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Pride Goes before Destruction

16: 16-30

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.

Security in Wisdom (16:16-19): Two “**better-than**” sayings in **verses 16** and **19** serve as bookends to this section contrasting **the proud** with those who choose the way of **wisdom**. The distinctive teaching of these **proverbs** is about the foolishness of **pride (verses 18-19)**, which seems connected to the pursuit of **plunder (verse 19)**, but which is ultimately self-destructive (**verse 18**). Against this backdrop of **pride**, readers are urged to choose **wisdom rather than wealth (verse 16)**, to **avoid evil ways** and thus to **preserve their lives (verse 17)**, and to **trust in ADONAI (verse 20)**.

How much better to get wisdom rather than wealth (16:16 Hebrew)! This verse briefly summarizes the thought of **3:13-18 (to see link click [Av](#) - Happy is the One who Find Wisdom)**. In this manner, “**better-than**” sayings point to the value of seeking the familiar pairing of **wisdom** and **understanding**. This is a key theme of **Chapters 1** through **9**, seen in **2:2-4**, **4:7-9** and **20-22**, and most specifically in the contrasts of **8:10-11** and **19**. The seduction of **wealth** is that it can give a sense of power and status, which leads easily to **pride**. This verse in the middle of the book may intentionally remind us of the foundational lesson found in the first **9 Chapters** (see [Aj](#) - **Proverbs to the Youth**) . . . **Get wisdom!**³²⁴

The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their path preserve their lives (16:17 NIV). As with the previous verse, this **proverb** fits in with the major themes of **Chapters 1-9**. There too we find the idea of **the path**. In the first colon, the word **highway** is used, perhaps suggesting the smooth road for those who choose **wisdom**, here identified by the moral term **upright**. **The path** is smooth because it bypasses **evil** that would sidetrack the travelers. The second colon intensifies the thought of the first by commenting on those who **guard their**

path with the quality of **their** choices, and come away with more favorable results.



Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18 NIV). Like the prophets, Solomon regarded pride “as a religious offense.” This was ultimately based upon the conviction of the dependence of everyone upon ADONAI. Hence pride meant an offense against God by Whom it would inevitably be punished. This **proverb** has entered the lexicon of common English sayings in the form “Pride goes before a fall.” This might be understood as saying that **pride** brings judgment on **itself**, but is **better** taken in a causal sense: **Pride** leads to significant problems. Throughout **Proverbs**, caution is directed toward **pride**, and **humility** is encouraged as a virtue characteristic of **Solomon himself (3:5 and 7, 6;17, 11:2, 15:25, etc)**. After all, **pride** does not allow one to listen to criticism and thereby correct misperceptions and harmful patterns of behavior, whereas **humility** does.

It is better to live humbly with the poor than to divide plunder with the proud (16:19 NLT). This verse is in the form of a “**better-than**” **proverb**, giving relative rather than absolute values. Here, the two items being compared are **humility**, on the one hand, and **plunder**, on the other. While **riches** are not portrayed as a negative in **Proverbs**, **they** are not to be obtained at the expense of **humility**. **Humility** is valued because it’s not **the path to pride**. **The humble** are contrasted with those who **divide plunder**, a military term for the victorious dividing **the spoils** among the soldiers. Perhaps having won the victory breeds **pride**, especially if it is thought to have come as a result of human skill or strength.³²⁵

The Wise Speaker (16:20-24): This section revolves around the positive value of speech, made explicit in **verses 21, 23-24**, and perhaps implied in **the word understanding** in **verse 20**. There are a number of repeated **words** and **phrases**

(not always evident in our translations); **wise in heart (verses 21 and 23)**; **sweet (verses 21 and 24)**; **words (verses 21 and 23)**; **instruction (verses 20 and 23)**; **adds (verses 21 and 23)**; and **prudent (verses 22-23)**. These verses commend **upright** speech as the result of a well-shaped character.³²⁶

