

# Proverbs 29:18 Commentary

## VISION

**Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law.**

Where there is no **revelation**, the people **cast off restraint**; but blessed is he who keeps the law. (Pr 29:18NIV)

Amplified Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish; but he who keeps the law [of God, which includes that of man]—blessed (happy, fortunate, and enviable) is he.

The Living Bible Where there is ignorance of God, crime runs wild; but what a wonderful thing it is for a nation to know and keep his laws.

NEB Where there is no one in authority, the people break loose, but a guardian of the law keeps them on the straight path.

Modern Language Where there is no vision the people run wild; but happy is he who keeps the law.

REB With no one in authority, the people throw off all restraint, but he who keeps God's law leads them on a straight path.

MEV Where there is no vision, the people perish; but happy is he who keeps the teaching.

BGT ο μ π ρ ξ ξ η γ η τ ς θ ν ε ι πα ρ α ν μ ὁ φυ λ ὶ σ σ ω ν τ ν ν μ ο ν μα κα ρ ι σ τ ς

KJV Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

NKJ Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.

NET When there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but the one who keeps the law, blessed is he!

BBE Where there is no vision, the people are uncontrolled; but he who keeps the law will be happy.

CSB Without revelation people run wild, but one who listens to instruction will be happy.

ERV Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

ESV Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

GWN Without prophetic vision people run wild, but blessed are those who follow God's teachings.

NAB Without prophecy the people become demoralized; but happy is he who keeps the law.

NIV Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.

NJB Where there is no vision the people get out of hand; happy are they who keep the law.

NLT When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.

NRS Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.

YLT Without a Vision is a people made naked, And whoso is keeping the law, O his happiness!

- **there:** 1Sa 3:1 Ho 4:6 Am 8:11,12 Mt 9:36 Ro 10:13-15
- **are unrestrained** or, is made naked, 2Ch 28:19
- **but:** Pr 19:16 Ps 19:11 119:2 Lu 11:28 Joh 13:17 14:21-23 Jas 1:25 Rev 22:14

**NO KING NO VISION  
NO RESTRAINT**

Proverbs 29:18 sounds a sobering message similar to the theme verse of Judges, Judges 21:25. Ironically as discussed below true meaning of this proverb is missed by many preachers of the Vision!

Where there is no vision ([chazown/chazon](#)) - **No** in the Septuagint ([see below](#)) is the very strong double negative (ou me) signifying absolutely no vision at all! **No vision** as discussed in more depth below refers to no prophetic word from God to His people.

**NET NOTE** on **chazon** "Heb "no vision." The Hebrew word "vision" (from the verb רָחַז [khazah, "to see"]) refers to divine communication to prophets (as in 1 Sam 3:1) and not to individual goals or plans. C. H. Toy sees a problem here: The most calamitous period of Israel's history was when prophetic vision was at its height, whereas people were often more obedient when God was silent. He also notes that in the book of Proverbs there is no mention of prophetic teaching with wisdom as a guide. So he emends the word to "guidance" following the LXX (Proverbs [ICC], 512). The TEV has "guidance"; the NIV retains "revelation." It must be stated that the prophetic ministry was usually in response to the calamitous periods, calling the people back to God. Without them the downward rush to anarchy and destruction would have been faster than with these prophetic calls from God."

**The people are unrestrained** ([para'](#)) - **Amplified** = "the people perish," **NET** = "cast off restraint" **MLV (Berkley)** = "run wild," **NEB** = "break loose," **TLB** = "crime runs wild" ([See illustration](#)), **NJB** = "get out of hand"

The **KJV** (and **Amplified**) rendering of Pr 29:18 that **the people perish** is somewhat misleading as it suggests that the writer is referring to eternal loss in the lake of fire, but that is not the actual meaning of the Hebrew word [para'](#) nor the Greek word in the Lxx, [paranomos](#), which means acting contrary to the law or lawless. Thus to interpret this proverb as a call to evangelize the lost (as a number of commentaries and sermons suggest) so that they do not perish eternally is incorrect. If the KJV had been rendered "the people run wild", this evangelistic interpretation most likely would have been much less frequent.

**NET NOTE** on **unrestrained** - The verb פָּרַע (para') means "to let go; to let alone." It occurs here in the Niphal with the meaning of "[the people] are let loose," meaning, they cast off restraint (e.g., Exod 32:25). Cf. NLT "run wild."

Compare this scene to what happens when God is out of the picture in the life of individuals or nations (Jdg 21:25+ = "No King"!)

The picture of **Para'** is of a people who are open and exposed to the subtle errors of deceptive doctrine (cp persuasive arguments Col 2:4+, Col 2:8+) which produces corrupt conduct ("out of control"). Belief always effects behavior and this case it births behavior without restraints which in essence equates with our English equivalent **anarchy** (derived from Greek **anarchos** = having no ruler <> **an-** negative = "no" + **archos** = ruler) and describes a state of lawlessness, an absence or denial of any authority and as a result an absence of order!

**THOUGHT - What is the point?** Sound doctrine ("vision") that exalts God as Supreme (cp "King" in Jdg 21:25+) must not seek to tickle ears (2Ti 4:2+, 2Ti 4:3,4+) but must be boldly and uncompromisingly proclaimed by God's appointed and anointed prophets from the pulpits! Could this principle have anything to do with the fact that the modern church in America seems to be having so little "salt" and "light" effect (Mt 5:13-16+) on a decaying, devolving culture which has in effect "cast off all restraints"?

**Adam Clarke** paraphrases Pr 29:18 this way "Where Divine revelation, and the faithful preaching of the sacred testimonies, are neither revered nor attended, the ruin of that land is at no great distance."

## THE STRIKING DIAMETRICAL DECLARATION

[Diametrical](#) means the exact opposite, completely opposed. "The opposite direction."

**But** (term of contrast - striking!) **happy** (['esher](#); Lxx = makarios = fully satisfied independent of the circumstances) **is he who keeps** ([shamar](#); Lxx = phulasso = guards) **the law** - This proverb gives us God's way of a happy, blessed life. Believe it or not! If you do not believe it, your life is very unlikely to be blessed by Jehovah! You may experience some "happy times," but those times fade and so does your happiness, because "happy" depends on what happens!

This clause sounds a lot like Psalm 1:1-3+ which says "How **blessed** is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Do you see the "hinge word," the word that marks the dramatic change of direction in the psalm? I'm sure you saw it, because the word "but" sounds out almost like a military command "About face!" Face the opposite direction to the one described in Psalm 1:1. Face the Word, eat (meditate on) the Word, obey the Word, walk in the Word, walk by the guidance of the Word as the Holy Spirit uses the Holy Word to lead you on a holy walk, a walk by streams of living

water!

**NET NOTE** on **keeps the law** - The law here refers to Scripture, the concrete form of revelation. So the two halves of the verse provide the contrast: When there is no prophetic revelation there is chaos, but those who keep the revelation contained in scripture find blessing.

**NET NOTE** on Blessed (Pr 29:18NET) or **Happy** - There is a tendency among commentators and English versions to translate אֲשֶׁרֶה ('ashrehu) as "**happy is he!**" (cf. KJV, ASV, NAB, NASB, TEV, NLT). But "**happy**" can be a misleading translation. The Hebrew word refers to a heavenly bliss, an inner joy, that comes from knowing one is right with God and experiencing His blessing. "Happiness," on the other hand, depends on what happens!

**ILLUSTRATION OF TWISTING THE SCRIPTURE** - **Proverbs 29:18** is often misinterpreted as indicating that when one does not have a "clear vision" (or a dream), then one has nothing to live for and will perish for lack of a goal. This is clearly **not** the intended meaning of this passage and to use it from the pulpit for that purpose is to "wrongly" divide the Word of Truth! (2Ti 2:15+). I have personally heard of Pr 29:18 being preached this way (to support a personal "vision" and agenda), and I warned the brother who related this incident to me, encouraging him to speak to his pastor about the mishandling of the passage (cp Acts 20:30NLT+). Long story short, shortly after preaching this message (see 2Co 4:2+ - adulterating the Word of God) this pastor's "vision" ended with him being asked to leave the church, with the subsequent catastrophic result that there was a major "church split". This pastor survived about 3 years at the next stop but was finally openly confronted by the same brother I had admonished almost 3 years earlier, and this confrontation was again over mishandling of the Word of Truth! Old dogs don't usually learn new tricks! They practice the maxim that their personal "*ends justify the means*"! The elders subsequently asked him to leave the church. Another very well known pastor (whom I shall not mention) writes that Pr 29:18 teaches "We are to be... men and women of **vision**." **Wrong!** God gives the "vision". We are to **hear** and **heed His "vision"** and then we will be blessed. Here is what we are called to be "We are to be men and women of ONE BOOK!"

