

**July 5**

**Scriptures:** Read Proverbs 21 & 22

**Key Verse:** “He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness and honor.”  
(Proverbs 21:21)

## **Overview**

Proverbs 21 begins by expressing the sovereignty of God and His providential care. He is in control over all things. As a farmer controls the flow of water in his fields through irrigation channels, so the Lord can turn the heart of a king (21:1; 20:24). In the books of Esther and Daniel, this principle is well illustrated. God uses kings as instruments to fulfill His purpose and plans, such as showing mercy or bringing judgment upon a people (Isa. 45:1). We are to pray for our nation’s leaders and be subjected to them (1 Tim. 2:1-2; Rom. 13:1-7). The sovereignty of God in relation to the free will of mankind is a mystery, yet we can be sure that there will never be a king or leader who will be able to take control of this world from the hands of God.

Even the outcome of battles is decided by God. Man may plan and be confident in his military strength (be it horses, tanks, or missiles), but only the plans of the Lord are sure, and only He can give the victory (21:31; 19:21). If man’s plans, counsel, and worldly wisdom are directed against God, they will never stand (21:30), for such are really not wisdom or understanding at all, since true wisdom and counsel come only from Him.

The book of Proverbs stresses that the truly wise man is the one who fears the Lord; this causes him to “follow righteousness and mercy” as well as have humility. The rewards that God promises for the one who fears Him are “life, righteousness and honor” (21:21; cf. Micah 6:6-8), as well as riches (22:4); this does not necessarily refer to material prosperity but mainly to the desirable treasure of a peaceful and joyous home life (21:20) without a contentious spouse (21:9; 19).

Far better than riches is a “good name” which is attained by having favour with God and man (22:1). Such a person is wise and has a worthy character which is respected and honoured. In the Middle East, an individual’s good name and the good name of one’s family is highly treasured and safeguarded, just as it was in biblical days. Many of the proverbs deal with the sanctity of the family, so that no reproach or shame will come upon the name of the family (e.g. 19:26). An important teaching that can safeguard a family from being put to shame is to “train up a child in the way he should go” by teaching him about God, His Word, and His commands from an early age; this requires great love and patience (22:6a). Because of man’s sinful nature, “foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child” (22:15). Therefore, along with teaching the child to walk in the ways of the Lord, that child must also be corrected, so he might not grow in the ways of sin; for the way the child is molded and carved will last his entire life. There is a promise to parents if they prayerfully and faithfully heed these instructions about child-rearing the biblical way: when that child is old, he will not depart from godliness (22:6b).

The person who has a good name is a worthy friend of the king, since he “loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips” (22:11), as well as being industrious and diligent (22:29; 21:5). He is

the total opposite of the slothful man who makes up excuses so he might not have to work (22:13). The lazy person greedily covets riches and yet does not want to work hard to attain prosperity. His laziness can lead to sinful and deceptive ways of becoming rich, but such riches are temporary and lead one in the path of death (21:6; 1 Tim. 6:6,10).

We also read of many other examples of the sinful way that leads to destruction and death, such as wickedness, violence, injustice, iniquity, and befriending an angry man (21:7,12,15-16; 22:8, 24-25). Oppressing the poor is also condemned, for the Lord takes notice of it and will plead the cause of the poor. Those who mistreat the poor will experience divine punishment; they will themselves be plundered and poverty stricken, and God will not hear their cry (21:13; 22:16, 22-23). God insists that man be no respecter of persons, for God made all people equal (22:2; Acts 10:34-36). In contrast, the one who gives generously to the poor will be abundantly blessed (22:9).

## **Prayer**

Our desire, oh Lord, is to wholly follow You in the path of righteousness. Grant us the wisdom to direct others to that path, leading to abundant and eternal life.