

# Proverbs 21:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

## Analysis

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This proverb asserts God's sovereignty over human rulers: 'The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.' Even the king—possessing supreme human authority—has his heart controlled by God. The metaphor of irrigation channels is instructive: as farmers direct water flow through channels for crop irrigation, so God directs kings' hearts toward His purposes. This doesn't negate human will but affirms divine sovereignty over it. God accomplishes His purposes even through rulers' decisions, whether those rulers acknowledge Him or not. This provides comfort that no human authority operates beyond God's control and that His plans will prevail despite human opposition.

## Historical Context

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Ancient Near Eastern kings claimed absolute authority, often declaring themselves divine or divinely appointed. Against this, Proverbs insists that even kings serve God's purposes whether they recognize it or not. Biblical examples abound: Pharaoh's hard heart served God's glory (Exodus 9:16), Cyrus fulfilled prophecy unknowingly (Isaiah 44:28), Nebuchadnezzar learned God's sovereignty through humiliation (Daniel 4:34-35). This truth sustained Israel under foreign rule and sustains Christians under ungodly governments today.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. How does knowing that God sovereignly controls rulers' hearts provide comfort when you face unjust or ungodly government?
2. In what ways should God's sovereignty over authorities affect your prayers for government leaders?

## Interlinear Text

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פָּلָנִי	מִן־מִן־	לֵב	לְרָגֶשׁ	מִן־	בַּיִדְךָ	יְהִי־הָ	עַל־	כָּל־
as the rivers	of water	heart	The king's	is in the hand	of the LORD			
H6388	H4325	H3820	H4428	H3027	H3068		H5921	H3605
אֲשֶׁר	יְחִיף־	אֲשֶׁר						
H834	it whithersoever he will	H2654	he turneth	H5186				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Proverbs 16:9** (References Lord): A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

**Proverbs 20:24** (References Lord): Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

**Ezra 6:22** (Kingdom): And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria

unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

**Acts 7:10** (Kingdom): And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

**Proverbs 16:1** (References Lord): The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

**Daniel 4:35** (Parallel theme): And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

**Psalms 106:46** (Parallel theme): He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.

**Isaiah 43:19** (Parallel theme): Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

**Psalms 105:25** (Parallel theme): He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.

**Nehemiah 1:11** (Kingdom): O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.