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Life or Death

14: 15-32

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.



The wise fear evil (14:15-18): Verse 15 is a literary pivot point, serving as a transition. It has two meanings. The first colon relates to the lines preceding it (**to see link click [Ch](#) - There is a Way that Appears Right**). **The simpleminded (1:4b) believes everything they're told (14:15a Hebrew). They** have a lack of critical thinking skills. By not reflecting on the matter, **they** may well speak or act on the basis of a misunderstanding and thus say or do the wrong thing, with horrible consequences. **But** the second colon relates to the verses that follow: **the prudent (1:4a) carefully considers their steps (14:15b Hebrew)**. This **proverb** basically contrasts **the simpleminded** over **the prudent**, with the intention of encouraging the attentive reader to choose the latter. **Lady Wisdom herself** (see **Am** - **Lady Wisdom's Rebuke of the Foolish**) advocates for this line of action in **9:6**.

The main point of the first subset is that **the wise fear ADONAI and turn away from evil, but a fool gets angry [against ADONAI] and yet feels secure (14:16 Hebrew)**. Here **the wise** are again compared favorably with **fools**. **Their**

fear of ADONAI (1:7 and 29, 2:5, 3:7, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:27, 15:16 and 33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17 and 24:21) keeps **them** from committing **evil** acts. **Everything in the world, the desires of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (John 2:16a)** are all very tempting, so it takes an emotion as strong as **love** or **fear** to keep us from yielding to **its** lure. The second colon marks **fools** as **hotheads**. **A quick-tempered person does foolish things, and the one who devises evil schemes is hated (14:17 NIV).**²⁸³ **The rabbis say that when the kettle boils over, it overflows on both sides. In other words, when a fool gets angry, his wrath destroys his own house.**

The simpleminded inherit foolishness, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge (14:18 Hebrew). Here the contrast is between **the simpleminded** and **the prudent**. The verse begins by claiming that the former inherits **foolishness**. The statement is somewhat ambiguous in terms of the origin of **the foolishness** that **the simpleminded** inherits. The parallel column doesn't really help. I think the best understanding is to recognize that **foolishness** is an inheritance from **simplemindedness**. In other words, **simplemindedness** produces **foolishness**. On the other hand, like **the simpleminded, the prudent** also have a possession, but in **their** case it is **a crown**, something that points to **their knowledge**. **Verse 18**, like **verse 15**, is a literary pivot point, concluding **verses 15-18** and introducing **verses 19-24**.

Good or evil (14:19-24): The next subset warns **young men** to embrace **righteousness** and reject **evil** because ultimately **ADONAI** will reward the former and punish the latter. **Evildoers will bow down (have bowed down) in the presence of good people, and the wicked bow down at the gates of a righteous person (14:19 NIV). In acknowledgment of their defeat. The verb is in the perfect tense, "have bowed."** According to a common Hebrew idiom, what is yet to take place is pictured as already having happened, an expression of the certainty that it will be so. **The conviction that in the end goodness prevails over evil is deep-rooted in Hebraic thought.**

This optimistic **proverb** states that **good/righteous people** are much better off than **evil/wicked people**. Indeed, the latter find **themselves bowing down** to the former. One would have to believe that **Solomon** had lost **his** mind to believe that this principle was always true. But this is obviously true *in the long run*. The TaNaKh supports this concept. For instance, **Joseph** was godly but was actually abused by **his brothers** and thrown into **prison** for **his righteous** behavior. However, by the end of the story, **Joseph** is in a position of influence so that **he** can save the family

of the covenant of promise. Likewise, at the beginning of the book of **Esther**, **Mordecai** finds **himself** persecuted by **Haman**, which seems the exact opposite of the claim of this **proverb**. But, by the end a reversal takes place so that **the wicked Haman** finds **himself** at the mercy of **the godly Mordecai**.²⁸⁴ In the B'rit Chadashah the same is true of **the rich man and Lazarus** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Hx - The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**). This is the ultimate fulfillment found in **Philippians 2:10-11: At the name of Yeshua, every knee will bow down . . . and every tongue confesses that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