Those who are prudent will prosper; those who trust in ADONAI will be blessed (16:20 NLT). The positive thrust of this section can be seen in this first verse. It commends **the path of wisdom as trusting in ADONAI**. This verse is not talking about the “health and wealth” doctrine, but a variation on the theme that those who follow **Lady Wisdom** (see [Am - Lady Wisdom’s Rebuke of the Foolish](#)) will have a **better life than** those who follow **Madam Folly** (see [Bo - Madam Folly’s Invitation to Death](#)). Once again, it is important to note that **proverbs** are not promises; **they** are generally true principles, all other things being equal. After all, **prudent** (Hebrew: *sakal*, see [1:4a](#)) is a word closely associated with **wisdom** and speaks of one’s ability to discern a situation in order to do or say the right thing.³²⁷

The wise at heart are known for their understanding, and sweet words are persuasive (16:21 Hebrew). Nagging never works. You are never **persuasive** when you’re abrasive. **The wise man’s heart is prudent in his words, and to his lips it adds instruction (16:23 Hebrew)**. These two verses parallel each other quite closely. Both refer to the same reality of skillful living based on godly character. Such people are **prudent** and their speech is edifying. This **proverb** is based on **Solomon’s** understanding that one’s **words** are a reflection of one’s heart. The one who is **wise at heart** will say helpful things to enhance another’s learning.

Here is another contrasting **proverb: prudence is a fountain of life to the one who has it, but discipline is wasted on fools (16:22 Hebrew)**. As one can imagine, **prudence** would lead to positive results, the ability, for instance, to solve difficult problems, including those that bring people into conflict. **The fountain of life** is a frequent metaphor ([10:11](#), [13:14](#), [14:27](#)) for the people and things that enhance life and its enjoyment. In a desert culture where life depends on water, this is an image of abundant, overflowing life as it was meant to be. Once again, **Proverbs** affirms that there is little that can be done for or with a **fool**.³²⁸

Pleasant words are like honey (Psalm 19:10), sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (16:24 Hebrew). This **verse** returns to the theme of **sweet words** (see [16:21](#)). **Words** were critically important to the sages of Isra’el.

They would never have understood the modern idea that “sticks and stones may break your **bones**, but **words** will never hurt you.” Indeed, **words** can hurt, but **they** can also heal. The latter is the message of this **proverb**, and the point is communicated by the metaphor: **Pleasant words are like honey**. The second colon indicates that **pleasant words** have a deep effect since one’s **bones** are one’s core.³²⁹

The foolish Speakers (16:25-30): There is a path that seems right to a man, but it ends in death (16:25 Hebrew). The image is that of a journey, in which the traveler imagines that he is pursuing a right path that will lead him to his desired goal or success and happiness, but finds, too late, that it leads to an early death, that is, to the destruction of happiness. This **proverb** is the heart of the subunit warning **the young man** not to walk by sight, and pointedly gives the reason. The safety and destiny of a **path** are not always as they appear (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dw - The Narrow and Wide Gates**). The deceptive **path** leads as certainly to **death** as the plainly marked one. Only an all-knowing, all-powerful **God** knows the true **path** that leads to **life**, and we must accept that revelation by faith.³³⁰

As Charles Swindoll relates in his book *Living the Proverbs*, **Solomon** and **the wise men** of Isra’el had a lot to say about the value of diligence and the dangers of laziness. When we put all these sayings together, their message becomes clear: work diligently and you will reap material rewards; laziness will leave you penniless. Even in this, however, the proverbs call for a balance. In favor of work, Solomon wrote: **It is good for workers to have an appetite; an empty stomach drives them on (16:26 NLT)**. The word **appetite** is the Hebrew word for *soul*. In this context, it refers to the human desire to meet our basic needs for survival. Literally, a person must have water, food, and shelter. This biological need drives us to **work**. In a broader sense of the expression, **Solomon** acknowledged our spiritual need for meaningful work. **ADONAI** designed us with this “hunger,” and we reflect **His** image when we fulfill our divine purpose (**Genesis 1:28** and **2:15**).

