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# We Plan, but God Determines Our Steps
# 16: 1-15

**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.**

From the very beginning **God's** people have lived under the authority of **the King of kings**. We recognize this dual authority of **divine sovereignty** and **human government**. Dual authority but not equal authority. We need to understand the difference. We are confronted regularly with the competence or incompetence of **monarchs**. During **Judah's** heyday the **Israelites** watched the pendulum swing from **righteous kings** to **foolish ones**, from **rulers** who trusted **YHVH** and those who tested **Him**. When **the Babylonians** crushed **Jerusalem** under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC (see the commentary on **Jeremiah, to see link click Ga – The Fall of Jerusalem**), Judah's king was dragged off to the banks of the Euphrates, and the political authority was given to a foreign governor. **The Persians**, after 539 BC, maintained the same system but with more class and less cruelty. Throughout this entire period, the time when **Proverbs** were part of the curriculum for training government administrators, the young officials had to be submissive to the central authority that regulated their labors. Apparently, they found **the proverbs** were applicable in almost any political context.

Happily, necessarily, the sages, as true members of the covenant community, had incorporated in the collections of **proverbs** a whole set of sayings that dealt with **the Authority** that outranked the rights of **the** secular **kings**. Side-by-side with **proverbs** that taught respect and regard for **the earthly sovereign** were those focused on the power and glory of **the heavenly Sovereign**. The checks and balances were thus in place for the leaders of a people that for almost all the time from the Babylonian Exile to the establishment of the modern state of Isra'el in 1948 has lived in the tension between **ADONAI** and Caesar, the tension of which **Yeshua** spoke so plainly when **He** gave **His** prescription for dealing with dual authority (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Iz – Is It Right for us to**

**Pay Taxes to Caesar of Not?**). **Proverbs 16,** more than any other section of the book, brings together the two types of sayings – those that describe proper royal behavior and correct attitude of the ones who serve **the kings** and those that depict **the King of kings**, always to be reckoned with in **His** ultimate authority and control in human affairs. Isra'el's young leaders, like all who wield authority in any place or time, lived under **the eyes of** their **LORD** and before the face of their **king**. How they do this is the subject of this chapter.

**Dependence on ADONAI (16:1-9):** What has bubbled under the surface of this collection of sayings in **Proverbs** beginning at **10:1** has now erupted with all the power of Yellowstone's Old Faithful geyser. All along the assumption has been that **wisdom** can be found because **YHVH** has built order and purpose into **His** creation. **The sage's** task is to discover **it**, frame **it** in memorable words, and set **it** before **their** pupils. But until **Chapter 16**, **the divine Presence** has been implicit, except to **fear Him**. The necessity and meaning of that **fear** will now become clearer than ever before. **Fearing ADONAI** is necessary because **His sovereign Presence** hovers over all of life to determine the success or failure of human plans and programs. **The eyes of ADONAI are everywhere, watching the evil and the good (15:3). For the eyes of ADONAI range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (Second Chronicles 16:9a). The eyes of ADONAI** is a shorthand way to express the dependability of **His Presence** and the versatility of **His** care.[313]

**We can make our own plans, but ADONAI gives the right answer (16:1 NLT).** This **proverb** makes it clear that, though humans can legitimately make plans, as Today's English Version puts it, **God has the last word**. We can strategize about the future, to be sure, but this **wise** observation would lead us to acknowledge that the future can only be determined by **God**. Such recognition should produce a proper humility and open us to changes. The purpose of this **proverb** is not to discourage human **planning**, but rather to make us aware that our **plans** will come to nothing without **ADONAI's** agreement.

