

The Book of Proverbs – Moral Instructions on Everyday Living

"Man Proposes, God Disposes" – Chapter 16

Mortals can devise whatever plans they want, but, says the author, God is the one who determines what happens in the end. Continuing on this theme, this chapter begins by going through some of the ways in which God rules over humans—knowing all their innermost thoughts and desires, and creating everything for a purpose. The author excoriates pride and the unwillingness to trust in God, but has nice things to say about loyalty and faithfulness. Again, the author points out that human beings make plans, but God is the one who actually directs their steps. The author also talks about how great and just a good king is, remarking also on how God appreciates fairness in judgment. To some degree, the book seems to assume that kings will be just: unrighteousness is an abomination to them. Avoid their wrath, but bask in the glow of a cheerful, happy king's mood. Famously, "Pride comes before the fall": the proverbs make this point again, this time in its most well-known version. Again, it's better to be poor and not proud, than proud and not poor. If you speak pleasantly, people will be more persuaded—and persuasiveness is something the wise possess. Such pleasant words are sweet, like honey. In contrast, the words of scoundrels set fire to things. Having an appetite or being hungry spurs you to work harder. Also, in line with the Proverbs' love for all things elderly, the author praises gray hair as indicating special life wisdom. Again, the author repeats the same point as at the beginning: life is like casting lots, but the decision on where they actually fall lies in God's hands.

Chapter 16

1. What does the LORD weigh? (2)
2. What causes men to depart from evil? (6)
3. What does the LORD cause to happen when a man's ways please the LORD? (7)
4. What goes before destruction? (18)
5. What does an ungodly man dig up? (27)
6. Who separates chief friends? (28)
7. What is a crown of glory if found in righteousness? (31)
8. Who is better than one who takes a city? (32)

In Praise of Bribes – Chapter 17

Continuing to riff on old themes, the author states that it's better to have a little dry food with quiet (meaning, with peace) than to have feasting with strife. A slave who acts wisely will end up ruling over the foolish children of his or her master. In the same way that a crucible forges silver and gold, so does God test the heart. People who insult the poor also are insulting God. The author goes on to praise forgiveness and also bribes (weirdly enough, they're referred to as being like "magic stones" that give you whatever you want—sounds like a video game). Grandchildren are like a crown for their grandparents, and the parents of children are their glory—meaning, they supposedly know what's right all the time or something. It's better to meet a she-bear who's lost her cubs than it is to meet a fool who's really deep into folly at the present moment. If you do evil back to someone who did good for you—you're in for destruction in a big way. Strife starts like water that begins breaking through a dam and quickly becomes unstoppable. So shut it down before it gains too much momentum. God dislikes people who condemn the righteous and commend the wicked (as you might've easily guessed, based on the author's other opinions). Also, don't make any rash pledges to your neighbor (or, even, any pledges at all, depending on how you interpret it). However, reversing the earlier position on bribes, Proverbs now attacks bribes—or, at least, it attacks *accepting* bribes (though earlier, it had only commended giving bribes). The author continues attacking the same targets as earlier: foolish children, abusing the innocent, etc. This chapter ends by saying that quietness is an attribute of the wise—even fools who can manage to be quiet will be considered intelligent by others.

Chapter 17

1. Who shall have rule over a son that causes shame? (2)
2. What is the crown of old men? (6)
3. Who separates friends? (9)
4. Who loves at all times? (17)
5. Who becomes surety? (18)
6. Who has no joy? (21,25)
7. What does good look like a medicine? (22)
8. Who spares his words? (27-28)

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Never Walk Alone – Chapter 18

This chapter begins by attacking living alone—Proverbs wants everyone to be part of the community. It returns to its favorite whipping boy shortly thereafter: the fool. Fools don't like to understand anything—they just want to babble on about their ill-informed opinions. The author repeats things we've already heard him say about four or five times: don't judge against the innocent and in favor of the guilty, God can protect you, humility is praiseworthy, wickedness brings disgrace, hard work is valuable, and fools are destroyed by the dumb things they say. Additionally, people who whisper malicious or insincerely nice things penetrate deep into your psyche and can mess you up. You shouldn't speak before you've heard what's going on fully; it's tough to deal with a broken spirit; it's helpful to give gifts; hearing a cross-examination can help throw something that initially seemed reasonable into question; and casting lots helps end disputes. Also, don't quarrel with your allies—it'll get you trapped worse than a castle's dungeon. True friends and good wives are blessings, and using your tongue properly holds the key to winning favor and having everything good happen.

Chapter 18

1. To what are the words of a man compared? (4)
2. Into what do a fool's lips enter? (6-7)
3. What are the words of a talebearer? (8)
4. Who is brother to him that is a great waster? (9)
5. What does the righteous run into and is safe? (10)
6. When should you answer a matter? (13)
7. What brings a man before great men? (16)
8. What is harder to be won than a great city? (19)
9. What is in the power of the tongue? (21)
10. What does a man find when he finds a wife? (22)
11. In order to have friends what must a person do? (24)

If I Was a Rich Man – Chapter 19

Continuing with yet more favorite themes, Proverbs states that it's better to be poor and have integrity than to be a fool. One of the aspects of being a fool is desiring things without having any knowledge—letting your wants lead you by the nose, essentially, with no reflection. Even though people's only folly brings them down, they still rage against God, like he's responsible. Wealth earns friends, but poverty makes people dislike you or stay away (though Proverbs says nothing about whether wealth earns you *real* friends). Proverbs proceeds to re-tread old (and some new) territory: false witnesses, foolish children, and quarrelsome wives are bad; slaves shouldn't rule over princes; it's good to overlook offenses; and kings are pretty great when they're in a good mood. Proverbs repeats advice (that, for the most part, it's already repeated): be kind to the poor, beat your kids to discipline them, listen to good advice. There's no point in trying to save someone from their own violent temper: you'll just need to do it all over again. Lazy people are so lazy that they'll stick their hand in a dish and won't even have the willpower to take it out. Even though Proverbs said there's no point in rebuking the wicked, here it says that if someone strikes a scoffer it helps simple people know what's up. The chapter ends by repeating a couple of Proverbs' classic stand-bys: listen to Mom and Dad and don't be a scoffer or fool, because you'll end up getting flogged.

Chapter 19

1. What makes many friends? (4,6)
2. To what are the contentions of a wife compared? (13)
3. What is from the LORD? (14)
4. Who shall suffer hunger? (15)
5. Who lends to the LORD? (17)
6. Who is better than a liar? (22)
7. Who causes shame and brings reproach? (26)
8. What is prepared for the back of fools? (29)