The poor are hated by their neighbors, while the rich have many “friends” (14:20 Hebrew). This **proverb** provides the necessary perspective to **verse 19** by implying that **evil people** are **rich** only for a time. In contrast to **the rich person** who has sufficient financial possessions but is morally deficient, **the poor person** is materially deficient but is never pictured as morally deficient.²⁸⁵ It is a principle of human nature that most people would rather be in the company of **the rich** than **the poor**. The latter typically have needs that require attention, while the former have resources that may prove beneficial to others. Thus, **the poor** are avoided and **the rich have many “friends.”**

Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor (14:21 ESV). This verse puts a negative spin on the observation of the previous verse. **Those who despise their neighbors**, whether **rich** or **poor**, **sin**. Indeed, the second colon encourages **generous** actions toward those neighbors and friends who are needed, especially the **poor**.

Won't those who plot evil wander aimlessly? But those who do plan good things find chesed and truth (14:22 Hebrew). This **proverb** is about consequences. It contrasts the end result of planning **evil** and planning **good**. **Evil** planners are not rooted in anything but, rather, **wander aimlessly**. The verb **wander aimlessly** (Hebrew: *ta'ah*) points to the theme of the right or wrong **path** spoken of throughout the book (see **Cc - The Path of Righteousness**). The rhetorical question assumes a positive power. On the other hand, those who **plan good things** receive **chesed** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**). **Chesed and truth** are a frequent word pair describing **ADONAI's** relationship toward **His** children. But they are also characteristics of the community of congregations of **God**.

Work brings profit, but mere talk leads to poverty. This **proverb** contrasts

hard work with longwindedness. Certainly, there are words that are profitable, but this **proverb** assumes empty words. If someone talks all the time and does not work, they will end up sleeping in a tent at the park. **Wealth is a crown for the wise, but the effort of fools yields only foolishness (14:22-24 NLT)**. This **proverb** is not about the “health and wealth” gospel, but **it** contrasts **wisdom** and **foolishness** by pitting the reward of the former with the emptiness of the latter. The metaphor of **the crown** is appropriate for the material reward that comes to **the wise**. On the other hand, you play stupid games and you win stupid prizes. Stupidity only yields stupidity, nothing more. This observation serves the purpose of motivating us to ask for **wisdom**. **James 1:5** says: **If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.** The young **king Solomon** illustrates the truth of the first colon of this **proverb**. **He** asked for **wisdom**, and **God** was so pleased that **He** also gave **him** power and wealth (see the commentary on [the Life of Solomon As - Solomon’s Wish](#)).²⁸⁶ It is important to note that **proverbs** are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Life or death (14:25-32): A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful (14:25 NIV). This is one of many proverbs that contrast those who tell **the truth** in court and those who tell **lies**. Here we can see how the contrast is a matter of **life** and **death**. There are a number of proverbs concerning **the witness (14:5, 19:28, 21:28, 24:28-29, 25:7c-8 and 18, 29:24)**. The truthfulness of witnesses is a major concern not only in **Proverbs**; it is also a major issue in **the Torah (Exodus 20:16, 23:1-2; Deuteronomy 5:20, 17:6, 19:16-19)**.

Those who fear ADONAI are secure. By placing **themselves** in **their** proper subservient position to **ADONAI**, such people are under **His** protection. In the second colon, the promises of protection are extended to **their children**. **He will be a refuge for their children**. If one **fears YHVH**, then **they** don’t need to **fear** anything or anyone else. **The fear of ADONAI is the fountain of life, enabling one to avoid deadly traps (13:14, 14:26-27 Hebrew)**. The identity of these **deadly traps** is not specifically made, but throughout the book **foolishness** is associated with **death** (see [Bo - Madam Folly’s Invitation to Death](#)). It leads to **life (19:23)**, it gives **security (14:26)**, **hope (23:17-18)**, and the promise of **long life (10:27)**. When you **fear ADONAI**, you keep your priorities straight. **Better to have little, with the fear of ADONAI, than to have great wealth with inner turmoil (15:16)**. **Lovingkindness and faithfulness make atonement for sin, but the fear of ADONAI keeps one from evil (16:6 Hebrew)**.

A growing population is a king's glory, but a prince without subjects has nothing (14:28 NLT). A king with no subjects is not much of a king. Perhaps the intention of **the proverb** is to encourage **the king** to promote humane policies to **his** kingdom. Too often **kings** attack **their** own people out of insecurity or simply in the interests of their own power. **Kings** with large populations are able to amass more powerful armies and achieve more influence in their world. Here a royal proverb follows two **ADONAI proverbs (14:26-27)**, an association that occurs elsewhere in **Proverbs** and may reflect some intentional structuring.

