ill-gotten gains are liable to be affected, diminished by every vicissitude of life and that we may feel too "seasick" to take any pleasure in them much of the time. They are not worth having, in other words. To all this is added the declaration that involvement in such ambitions is a death sentence, without repentance. It will greatly incur the wrath of God, partly because of how such treat others and also how they are snubbing God. In summary it is a positive embracing of certain destruction; those who seek false achievement seek death.

21.7. It is the act of commitment to a course of robbery, burglary or thieving; or even a single attempt, which is that person's downfall because it is a statement of intent to be

lawless and to despise the legitimate acquisitions of law-abiding citizens. It is, in effect, to despise work (which God has ordained in Genesis 3.19) and law and order which the laws of God command.

21.8. Paul writes to Titus (Titus 1.15-16) “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

21.9. Here we are, back with one of the “It is better...” proverbs. Love, peace and contentment in the married life even with much shortage and sacrifice is better than abundance of lifestyle with constant argument and rancour.

21.10. Proverbs 3.29 instructed us, “Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.” The wicked will seek to commit evil wherever it suits him and he will make no exception of his neighbour, maybe finding him to be an even easier prey.

21.11. It is one of the aims of punishment that those who are in danger of doing the same thing should be put off. Whatever form instruction takes a wise person learns from it. He learns from his mistakes; he learns from assimilating facts; he learns by reflection upon life and in many other ways also.

21.12. The best that a wise person can do, for the most part, when he observes entrenched evil is to learn to avoid every appearance of evil himself. God however is in a position to do something about it and, whether sooner or later, will destroy it. Read Psalm 37.9; 73.17-20.

21.13. James writes by the Holy Spirit (2.15-16) “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” The possibility seems to be envisaged in which a whole church may be so complacent that it does not heed the cry, or is oblivious to the need, of even poor fellow believers.

21.14. We are used to training dogs and rewarding them with gifts; we deal with our children somewhat similarly. Even adults need such encouragement, but would be shy if it were publicly or indiscreetly shown. We give tips in restaurants. Such encouragement is not a bribe. But there is a fine line between legitimate encouragement and a bribe. It is probably easiest to distinguish the difference in this way. If we reward completed action it is all in order. If we reward in order to stimulate action, especially improper action, it is a bribe.

21.15. It gives real pleasure to fulfil righteousness in any way and to complete one's work in a proper fashion. The opposite of that joy is a certain fearful looking for of judgment which, however much the hardened sinner denies it, will activate his conscience at unwelcome moments.

21.16. The aimlessness of a person with no interest in understanding anything in any realm of life is to be more dead than alive. That there are many like that is indicated by the description "congregation," though the final gathering of such together from all over the world and at all times of history will not be till the judgment. There is no need to remain in that number. We may all seek the wisdom that is in Christ Jesus the Lord.

21.17. Do we eat to live or live to eat? Here is a proverb about getting our priorities right. Pleasure is a fine foil to labour and should be enjoyed to send us back better fitted and rejuvenated for our life's work. It is not to be a pastime, to while away hours which could be better spent; or to be indulged for its own sake. If our job is boring or repetitive it cannot be worse than the slave's lot, to whom it was written, "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3.23). "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things (that is, necessities) shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6.33). Our wisdom would be to make it our pleasure to seek first the Saviour's kingdom.

21.18. The Spirit of the Lord says, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life" (Isaiah 43.4). It would be good to read Joshua 7 at this point, noting especially verses 8 & 26. The sin of Achan prevented the blessing falling on the whole nation. The execution of full punishment meant that the Lord was appeased and His people were able to continue victoriously. Let the sinner beware, particularly the secret sinner.

21.19. Here is another "It is better..." proverb and once again features an unruly woman. Peace and quiet, even in heat and grit, is better to be desired than the constant bickering of bitterness.

