## Lesson 2-18

# It’s Better

##### Proverbs 21:9-19

###### Memorize This Week

Better to live on a corner of the roof

than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 21:9

The better saying that any living conditions (in the corner of a roof, in the desert, *21:9, 19*) are preferable to living with a quarrelsome woman form the *inclusio* for this series of proverbs. The proverbs between the inclusio do not themselves examine domestic harmony but concern a variety of topics.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## 21:9

1. Why would living by yourself be better than living with a quarrelsome wife?

English versions which translate the Hebrew term as “roof” here, for example, “It’s better to stay outside on the roof of your house.” (CEV) sometimes produce amusing images for modern readers. The reference is probably to a small room that would be built on the flat housetop primarily for guests (e.g., 1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:10). It would be cramped and lonely—but peaceful in avoiding strife.

A quarrelsome wife is in *Hebrew* “a wife of contentions.” Some modern versions call her “a nagging wife.” The Greek version, Septuagint (LXX), has no reference to a quarrelsome wife, but instead mentions the injustice going on in the home.

Pray About This

How would you use this proverb with a young man looking to get married?

## 21:10-13

1. What grave error do the wicked commit *(21:10, 13)?*

21:10 The *Hebrew* literally says that the “soul” (*nefesh*, traditionally, “soul”) of the wicked does the craving. This term has at its core the idea of appetites, and so its use here underscores that the cravings are deep-seated. The word “crave” has the meanings of “desire, crave, long for, lust after.” It usually has “soul” as its subject. The word is used in the Ten Commandments in the prohibition against coveting a neighbor’s house (Deuteronomy 5:18). The person who lives to satisfy his own craving for evil will not be interested in meeting the needs of others. His neighbors will not receive mercy from him.

21:13 The imagery means “pay no attention to” the cry for help or “refuse to help.” The proverb is teaching that those who show mercy will receive mercy. It involves the principle of talionic justice—those who refuse the needs of others will themselves be refused when they need help (so Luke 16:19–31).

1. What is the judgment upon these people *(21:11-12)?*

21:11 The contrast here is between the simple and the wise. The simple gain wisdom when they see the scorner punished; the wise gains knowledge through instruction. The scorner does not change, but should be punished for the benefit of the simple (e.g., 19:25).

21:12 In the book of Proverbs, the Hebrew term *tsadiq* normally refers to a human being, and that is a possible translation here (cf. KJV, ASV, NAB), although it would have to refer to a righteous person who was a judge or a ruler with the right to destroy the wicked. Many commentators and English versions simply interpret this as a reference to God (cf. NIV, NRSV, TEV, NLT). It is careful scrutiny that is given to the household of the wicked before judgment is poured out on them. The term “house” probably means “household” here—the family. One way to read the line is that the righteous judge (human or divine) takes into consideration the wicked person’s family before judging the wicked person. The other—and more plausible—interpretation is that the judge considers the household of the wicked and then on the basis of what was observed judges them to bring “evil” (ruin) upon them as they have done to their neighbors.

Pray About This

How should we know about the needs of our neighbors?

## 21:14-15

1. What advice do these verses give about how to deal with lawsuits*?*

21:14 The synonymous parallelism joins the more neutral term “gift” with the more specific “bribe.” D. Kidner notes that this underscores how hard it is to tell the difference between them, especially since they accomplish similar things. *Hebrew* “a bribe in the bosom” (so NASB). This refers to a gift hidden in the folds of the garment, i.e., given secretly (cf. NIV “a bribe concealed in the cloak”).

21:15 The noun means “terror (NAB, NASB, NIV), destruction (KJV, ASV), ruin (cf. NCV).” Its related verb means “be shattered, dismayed.” The idea of “dismay” (NRSV) or “terror” would make the better choice to contrast with “joy” in the first line, but “ruin” is also possible. Whenever justice prevails, whether in the courts or simply in society, the people who practice iniquity may be shaken into reality by fear (cf. CEV “crooks are terrified”).

Pray About This

How would a gift “patch things up” with someone who is angry with you?

## 21:16-18

1. What are some of the consequences faced by those who do wrong?

21:16 The image of “wandering off the path” signifies leaving a life of knowledge, prudence, and discipline. This person will “will remain” or “will rest,” but it does not here carry any of the connotations of comforting repose in death that the righteous enjoy; it simply means “to remain; to reside; to dwell.” The choice of this verb might have an ironic twist to it, reminding the wicked what might have been. Instead, they will lose their life in exchange for their wandering.

21:17 The participle “loves” (*’ohev*) indicates in this context that more is involved than the enjoyment of pleasure, for which there is no problem. The proverb is looking at “love” in the sense of needing and choosing, an excessive or uncontrolled indulgence in pleasure. “Pleasure” is actually the Hebrew word “joy” (*simkhah*). It is a metonymy of effect, the cause being the good life that brings the joy. In the second colon, “wine” and “oil” would be metonymies of cause, the particular things in life that bring joy. Therefore the figures in the lines work together to give the complete picture. In elaborate feasts and celebrations the wine was for drinking but the oil was for anointing. Both of these characterize the luxurious life (e.g., Psalm 23:5; 104:15; Amos 6:6).

21:18 The Hebrew word translated “ransom” (*kofer*) normally refers to the price paid to free a prisoner. R. N. Whybray (*Proverbs* [CBC], 121) gives options for the meaning of the verse: (1) If it means that the wicked obtain good things that should go to the righteous, it is then a despairing plea for justice (which would be unusual in the book of Proverbs); but if (2) it is taken to mean that the wicked suffers the evil he has prepared for the righteous, then it harmonizes with Proverbs elsewhere (e.g., 11:8). The ideal this proverb presents—and the future reality—is that in calamity the righteous escape and the wicked suffer in their place (e.g., Haman in the book of Esther).

Pray About This

Why is living for pleasure a dangerous pursuit?

## 21:19

1. What additional description is given about this wife one should avoid*?*

The verse makes the same point as 21:9 and 25:24; but “desert land” is substituted. It would be a place sparsely settled and quiet.

The Hebrew noun *ka’as* translated “nagging” (NIV) means “vexation; anger.” The woman is not only characterized by a quarrelsome spirit, but also anger—she is easily vexed (cf. NAB “vexatious”; NASB “vexing”; ASV, NRSV “fretful”). The translation “easily-provoked” conveys this idea well.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Pray About This

How can one avoid marrying a woman who is easily provoked?

1. Garrett, D. A., New American Commentary, XIV, 180-181. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All notes adapted from *The NET Bible Notes* (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)