He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered promotes stupidity (14:29 Hebrew). Solomon knows that a **cool-headed person** will get further ahead in life than a **hothead**. **He** is not ruffled or goaded into overreacting to avenge **himself**, or to seek revenge rather than trusting **God**. The ability to control one's emotions and express them at the right time and to an appropriate degree is an important aspect of **wisdom**. To act impulsively, without reflection leads to **stupidity**, a close companion of **foolishness**.

That a person's emotions affect his physical condition is well known (**15:13** and **30, 17:22**, and **18:14**). **A heart at peace** (a healthy disposition) **gives life to the body**. The first colon states that an emotionally healthy person enjoys physical well-being. On the other hand, jealousy is an emotion that can destroy one's inner peace and have a negative effect. **But jealousy**, which cares only for itself and gets worked up, **is like cancer in the bones** because it eats away at the person (**14:30 Hebrew**).

There is a difference between being **jealous** and being **zealous**. **Jealousy** is a negative trait, with something that is not yours, while **zealousness** can be a positive trait toward something that is yours. For example, a husband should be **zealous** for his wife if another man approached her romantically. But the same principle applies to our relationship with **the LORD**. When **Balaam** sent **Midianite** and **Moabite women** into the camp of **Isra'el** to entice them into sin and idolatry. **One of the Israelite men, Zimri the son of Palu, the prince of the tribe of Simeon, and a Midianite woman, Cozbi the daughter of Zur, a princess of Midian (Numbers 25:14-15)**, were having sex **right before the eyes of Moshe and the elders of Isra'el, as they were praying and weeping at the gate to the Tabernacle**. But **when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the high priest, saw it, he jumped up and left the congregation, took a spear in his hand, and pursued the Israelite right into the inner part**

of his vaulted canopy, where, taking the law into his own hands, he thrust his spear all the way through both of them - right through the Israelite and into the woman's stomach. He was zealous for ADONAI (see the commentary on **Numbers Ea - Taking a Stand for God**).

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but He that is gracious the poor honors Him (14:31 Hebrew). Proverbs teaches that God blesses the wise with riches and afflicts the foolish with poverty (14:24). Without context, one could falsely come to the conclusion that the book of **Proverbs** is callous towards the needs of **the poor**. However, this view does not take into account the sensitivity and protections offered to **the poor** through the compassionate teaching of **Solomon (11:24, 28:27, 29:7 and 14)**. After all, **Proverbs** also shows awareness that there are other reasons besides foolish behavior, including laziness and indulgence, that lead to **poverty (13:23)**. The point is made that to **oppress the poor** is not just an attack on **them** but also on **God**, who made them **(22:2)**. On the positive side, to honor the poor is to honor **God**. **The word gracious is significant. Not only is the poor person to be helped, but in a gracious manner so they don't feel humiliated.**²⁸⁷

The wicked are brought down by their own evil deeds, but the righteous have a refuge even at the time of death (14:32 Hebrew). Although **evil** is occasionally on top, in the long run, **the righteous** are victorious and **the wicked** are defeated. **The teaching of this proverb is elaborated in Psalm 73. With the first colon, mirroring verse 19: How suddenly they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors, and the second colon reflected in verse 24: You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards You take me to glory. The thought is that the righteous person, filled with the trust in God, does not abandon hope though at the point of death.** This is a **proverb** about ultimate consequences. Problems can be disastrous for **the wicked (6:15)** because **they** have no **hope** in **the Lord**. On the other hand, when **the righteous face death they have a refuge**, namely **ADONAI**.²⁸⁸

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that loving and serving **You** is the wisest thing that anyone can do! **You** are so loving, powerful and totally wonderful! There are many voices in this world that call out saying they are the answer to life; but there is only one true way to lasting **joy** and peace forever. Thank you that thru **Messiah You** have provided the only way to steadfast and eternal life. **Your** love is such a comfort to have, both in this life and in the life to come. **The thief comes only to steal, slaughter, and destroy. I have come that they might have life, and***



have it abundantly (John 10:10). In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen