

10. Divination (is) on the lips of a king.
In judgment his mouth shall not act treacherously.
11. A scale and balance of justice (belong) to Yahweh.
His work (are) all the stones of the bag.
12. (It is) an abomination for kings to do wickedness,
For by righteousness a throne will be established.
13. The lips of righteousness (are) the pleasure of kings,
And he who speaks uprightness he will love.
14. The wrath of a king (is) messengers of death,
And a wise man will pacify it.
15. In the light of the face of a king (is) life,
And his pleasure is like a cloud of the latter rain.

Introduction

At the middle of the second half of the book of Proverbs (10:1–22:16) stands a passage about the works and ways of Yahweh (15:33–16:9). It demonstrates that all the counsel and wisdom of the book proceed from the Lord and can be attained only in the way of salvation that he has ordained.

Immediately following that paragraph is this paragraph about the king. That king is the anointed king of Israel, the Old Testament messiah who represented the Lord to his people and defended them against their enemies. The king stood in direct relationship to the Lord and the Lord appointed him to accomplish his purposes in his kingdom. He was a foreshadowing of our Lord Jesus Christ, the king of kings who rules the world with righteousness. Proverbs 16:10–15 are primarily about Christ.

The king plays an important role in the book. King Solomon wrote especially for his successor on the throne of Israel. The advice he gives is for the wise administration of righteousness in the kingdom of God. Therefore, we find throughout the book certain passages which are especially for the king: 14:28–35, 25:1–10 (the first paragraph in the second group of proverbs of Solomon, 25:1–29:27), and the words of King Lemuel in Chapter 31. All this is meant to illustrate for us the importance of the truth of 8:15–16:

By me [wisdom] kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
By me princes rule, and nobles,
All the judges of the earth.

Ultimately, of course, this wise and righteous king is our Lord Jesus Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. We learn wisdom and righteousness from the mouth of the righteous servant who justifies many and, having justified them, sanctifies them also to walk in the way of wisdom and righteousness.

This does not mean that Proverbs has nothing to say to ordinary people. The wisdom and righteousness taught in the book are for the king to practice but also to teach to his people. They also must acquire wisdom because it falls on them to submit to and practice the righteousness that the king administers.

The righteousness of the king is the particular focus of 16:10–15. He must judge without treachery against the law (v. 10), using honest scales (v. 11). Righteousness is the foundation of his throne (v. 12). He loves righteousness (v. 13). His wrath against unrighteousness is death, and his favor towards righteousness is life (vv. 14–15).

Verse 10

In Scripture the word “divination” almost always has a negative connotation. “So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner’s fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam” (Num. 22:7). “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft [divination]” (1 Sam. 15:23). “Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver my people out of your hand” (Ezek. 13:23). But if we take the word negatively here, the verse makes no sense. In this case, we have no choice but to understand it in a positive way.

Divination was a way to make decisions, to discover truth, or to predict the future (cf. Ezek. 21:21–22). Here it means to consult with God by his word, his prophets, or perhaps the Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:21). Thus, the king would divine the truth and be able to exercise righteous judgment.

It is of the first importance that the king not abuse his power or permit bribes and favoritism to cloud his judgment. His mouth must not act treacherously. He must make righteous laws, judge his people according to them, and reward the good and punish the evil. He is the representative of God to men, and his treacherous dealings have much greater power for evil than the treachery of ordinary citizens towards each other.

Verse 11

Verse 11 carries this further; it states a basic truth. The Lord requires honesty in commercial affairs and oversees the practices of merchants in their dealings with their customers. He is the God of truth and commands men to use just weights (the stones of the bag) and measures. If they cheat, the Lord will see.

The Lord oversees these commercial affairs partly through the king and the rulers of the land. They establish the standards of measure and judge according to them. In answering to the king, men are answering to God; if they escape the judgment of the king, they will not escape the judgment of God who weighs spirits (v. 2).