**All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but ADONAI weighs the spirit (16:2 NLT).** Here human self-perception is judged in the light of **God's** perception. The **proverb** speaks to our ability to deceive ourselves concerning our **righteousness**. **Proverbs** often denigrate **those** who are **wise** (or **pure**) **in their own eyes (3:7, 12:15, 26:5** and **12,** and **30:12)**. This observation invites profound reflection on our motives, since **YHVH** is the final judge of whether **a path** is right or wrong. The need for **God's** accurate scrutiny is underscored in **21:2**, **a**

**proverb** almost identical to the one here: **A person may think their own ways are right, but ADONAI weighs the heart (21:2).**

**If you commit all you do to ADONAI,** since **He** already has clear control over **them**. Then **your plans will succeed (16:3 CJB).** All of our planning should be done with the recognition that **YHVH** can indeed overturn it. The thought is not that we simply pray for **God** to honor our **plans**. Rather, it is the idea that we submit our entire life to **the Lord**, so that even if our human plans are upended, we can recognize an even deeper **plan** at work in our lives. In **Second Samuel 7**, **David** approached **Nathan** with **his plan** to build **the Temple**. While **Nathan** gave a quick approval, that evening **Ha'Shem** intervened and told **the prophet** to tell **David** that **He** did not want **the king** to build **His Temple** (see the commentary on **the Life of David Ct – The LORD's Covenant with David**) because as a warrior, **he** had **shed much blood. ADONAI** desired a man of peace to build **His dwelling place**, and instead chose **David's son, Solomon**, a man of peace, to build **the Temple**. As a result, **David** spent the rest of **his** life collecting the materials for **Solomon** to build **the Temple** (see **the Life of David Fd – David Provided Resources for Building the Temple**).[314]

**ADONAI has made everything for its purpose (16:4a CJB).** More directly, all things were made for **man**, and **man** for **God**. **I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yes, I have made him (Isaiah 43:7).**[315] **As the absolute Creator and Controller of the universe, He determined for which purpose everything that exists was made. There is nothing aimless in the world, even if it appears so to man's finite intelligence.**

**Even the wicked for the day of disaster (16:4b CJB). The wicked** will not escape **their** appropriate judgment. **ADONAI** is in control of **their wicked** acts of human beings and uses **their evil** for **good**. The story of **Joseph** illustrates this example. **ADONAI** overrules **the evil** actions of **the brothers** and **Potiphar's wife** to place **Joseph** in a position within the Egyptian government so **he** could provide a haven and **life** to **the righteous of the TaNaKh** during a horrific, world-wide, famine. There are many other examples, and believers today may also think of the ultimate **good**, the blessed Messianic Kingdom, brought about through an act of horrifying **evil**, the crucifixion of **the Son of God** on a Roman cross.

Another example of this **proverb** may also be found in the events that led to the downfall of the Southern Kingdom. As a specific illustration of this general time period, we may think of the early intrusion of **Nebuchadnezzar** into **Judah**; **In the**

**third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it (Dani'el 1:1).** From the perspective of Judah, this was an **evil day**, resulting in the loss of sacred objects from **the Temple** and some of **the noble young men** of the society. From the Babylonian perspective, this victory was a gift from their gods. However, the narrator of the story tells us the divine truth: **And ADONAI delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hands (Dani'el 1:2a).**

**ADONAI** uses all things for **His good** purposes, even **evil people** and **their wicked** acts. In the B'rit Chadashah, **Peter** declares that though **Yeshua** was put to death by **wicked people**, this was done by **God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23 NIV)**. And the idea of this **proverb** also lies behind **Paul's** reassurance that **in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28 NIV). 16:4** is not a statement that **God** authors **evil**. The teaching of the verse fits well with the general biblical idea that humans bring about their own **wickedness**. It's a statement of **ADONAI's** control. **God** can use the very act of human rebellion and self-sufficiency for **His** purposes.[316]

**ADONAI detests the proud. Proverbs** is consistent in **its** condemnation of **pride**. **Pride**, after all, promotes the self and also leads to a self-defensiveness that does not allow one to hear criticism, an indispensable part of **the path** to **wisdom**. **Solomon** declares that **they will surely be punished (16:5 NLT).** The haughty **will be punished**, but exactly how is not specified. Perhaps **their punishment** will be effected through **their** own **foolish** behavior, or perhaps **Ha'Shem** will intervene. In any case, **they** will not escape.