Here's another example of an inaccurate interpretation of Pr 29:18 by **John Phillips** a commentator that I greatly admire. This quote emphasizes the point that every believer must continually be a Berean no matter how respected the source! Notice who the Bereans "checked out" and what "plumbline" with which they examined his teachings! (Read Acts 17:10, 11+)

Eli had no spiritual vision (**Ed**: I agree with that statement in principle). The Bible says, "**Where there is no vision, the people perish**" (Pr 29:18). That proverb was true then, and it is true today. It is a serious situation when Christians have no spiritual vision (**Ed**: While this may be true to a certain degree, that is not what Pr 29:18 is teaching!). Things are happening in our world that would make the angels weep, but some of us are so shortsighted or so preoccupied with personal matters that we cannot see other people's needs, even when they are brought to our attention. (See [Exploring People of the Old Testament](#))

A popular paraphrase (if you could call it that) is the **Message** which says "*If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.*" The problem with this rendering is that it seems to place emphasis on what God is doing in the world, not what God has already done in His Word and what He now instructs His people to do in that same Word. In short, this rendering leads people away from focusing on the Word and points them to what God is doing in the world. While there is **nothing wrong with seeing what God is doing in the world** (a sovereign God is **ALWAYS** doing something for EVERYTHING is in His control), our eyes need to first focus on **His Word** and then we can truly discern what **He is doing in the world**.

**John Wesley** wrote that "**no vision**" means "No vision-No prophecy; no public preaching of God's word.

**Henry Morris** rightly explains that "the word **vision** does not refer to far-sighted imagination, as this verse is commonly applied, but rather to actual divine revelation."

**W A Criswell** - "The word "revelation" (chazon, Heb. for "prophetic vision"- cf. 1Sa 9:9) refers to the experience of the prophets in receiving a word from God (see Dan. 4:5, note). The "law" (torah, Heb., may also mean "instruction") is not only the Mosaic Law but also the messages to the people from God via His messengers, the prophets. Happiness comes in obeying the word of God however it comes (cf. Isa. 8:16; Amos 8:11, 12). This word, "perish," means "open" or "exposed." When people today reject or ignore the revealed Word of God, they are open and helpless to resist the humanistic and occultic doctrines of men and devils. (Happy speaks of) True happiness, or blessing found only through "keeping"--that is, "guarding" God's Word, then obeying and proclaiming it.

**Pulpit Commentary** on Pr 29:18 - The fatal effect of the absence of such revelation of God's will is stated to be confusion, disorder, and rebellion; the people, uncontrolled, fall into grievous excesses, which nothing but high principles can restrain. We note the license of Eli's time, when there was no open vision (1Sa 3:1,2); in Asa's days, when Israel had long been without a teaching priest (2Chr 15:3); and when the impious Ahaz "made Judah naked" (2Chr 28:19); or when the people were destroyed by reason of lack of

knowledge of Divine things (Hos 4:6, cp Is 1:3, 5:13, Je 8:7). (See [Biblehub - multiple comments](#))

**Charles Bridges** on Pr 29:18 - "Thus we may learn the necessity of preaching, and what inconvenience follows when it is not used. 'Where preaching falls,' says Solomon, 'there people perish.' Therefore, let everyone keep himself in God's schoolhouse and learn his lesson diligently. For as the body is nourished with meat, so is the soul with the Word of God" (Bishop Pilkington). "The meanest village," Luther was apt to say, "with a Christian pastor and flock is a palace of ebony."

**The Complete Biblical Library** – Divine revelation constrains its recipients. When it is, or seems to be, lacking, only those who understand the divine origin and authority of the Covenant will order their lives according to its standards. The proverb contrasts those who depend upon special acts of divine communication with the one who heeds the Covenant as already given, describing the response of the former and the consequences for the latter. The usual pattern is that the apparent lack of revelation leads to license. For example, in Exo. 32:25, the same verb describes the people's sinful activity around the golden calf. Eli and his sons, who were as priests supposed to teach the Covenant, responded to the relative lack of divine revelation in their time (1 Sam. 3:1f) by failing to live up to the light that they already had (the laws of sacrifices; Lev. 1-7), even when corrected by the people (1 Sam 2:16). In contrast, stand Samuel's continued faithfulness (1 Sam. 2:11, 18, 21, 26) and Josiah's immediate response to the scroll found in the Temple (2 Ki. 22:11ff). Although references to revelation are rare in Proverbs (cf. 2:6), the theme of one's response to the "law" is also found in 28:4, 7. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Cornerstone Biblical Commentary** – When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. The Hebrew word *khazon* (divine guidance) is always a prophetic word (Isa 1:1), sometimes paired with revelatory dreams (Dan 1:17). Hence KJV, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," or RSV, "Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint," or NIV, "Where there is no revelation." The next line sets this ecstatic utterance parallel to "keeping torah." Torah [TH 8451, ZH 9368] = *khazon* [TH 2377, ZH 2606]; wisdom instructions are inspired oracles—see the oracle of Agur (30:1). Kings divine wisdom (see note on 16:10); Wisdom "prophesies" throughout the city (1:20; 8:4). Visionary language is engaged to assert that wisdom is inspired. (See context in [Psalms. Proverbs](#))

**Sid Buzzell** - The familiar KJV "where there is no vision" is misleading. The word "vision" is the revelation (*hāzôn*) a prophet receives. Also the KJV translation "the people perish" does not refer to unsaved people dying in sin. The verb *pāra'* means to cast off restraint. So the verse is stating that without God's Word people abandon themselves to their own sinful ways. On the other hand keeping (obeying) God's Law (cf. 28:4, 7) brings happiness. (See context in [The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Vision** of v. 18 is not visual, but a divine revelation.

**What the Bible Teaches** – The "vision" referred to here is the same as that mentioned in 1 Samuel 3:1: "The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision". God was not communicating with His people. Thus the **vision** of v. 18 is not visual, but a divine revelation. It is the same word used in Isaiah 1:1. It was at that time a message communicated by God to His prophets. It is, in our day, the revealed mind of God in the Scriptures. When there was no revelation, no word from God, there was nothing to restrain the wickedness of the human heart. "Perish" means to be unrestrained. It is used in Exodus 32:25 when the people were "naked" or unrestrained around the golden calf. It is from revelation that we get ethics. Any system of ethics outside of revelation is doomed to fail, being built on an arbitrary basis of what "the good" is. Morality ultimately depends on divine revelation. In countries where the Judeo-Christian heritage was honoured, the rule of law existed and men knew stability and security to a large extent. With the advent of multiculturalism and the worshiping of toleration in regard to morals, there has been the removal of moral standards and moral behaviour. Moral relativism, the offspring of this thinking, has led to the denial of any absolutes with "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes". The link with the previous verse may well be that the discipline of the family is dependent on the Word of God. The second part of the verse individualises the result of law-keeping: "... happy is he". When divine revelation, or vision, comes, then it is wisdom to observe that law. (What the Bible Teaches – Proverbs and Ecclesiastes)

**Holman Old Testament Commentary** - The King James translation of "vision" here is often misunderstood. The Hebrew word consistently refers to the visions in which prophets receive a revelation from God (Dan. 8:13; Nah. 1:1). When people have no revealed word from God, they will cast off restraint, running wild as they please. The word means to let loose or to let one's hair down (Lev. 13:45) and was used to describe Israel's reveling with the golden calf (Exod. 32:25). In contrast, the person who keeps God's law will be blessed. ([Proverbs - Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**Wilmington** comments on Pr 29:18 - Needed: Leaders from the Lord. Without good spiritual leadership, people tend to fall deeply into sin (see Ex 32:25; Jdg. 21:25; 1Sa 3:1; Amos 8:11, 12; Mark 6:34; Heb 13:17). (See context [Wilmington's Bible Handbook](#))

**John MacArthur** on **no vision**. This proverb looks both to the lack of the Word (i.e., 1Sa 3:1) and the lack of hearing the Word (Am 8:11, 12), which lead to lawless rebellion (cf. Ex 32:25; Lv 13:45; Nu 5:18). The proverb then contrasts the joy and glory of a lawful society (28:14; Mal 4:4). (See context in [NKJV, The MacArthur Study Bible](#) or borrow the [MacArthur study Bible](#))

**Eric Lane** - There is anarchy (Pr 29:18) Here is the final stage in the breakdown of justice – the people cast off restraint, or 'go wild',

as when Aaron was left in charge of Israel and failed to prevent their idolatrous orgy (Exod. 32:25). The absence of revelation which permits this situation to arise refers to the lack of prophetic preaching (see 1 Sam. 3:1). The prophets expounded the law to the people, applied it to their lives and called on them to repent of their departure from it. Ideally they worked with the King whose main duty was to uphold the law. But when the Kings themselves flouted it they silenced the prophets (Hosea 9:7f) and the people got away with anything. When the King withdrew the prophets, God withdrew his blessing (Hosea 4:6), and only restored it when the people returned to the law. Although we are not in that system, governments are still appointed by God to keep people in order. Christians and their preachers can cooperate with them in this by proclaiming and living the moral law and preaching the gospel. ([Proverbs Focus On The Bible Commentary Series](#))

**Life Application Study note** - "Divine guidance" refers to words from God received by prophets. Where there is ignorance or rejection of God, crime and sin run rampant. Public morality depends on the knowledge of God, but it also depends on keeping God's laws. In order for nations and individuals to function well, people must know God's ways and keep his rules. Having God's Word means little if we are not obeying it ([Life Application Study Bible](#))

**Matthew Henry** commenting on Pr 29:18 calls us to observe "How bare does a place look without Bibles and ministers! and what an easy prey is it to the enemy of souls! The misery of the people that want a settled ministry: Where there is no vision, no prophet to expound the law, no priest or Levite to teach the good knowledge of the Lord, no means of grace, the word of the Lord is scarce, there is no open vision (1Sa. 3:1), where it is so the people perish (contrasted with)...The felicity of a people that have not only a settled, but a successful ministry among them, the people that hear and keep the law, among whom religion is uppermost; happy are such a people and every particular person among them. It is not having the law, but obeying it, and living up to it, that will entitle us to blessedness. ([Proverbs 29 Matthew Henry's Commentary](#))

**Harry Ironside** on Pr 29:18 - When ministry of this nature is lacking among the people of God and the assemblies of His saints, they soon become lawless, substituting for the Spirit's energy the mere busy meddling of nature, and opening the door to what is simply of man in the flesh. But we would not forget the second part of the couplet. Even let ministry of an edifying character be rarely known, yet where the word of God controls there will be blessing. He who keeps it will be happy amidst the existing confusion, enjoying fellowship with Him who inspired it...**Lack of vision** will be manifested in a cold, dry, theological, or philosophical, treatment of the Scriptures, as though given to exercise the intellect, rather than the heart and the conscience. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is one applicable for all Christians while in this scene of trial and testing (Eph. 1:15-23). ([Notes on the Book of Proverbs](#)).

**Henry Blackaby** commenting on Pr 29:18 writes that "The world operates on **vision**. God's people live by **revelation**. The world seeks grand and noble purposes and goals to achieve. People dream up the greatest and most satisfying things in which they can invest their lives. Institutions establish goals and objectives and then organize themselves to achieve them. God's people function in a radically different way. Christians arrange their lives based on the revelation of God, regardless of whether it makes sense to them. God does not ask for our opinion about what is best for our future, our family, our church, or our country. He already knows! What God wants is to get the attention of His people and reveal to us what is on His heart and what is His will, for God's ways are not our ways! (Isa. 55:8, 9). Whenever people do not base their lives on God's revelation, they "cast off restraint." That is, they do what is right in their own eyes. They set their goals, arrange their agendas, and then pray for God's blessings. (See context [Experiencing God Day by Day: Devotional](#))

When we do not have the constant influence  
of God's Word in our lives, we become unrestrained  
-- [POSB](#)

**Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible** - The righteous are happy because they keep God's law. The wicked reject God's revelation and perish. God's Word is a powerful force that preserves, protects, and keeps us on the path of righteousness. Commentators differ as to the meaning of vision, but the second statement of the proverb defines it. Law is parallel to vision and establishes that the subject of the proverb is the Word of God. Vision is divine revelation given through the prophets:

"And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision" (1 Sa.3:1).

