

# Safety is of the Lord

*Proverbs 21:31*

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*The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of the Lord  
- Proverbs 21:31*

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The horse, quite logically and very well-known, was a common and familiar part of the life and surroundings of the normal Israelite. We'll note that there is no "enlargement" on the type of horse and so we're talking about just a generic horse, working or riding. The reference to "battle" suggests that we are talking about a military horse that would have been used in various aspects of military use.

"Prepared" here, in the context in which we are speaking, is referring to the training that results in the horse being ready and able to do what is needful. Of course, the implication that people can be trained as well. Note the reference to "the day of battle" which directs our attention to the intense training the horse receives to prepare it to do what is needful to carry the rider even in the traumatic times when, normally, it would turn and flee.

The turmoil of the battle events would normally cause the horse, along with virtually all other "animals", not to mention many, if not most men, to flee for safety. But Solomon's point here is that the right training can enable the horse, and also the rider of the horse, to do what is necessary to attain the goal needed to win the fight. This not to imply that fighting or war is ALWAYS a good thing, but it is, at times, a needful or unavoidable thing. Likewise, some will argue that it is always avoidable; but a realistic and honest look at time and society must admit that it IS a true characteristic of how men conducted themselves over the centuries and millennia they have been present in this world.

Solomon's point is basically two-fold. First, if there is to be any real hope to survive conflict that comes the way of the various societies of which man is a part, there must be some getting ready for it so that one side is not simply overrun by the other.

Secondly, and most significantly, Solomon underscores the truth that the training given to one's mount in a fight is NOTHING compared to what ought really be our perspective on life as a whole!!

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A good, well trained horse is surely reliable in battle. However, the believer ought not place more than just a bit of his trust on what he is sitting upon!! "Battle" is actually quite an interesting word. It is the Hebrew word "milḥāmâ" (said "mil khaw maw") and can speak a wide variety of different forms of conflict. It appears 319x in the OT and is given as "war" 158 times, "battle" 151 times, as a single "fight" five times, as "warriors" or the one who

fight twice, in a participle form, as “fighting once, and speaks of the “war” as a unit or at large occurrence once, and in “wars” as in a plural editorial use once.

Notice that the reference here is a, kind of, looking ahead thing. The horse is prepared before the “war” ever occurred, that is, in anticipation of what was known to be coming. From this idea, Solomon lays out for us two ideas:

- **First** he calls to mind the truth that life will ALWAYS contain those things that MUST be dealt with and can be extremely difficult for us to overcome effectively. While I do not believe that he is calling to mind the idea that life is one big long (or even occasional) experience of warfare. Rather, he is calling to mind the truth that there are difficulties in life, some of the extremely harsh and terrible. Hence, the allusion to warfare.
- Second, he talks of what should be, in his mind; and as a Prophet speaking for God, ought to be the best and most effective solution for those difficulties as and when they arise. Safety, in the face of danger, no matter how serious, even when of a “war” level, is “of the Lord”.

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We note first of all that this second phrase starts with what is commonly called a “contrasting conjunction”. It sets the first part of the sentence over against the second. The picture of the trained horse, ready and prepared to carry his rider into the rigors of warfare is contrasted against the power of God to keep His child safe. As able as a good mount is ready and effective to do what is needful to assure the riders’ safety, Solomon’s intention is to drive home the point that the hand of God is multiple times MORE able.

In fact, it seems as though Solomon is drawing our attention to the idea that a good mount is a great thing to have in battle, well trained and effectively prepared, BUT, the only place one can secure real safety is from the hand of God! Again, there is no reference to safety in battle, except, of course, in a very general sense. But King Solomon’s intention is to cause our thoughts to go in a very general direction.

Whereas the first phrase spoke of something that prepare us ahead of battle in the item of a good mount which would be needed and could serve in an effective and useful fashion. But, in this second phrase he uses a word that can speak either of outright safety OR of deliverance once danger has been encountered. The facilitating thing here is that it is our walk with and submission to our God that can have such a profound effect and which God can use to protect and deliver us from life’s “battle(s)”.

Just to rehearse our interpretation once again this proverb follows appropriately upon the preceding verse(s). In that we are taught that “*no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel (can prevail) against Jehovah.*” In this that human strength and reliance on human aid against our foes is useless without God’s blessing upon them or His strength exercised IN them. The war-horse, so eulogized by the Creator (Job 39:19–25), is a splendid sight as it stands

caparisoned for battle; how much more a well-mounted force of cavalry! Yet shall these utterly fail to achieve victory unless God will it and act in it.

As always there are some number of illustrations that can help with our perception of what is being said here -

- The horse was forbidden to be used in battle among the Jews (Deut. 17:16), in order that they might ascribe the glory of their victories to Jehovah.
- So it was that Joshua “houghed” or hamstrung, i.e., to sever the “tendon of Achilles” of the hinder legs of captured horses ( Joshua 11:6, 9; 2 Sam 8:4 ; 1 Chronicles 18:4 ), so as to render them all but useless.
- It is interesting that it was by Solomon this law was violated. And the national glory in battle began to wane from the time when this veto was disregarded. Defeat commenced from the very quarter of unwarranted confidence (comp. 1 Kings 10:26, 28, with 1 Kings 11:14–26 and 2 Chron. 12:8, 9).
- Sisera’s army, with its nine hundred chariots of iron, was easily defeated by Barak’s chosen force, not only without chariots or horses, but even disarmed (Judg. 5:8); so that the “victory” was seen to be “of the Lord.”
- The same was true of Gideon’s picked three hundred, and in both cases “*their faith subdued kingdoms*” (Heb. 11:32, 33).
- The renunciation of their confidence in horses marked a time of gracious acceptance for Israel (Hos. 14:3).

Just to think in terms of application - The newspapers often teem with speculations about war. But how seldom does the Lord of hosts appear to be taken into account! As a Christian, let me endeavor to supply the want I find in them. We ought to remember that victory is of God. True, the proper means must be employed, or God cannot be expected to bless our arms even in a righteous cause. It is a part of His moral government that good results do not ordinarily flow except from well-considered efforts. Therefore, as long as war is a necessity (and it IS still, at times a necessity), there must be armies kept up, well-disciplined and equipped (the modern equivalent of the well-trained war horse).

But this is not all. God can save without armies, but armies cannot conquer without Him. This is even so in the case of the victories of those nations who have set themselves against the principles of God). Hence, national prayer should always accompany national warfare. And since the many pray not, those who are prayerful must supply their places by redoubling their prayers. The principle applies no less to the spiritual combat. Vain are our efforts (redoubled, it may be, in Lent) to conquer the enemies of the soul, if we are looking to those efforts for success. The secret of victory must lie in the motto, “Through God we shall do great acts, and it is He that shall tread down our enemies.”