Since **verse 5** should lead to self-examination, **verse 6** provides the way forward. Though unrepentant **sin will not go unpunished, ADONAI's lovingkindness** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af – The Concept of Chesed**) **and faithfulness (3:3, 14:22, 20:28)** has provided a way for **sin** to be **atoned for**. **Leviticus** describes **the atonement for sin** (see **Leviticus Ah – The Offerings from the People's Perspective**). Once a person's **sin** has been **atoned for**, his **fear of the LORD** will be the motivation for him to **avoid evil (16:6 Hebrew)**.[317]

When we are in a right relationship with **ADONAI** our **ways please Him, making even our enemies at peace with us (16:7 CJB).** A true disciple is **a peacemaker** as **Yeshua** taught **His** followers to be: **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).** Aside

from **God Himself**, **shalom**, or **peace** is a concept that is perhaps the most revered among Jewish people. The Hebrew term **shalom** is very different from the Greek concept of peace. The Greeks used that term to describe the absence of conflict. When a war stopped there was "peace." In the Jewish culture, however, the term is much broader and deeper. Not only does it describe the absence of conflict, but also a state of completeness, fulfillment, and positive **blessing**. It should come as no surprise that those who seek **shalom will be called children of God**. So what does **peacemaking** look like? **Peacemakers** are those who **turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)**, **go the extra mile (Matthew 5:41)**, and **love their enemies** while praying **for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:43-44)**. Why should we do this? Because **God** is a **peacemaker**, and when we make **peace** we are called **children of God**. **Peacemaking** is a family thing.[318]




**Better to have little, with righteousness, than to be rich and dishonest (16:8 NLT).** This is yet another comparative (better-than) **proverb** (also see **16:19** and **32, 17:1, 19:22, 22:1, 24:5, 27:5, 28:6** and **23**), expressing relative value. According to **Proverbs** there is nothing wrong with being **rich**, but if one must make a choice, then there is no question that **righteousness** is more important than **dishonest gain**.**We make our plans, but ADONAI determines our steps (16:9 NLT).** This **proverb** says almost the exact same thing as **16:1: We can make our own plans, but ADONAI gives the right answer (16:1 NLT).** Thus, these two verses serve as bookends to the theological themes on **divine sovereignty** and **human freedom**. The idea is that human beings can **plan**, but our **plans** do not succeed unless **YHVH** decrees it. Understanding this diminishes

human **pride**.[319]

**The king's respect (16:10-15):** Political protocol was part of **the sages'** curriculum. **Their** pupils had to be familiar with both the duties and the desires of the monarchs whom **they** served. Much of **their** counsel in these matters seems very practical. **They** understood the ways of **the kings** and the dangers inherent if those ways were treated lightly. Yet fundamental to **their proverbial** sayings was a conviction of the **God**-given guidelines for ruling. Part of **the Creator's** providence for human society was the responsible exercise of human authority. **Kings**, whether Israelite or Persian, served **His** purposes, especially when **they** exercised **their** power in ways that aligned with **His** will. But the limits of **their** authority were clearly understood as the warnings of both **Moshe** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Dh – The King**) and **Samuel** (see the commentary **the Life of King Sha'ul Br – Samuel's Warnings**) made clear.