But the rule of honesty also applies to the king himself. He must have just laws for all and for all areas of life; and he must weigh men according to just measures, unmoved by any attempt to turn him aside. Furthermore, he must practice righteousness in his own affairs, not manipulating currency, changing interest rates or tax law or any other law, to profit himself. He must not use the law to abuse those who oppose him, to win re-election, to favor his friends or to accomplish any evil purpose. He too will answer to God, even if there is no man who has the authority to call him to account.

Verse 12

High position exacerbates sin. It is worse for one in authority than for an ordinary person to commit wickedness. God has given him greater responsibilities, his sins have greater influence for evil, and very often his sins tend toward favoring the strong and oppressing the weak, or (perhaps more common in our day) favoring the weak and oppressing the strong. His wickedness is abominable to God.

Ultimately his wickedness will undermine his throne. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of the throne of God (Ps. 97:2). Any earthly throne not founded on righteousness cannot endure. The history of nations is replete with examples; our own nation is not the least of them. As rulers give themselves and the law over to unrighteousness, unrighteousness begins to prevail in society. Thus, the throne begins to totter and will fall unless there is a return to righteousness.

But the Lord said to his apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This whole paragraph applies also and especially to the kingdom of God. His kingdom is a righteous kingdom and has a righteous king. Those who represent him in that kingdom (especially the elders of the church) must be

careful to judge righteously, to condemn sin and encourage righteousness, to exercise church discipline rightly, to be upright in the truth, in worship, and in all their dealings with the flock of God. Their thrones too will fall if they are not founded on righteousness.

Verses 13–15

A righteous king takes pleasure in righteousness and will love those who practice it. He loves it in his advisors, in those who practice law in his kingdom, and in those who come to him for judgment. He seeks servants and citizens who will do and speak righteousness in judgment and in all their affairs.

A perverse heart shall depart from me;
I will not know wickedness.
Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor,
Him I will destroy;
The one who has a haughty look and proud heart,
Him I will not endure.
My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land,
That they may dwell with me;
He who walks in a perfect way,
He shall serve me...
Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land,
That I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD (Ps. 101:4-6, 8).

The king's wrath is death. That is a synecdoche that makes the most extreme punishment stand for all the variety of punishments the king has at his disposal. It is also literally true. The king does not bear the sword in vain. He has the authority and the obligation from God himself to punish evildoers even with the extreme punishment of death. In the kingdom of God this sentence is the sentence of excommunication which delivers a man to Satan.

A wise man will therefore seek to appease the king's wrath and escape his righteous judgment. But, since the king is righteous, he will not seek to appease it by unrighteous means. He will appease it instead by paying the penalty required and by conforming to the law in the future.

On the other hand, since the king loves righteousness, his face will shine on those who practice righteousness. He will reward them, and they will live. For the righteous, there will be well-ordered life, peace, and prosperity.

The second part of this verse changes the metaphor. Instead of light shining, we see clouds bringing rain. But this is not a picture of sadness and obscurity. The clouds are beneficial; they bring the latter rain necessary for the watering of the crops and a good harvest. "His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth" (Hos. 6:3). The favor of the king blesses those who speak and do righteousness.

Nevertheless, even the best earthly kings, though they are representatives of God, cannot give or take spiritual life. Therefore, all their injustices whether committed in defiance of God or in ignorance, God will set right in the final judgment, and all their righteous works he will confirm and establish forever.

Conclusion

All of this is true of the King of kings and Lord of lords. His mouth never deals treacherously. He weighs all the deeds—and even the hearts—of men with a just measure, the righteous law of God. His throne is everlasting

because its foundation is perfect righteousness and justice. He loves righteousness and hates wickedness. His wrath is death and his favor life. Wise men “kiss the Son,” lest he be angry and they perish when it is kindled just a little. But blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

In the most righteous of nations here on earth, justice still falls far short of the righteousness of God. All kings are sinners. Even in the church of God, perfect justice is hard to find. Therefore, we look for a kingdom in which righteousness dwells.