21.20. This proverb, while it may be appreciated on a natural level, is best enjoyed on a spiritual. Salvation in Christ and all it entails is the supreme treasure. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4.6-7). The foolish man lays waste his powers and may, by sponging, diminish the stores of the righteous. This can even happen in a spiritual way when a spiritual person gets involved in some dispute. Let us look "diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby

many be defiled” (Hebrews 12.15). Both the wise and foolish should take heed of the words of the Saviour, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6. 19-20).

Oil is always a picture of the Holy Spirit and the abundance of His anointing. The sheer abundance of His gifts is illustrated by the lavishness with which the oil was poured upon Aaron, Psalm 133.2. So it is poured upon a believer, especially that he/she may know unity with Christ and with one another; but also there is an abundance of many other graces and gifts. It is that very abundance which is threatened when the Spirit is grieved (Ephesians 4.30). No man, nor Satan’s malice behind men’s evil actions, must rob us of our supply. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4. 31-32).

21.21. The principle is exemplified and commended by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Beatitudes, (especially in Matthew 5.6-7), “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”

21.22. A city well defended by a high wall may yet be penetrated unseen by an opponent scaling that wall and opening up the way for his comrades from within the city itself. It is a picture of the way in which a wise person’s advice and manners may secretly overcome, albeit unwillingly at first, the entrenched opinions or purposes of an opponent, establishing doubts within him of the efficacy or rightness of his conduct.

21.23. How often we regret our hasty comment or riposte. We may live to regret giving, as our considered opinion, ill-thought out and un-prayed over advice. Our conscience may trouble us; our stock may have diminished in the eyes of others; but it embroiled us in trouble in one way or another.

21.24. We have been advised constantly in the book of Proverbs about pride and scorn. It is an awful reputation to have to be always angry, to deal in anger, so that no one, even among our colleagues, dares to approach when for the welfare of firm, family or church it is essential. Perhaps Nabal was fresh in Solomon’s mind. “Nabal (fool) is his name, and folly is with him.” “He is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him.” (1 Samuel 25.25,17). Read the whole chapter as an antidote to such an attitude.

21.25. There is dry humour here. It’s all right to be amused if we’re thinking of someone else, but clearly the Holy Spirit knows that this is such a method as will stir a

lazy one at last. Oh! to own a mansion! Oh! to be the greatest! But without labour these are but dreams; exaggerated dreams, of course, because most who do labour cannot achieve these things. The humour lies in this, that the hands refuse to get involved – as if the hands were not directed by the heart's desire! The desire for reality is not as great as the desire for daydreaming and this is a more common malady than we might suspect, even in our own hearts. Balaam said, "let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Numbers 23.10) but it was merely a forlorn hope without living a righteous life, which, of course, he didn't.

21.26. Desire without labour leads to covetousness, a much more serious sin, for it is a breach of the 10th commandment. Greed and jealousy concerning the "haves" and the "have-nots" consume him with no basis in reality, except his own laziness, at all. The righteous work and give unsparingly. It is not meant that they give to the lazy one, though if their lives were threatened or that of their families through poverty, they might. However, the scripture says through the apostle Paul, "this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3.10).

21.27. The Lord loathes it when an unrepentant person makes his/her offering. It is infinitely worse if such a one is actively meditating on the sin in hand, not even heeding the significance of the sacrifice for a moment.

21.28. If proved false, such a witness will be disqualified from future credence. The one who abhors lying and thinks about what he sees will frequently be called upon to testify. The unrepentant liar will perish eternally; but the believer will judge the world and angels too (1 Corinthians 6.2,3).

21.29. A person who wishes to continue in wickedness when confronted by man or convicted by the Spirit will steel himself; the upright will in all matters, even if convinced of his sin, direct his thoughts and actions into truth and honesty.

21.30. Gamaliel rightly cautioned against fighting against God (Acts 5.39), "...if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

21.31. We have already considered that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (16.33) where there is a proper proportion of the part man plays and the part God plays. We must do something, but God superintends. This proverb is another telling illustration of the same principle. By giving us the different illustration of warfare the Holy Spirit alerts us to another situation in which this whole idea is so important. He awakens us to other situations which we might similarly think of; civil, political, military, business, domestic or private.