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Is.1:1).

"I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets" (Hos.12:10).

"And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it



will not tarry" (Hab.2:2-3).

"The law, the prophets and the wisdom literature meet in this verse." We need to fill our minds, hearts, and lives with the Word of God. This is why it is important to read the Bible daily and to consistently sit under its preaching and teaching. God's Word guides us along the right path and protects us from straying into sin. Furthermore, God's Word is a cleansing agent in our lives:

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Jn.15:3).

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ep.5:26).

When we do not have the constant influence of God's Word in our lives, we become unrestrained. **Perish** means to loosen or cast off restraint. When we ignore, neglect, or deny God's Word, we eventually loose ourselves from the boundaries set by God Himself. We "run wild" (NLT). As a result, we are likely to fall into sin and ultimately perish (Jas.1:15). Grasp the correct meaning of this word picture: it does not present the Bible as a rope that binds us or a prison that confines us. The Bible is a hedge that protects us from the dangers that lurk outside its boundaries. If we keep (shamar) God's Word—hedge our lives with it—we will be happy. We will walk about freely inside its borders and remain unharmed by the dangers of sin.

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (Jas.1:25).

"And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts" (Ps.119:45).

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11-12). ([Proverbs The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible](#))

**Tyndale Commentary - Vision** (AV, RV) is to be taken in its exact sense of the revelation a prophet receives. Law in line 2 is its complement. 'The law, the prophets and the wisdom literature meet in this verse' (The New Bible Commentary). **Perish** (AV): rather, 'run wild'. The verb means to let loose, e.g. to let one's hair down, whether literally (Lev 13:45; Nu 5:18;? Judg. 5:2) or figuratively (especially Ex 32:25 [twice]: RV 'broken loose', etc.). This latter verse is perhaps the intended background to the proverb, with its contrast between the glory on the mountain of vision and law, and the shame in the valley. 1 Samuel 3:1, with its context, also exemplifies the saying, in showing the dependence of public morality on the knowledge of God. (See context in [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Proverbs](#))

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#### **David Guzik - Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint**

a. The **revelation** in mind here is not the spontaneous word from a purported prophet. It is God's great **revelation**, His revealed word through the Hebrew prophets and later the apostles and prophets who gave us the New Testament. When God's word is unavailable or rejected, **the people cast off restraint**. They no longer have a standard greater than their own feelings or current opinions.

i. Other translations (such as the King James Version) express this in these words: *where there is no vision, the people perish*. This has often been taken to say, "Where there is no visionary leadership, people and enterprises fail." That is often a true principle, but *not* what Solomon wrote here. There is little doubt that the Hebrew word *hazon* means "God's revelation," and not "visionary leadership." "In sum, *hazon* refers here to the sage's inspired revelation of wisdom." (Waltke)

ii. "The word *hazon* refers to divine communication to prophets (as in 1 Samuel 3:1) and not to individual goals that are formed." (Ross)

iii. **Revelation**: "...is to be taken in its exact sense of the revelation a prophet receives." (Kidner)

iv. "Where Divine revelation, and the faithful preaching of the sacred testimonies, are neither revered nor attended, the ruin of that land is at no great distance." (Clarke)

v. "No greater calamity, therefore, can there be than the removal of the revelation.... Where revelation is withdrawn from a church, the people perish in ignorance and delusion." (Bridges)

b. **The people cast off restraint**: This principle was lived out in Israel's history. Judges 17:6, 21:25, and 1 Samuel 3:1 all describe such times when God's word was abandoned, and the people lived with no **restraint**.

i. **Cast off restraint**: "Or, *is made naked*; stripped of their best ornaments, God's favour and protection, as this word is taken, Exodus 32:25." (Poole)

c. **Happy is he who keeps the law.** In contrast, there is happiness and contentment for the one **who keeps the law**. In this sense, the Bible is something like a guide given to us by our owner and creator, telling us how to live a wise and blessed life. It is within **restraint**, but not in an oppressive sense. Only a fool thinks that all **restraint** is oppressive.

i. **He who keeps the law:** “Although the want of God’s word be sufficient for men’s destruction, yet the having, and hearing, or reading of it is not sufficient for their salvation, except they also keep or obey it.” (Poole)

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#### QUESTION - [What does it mean that without vision the people perish?](#)

**ANSWER** - The King James Version of [Proverbs 29:18](#) says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Some have used this verse to emphasize the importance of vision in [leadership](#). Without a long-term plan—without a vision—people are doomed to wander aimlessly.