This need, however, can become an obsession. Hunger urges us to work, but greed – or one of many personal issues – compels us to work too much. **God** calls us to diligence, but **He** doesn’t want workaholics. According to **Proverbs**, there is both a time to **work** and a time to enjoy the fruit of our labor. **Prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterwards, then, build your house (24:27)**. The phrase **build your house** has both a literal and a figurative meaning. To build one’s **house**, a man not only erected a structure in

which to live, but he worked to establish a legacy. He married, filled **the home** with children, reared them to adulthood, and then enlarged the dwelling to accommodate the next generation. In this sense, a person's **house** represented his life, which he filled with family, wealth, and provisions for security. To paraphrase these **proverbs**, "Work hard! Then, get a life!"³³¹

A worthless man digs up evil gossip (11:13, 18:8, 20:19, 26:20 and 22; Romans 1:29), his words are a destructive blaze (16:27 Hebrew). This is the first of three **proverbs** in this section that describe those who seek to destroy: **A worthless man, a deceitful person, and a violent man. A worthless man** is literally *a man of belial, a man of depravity and wickedness*. **He is wicked** because **he digs up evil gossip**. The meaning of **digs** (Hebrew: *korah*, meaning *plots*) is that of bringing **evil** to the surface (**Jeremiah 18:20**). What **he** finds, **he** spreads. **His words** are like a **destructive blaze**.³³²

James, the half-brother of **Yeshua**, has much to say about **the tongue** and **evil gossip**: **If we put a bit into a horse's mouth to make it obey us, we control its whole body as well. And think of a ship - although it is huge and is driven by strong winds, yet the pilot can steer it wherever he wants with just a small rudder. So too the tongue is a tiny part of the body, yet it boasts great things. See how a little fire sets a whole forest ablaze! Yes, the tongue is a fire, a world of wickedness. The tongue is so placed in our body that it defiles every part of it, setting ablaze the whole of our life; and it is set on fire by Gei-Hinnom itself (James 3:3-6).**

A deceitful person stirs up strife, and a slanderer can separate even close friends (16:28 CJB). **Gossip** always causes hurt and divisions, and it destroys fellowship, and **ADONAI** is very clear that we are to confront **those** who cause division among the congregations of **God**. **They** may get mad and leave your group or place of worship if you confront them about their divisive actions, but the fellowship of **the Body of Messiah** is more important than any one person.³³³ **The Word of God** is very clear about this: **There are six things that ADONAI hates, yes, seven that are detestable to Him (6:16 Hebrew).** This **verse** is known as a numerical saying; a typical **wisdom** form found prominently in **Proverbs** (see **Proverbs 30:15, 18, 21, 24, and 29; Job 5:19; Ecclesiastes 11:2; Amos 1:6, 9, 13 and 2:1, 4, and 6; Micah 5:5**). The clue to reading numerical sayings is that the focus of the message is often on the last item mentioned. The **seventh** example here: **the person who stirs up descension in the congregation,**

draws together the remainder of the other descriptions.³³⁴

A violent man lures his neighbor astray and leads him into evil ways (16:29 CJB). Violence characterizes **fools** because of the harm that **they** bring on others. However, this **proverb** specifies a different harm, **they** influence others near **them** to mimic **their** behavior. Through **their** association and influence, **they** cause others to walk on the same deadly **path**. **Their** same seductive appeal of **the violent** is dramatized in **the wisdom** found in **1:8-19**. Those who hang around **them** would do well to listen to the advice found in **20:19** and **22:24** not to associate with **fools**.

One who winks knowingly is planning deceit; one who puckers his lips together accomplishes evil (16:30 CJB). Since we are at a considerable chronological and cultural distance from the original setting of **Proverbs**, matters like the significance of facial gestures are not crystal clear to us. From the context, we assume that the gestures **of winking eyes** and **puckering lips** communicate some secret or subtle signal that indicates a person's **evil** intent. Perhaps this observation has the intent of helping people read another person's face to get behind the words.³³⁵

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that there is security in following **Your wisdom**, which is so much greater than the sum of any person's wisest thoughts. **Wisdom** says: "Hold your **tongue** and check your **pride** at the door. Instead, be filled with **God's** eternal peace and joy by loving **Him** with all your heart. What a wonderful **God's** great gift (**Romans 5:17**) of **Messiah's righteousness** to all who believe in **Him**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*