

Proverbs 21:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

Analysis

The person who 'wandereth out of the way of understanding' departs from wisdom's path. The consequence is dwelling 'in the congregation of the dead'—spiritual death and ultimate damnation. Understanding here means not mere intellectual knowledge but living wisdom that fears God and follows His ways. To wander from this path is to embrace folly and death. The imagery of 'congregation of the dead' (Hebrew 'repha'im,' shades/departed spirits) depicts the final state of the wicked. This isn't unconsciousness but conscious existence in the realm of death, separated from God's life. The warning is stark: persist in folly and you will join the damned. Conversely, remain in the way of understanding and you will have life.

Historical Context

Hebrew thought associated Sheol with the gathered dead. While Old Testament revelation about the afterlife was less developed than New Testament teaching, the reality of conscious existence after death and judgment was affirmed.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Are you walking in the way of understanding, or have you wandered from wisdom's path?
2. What specific areas of life reveal you're drifting from biblical wisdom?

Interlinear Text

אִם	תִּוָּעָה	מִן־דֶּרֶךְ	הַשְׂכִּיל	בְּקִה ל
The man	that wandereth	out of the way	of understanding	in the congregation
H120	H8582	H1870	H7919	H6951
רְפָא יִמּוֹתָם:				
of the dead	shall remain			
H7496	H5117			

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 10:38 (Parallel theme): Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Psalms 49:14 (Parallel theme): Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

Psalms 125:5 (Parallel theme): As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.