**The lips of a king speak as an oracle** (Hebrew: *qesem*, meaning *divination*)**.** Acting justly was a requirement for **the king**. Because **kings** were believed to have special access to **ADONAI**, the power of divination, or the ability to receive **an oracle** which helped **them** shape **their** political decisions (also see the commentary on **Exodus Gb – The Urim and the Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**) and judicial verdicts. **They** had a special obligation **never judge unfairly (16:10 Hebrew).**[320]

**ADONAI demands accurate scales and balances; all the weights of the bag are His concern (16:11 Hebrew).** This **proverb** speaks to **honest** commercial transactions **(11:1, 20:10** and **23)**. Cheating must have been known if not rampant in ancient Isra'el. **Scales** were used during purchases. It was possible to manipulate **the scales** to give a reading for the benefit of the seller. **The weights of the bag** refer to the weights placed on one side of the balance, and if they were falsely represented, then the seller could defraud the customer. **YHVH** hates all fraud and deception (see **Deuteronomy Ev – Honest Weights and Measures**).[321]

**The king detests their** subject's **doing evil, for his rule is established by righteousness.** The reason is clear: **righteousness** is the only sure support or foundation to **establish** the throne of **the king**. Both the divine order in creation and the divine vigilance over history are geared, sooner or later, to the overthrow of unrighteous **kings** from **their** royal seat. Enforcing justice is virtually an act of self-preservation. Whatever threatens the stability of his authority will raise **the sovereign's wrath**. **Kings take delight in righteous lips; he loves those who**

**speak honestly (16:12-13 Hebrew). Righteous lips** seem to describe messengers who get the facts straight or ministers of state who grasp the full picture and relate it accurately to **the king**. It seems such reporting is rare so **delight and love** convey **the king's** appreciation. This helped **him** create a policy that will succeed, since there may be special reference to those who speak to **him** in court.[322]

**The king's wrath is like a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it (16:14 NIV).** This **proverb** appears to be addressed to those who had contact with **the king**. Obviously, ancient **monarchs** were powerful individuals, often making life-and-death decisions. In the first colon, if anyone angered **the king** they ran the risk of ending their own lives (see the commentary on **Esther Ba – I Will Go to the King: If I Perish, I Perish**). However, in the second colon, **the wise** know how to anticipate the reaction of **the king** and say the right word and do the right thing at the right time to avoid bringing **his wrath** onto **them**.

**Solomon** offers similar advice in **Ecclesiastes: Obey the king's command, and don't be in a hurry to leave his presence and don't persist in doing what is wrong, for he does whatever he pleases. After all, his word is final; who can challenge him,** asking: **Why are you doing that (Ecclesiastes 8:2-4)? Moreover, don't insult the king, not even in your thoughts; and don't insult the wealthy, not even in your bedroom; for a bird in the air might carry the news, a creature with wings might repeat what you said (Ecclesiastes 10:20).**

**When the king smiles, there is life; his favor is like a cloud that brings the spring rain (16:15 NLT).** This **proverb** forms a contrasting pair with the previous one. **Verse 14** dealt with **the king's wrath**, and this one with **his delight**. **The smiles** on **his** face reflect **his** happiness. This royal disposition leads to **life**, which implies something more than mere existence: it points to reward. The second colon provides a metaphor that illustrates the first statement. **A cloud brings** refreshing **spring rains**. These **rains** are late in the agricultural cycle, coming in March and April and causing a growth spurt of crops right before the harvest.[323]

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for directing my steps. **You** are so loving to tenderly care about me. You not only redeemed me **(Titus 2:14)**, but you live within me, giving **You** 24/7/365 access to be there to help and to guide me.* ***Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with***

***him* (John 14:23).** *How wonderful that though **You** are **Sovereign** over the world, **You** are still always there to help guide me whenever I cry out to **You**. **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," (Hebrews 13:5b).** When **You** guide my **steps**, I can trust **You** with absolute certainty that you know the entire situation and will guide the best **steps**. **We make our plans, but ADONAI determines our steps (16:9).** Thank **You** that when I am walking close to **You**, even if I experience hard times, I can trust **You**, walking with me through the hard times to help me grow stronger in **You** to the glory of **Your Name**. **For I know the plans that I have in mind for you," declares ADONAI, "plans for shalom and not calamity – to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).** I know that as **You** guide me, nothing can ever separate me from **Your love (Romans 8:37-39).** Thank **You** so very much for all **Your love** and care. It is a joy to praise and to worship **You**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*