Of course, it is true that having an idea of where one is headed helps in getting there. Proverbs 29:18 is not talking about having a business or ministry vision. Other translations of the Bible help clarify the point of Proverbs 29:18 for modern readers. The NIV puts it this way: “Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.” The ESV has, “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.”

The “vision” in this verse refers to a divine communication as from a dream, revelation, or prophecy. The same Hebrew word used in Proverbs 29:18 is found in 1 Samuel 3:1 in the context of the rarity of the word of the Lord and the infrequency of prophetic visions. It is also used to introduce the prophetic books of Isaiah and Obadiah and several of the visions of Daniel. Lack of vision, then, is a lack of God’s revelatory word.

Proverbs 29:18 says that “the people perish” where there is no vision. The word translated “perish” or “cast off restraint” in the original means “to loosen” and thus “to expose or uncover.” The same Hebrew word is used in Exodus 32:25 during the golden calf incident: “Moses saw that the people were **running wild** and that Aaron had let them get **out of control** and so become a laughingstock to their enemies” (emphasis added). It is also used in Leviticus regarding uncovering one’s head or letting one’s hair hang loose (Leviticus 10:6; 13:45; 21:10). Other proverbs use the same word to denote “ignoring” or “neglecting” instruction (Proverbs 1:25; 8:33; 13:18; 15:32) and “avoiding” the path of the wicked (Proverbs 4:15).

With this we understand that, without the Word of God, people are “loose”; that is, they go their own way. They live without restraint. Ultimately, living in such a way will lead to death because to ignore God’s way is to ignore the way of life (Romans 6:23). So what is the remedy to such lethal waywardness?

The next part of Proverbs 29:18 tells us: “Blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.” We are blessed when we keep God’s directives. Psalm 19 elaborates on the perfection and trustworthiness of God’s Word. His precepts “are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Psalm 19:8). David, the psalmist here, goes on to describe God’s decrees as “more precious than gold” and “sweeter than honey” (verse 10). He writes, “By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (verse 11). Lest anyone be confused, this is not a call to [legalism](#). Life is not found in our ability to obey a list of dos and don’ts. Within Psalm 19 we see indications of relationship with God. David talks about the fear of the Lord being pure (verse 9), he calls himself God’s servant (verse 13), and he calls God his “LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer” (verse 14). When Jesus named the greatest commandment, He referred to the command to love God (Mark 12:28–34). Our obedience to God and our keeping of His Word flow from a relationship in which we are loved by God and we love Him in return (1 John 4:7–10).

Hebrews 1:1–2 says, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.” Jesus has come into the world as the [living Word](#) of God (John 1:1, 14). God has also given us the written Word, the Bible. When we fail to read God’s Word and live it out in our lives, we become people “without vision.” When we ignore God’s Word, we begin to live without restraint to our own peril. Conversely, when we heed God’s Word, we are blessed. Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:9–11). God has given us His Word, and He calls us to be faithful to it. In keeping God’s Word, we will find joy in Him. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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**Charles Wood** has an excellent sermon outline on Pr 29:18KJV entitled “No Vision”. Here are the opening points of his outline...

**Introduction:** Sometimes the Scriptures are misused, especially by ignorance. Sometimes those who know the Bible well misuse it in certain places. Usually it is not serious, but rather a right truth from the wrong passage. This often makes us miss some good teaching. This verse is a case in point.

#### I. Corrected Interpretation

## A. Common

1. **"No vision"** — failure to see opportunity
2. **"People perish"** — people are lost and go to hell

## B. Correction

1. **"Vision"** — word which has reference to revelation (word refers to revelation of God's will through any agent)
2. **"Perish"** — cast off restraint, become ungovernable

## C. Continuation

1. The second part of verse 18 gives the clue to interpreting the first
2. Meaning — **"Where there is no proclamation of God's revelation, people cast off restraint and become ungovernable"**

(For the complete outline see [Sermon Outlines on the Book of Proverbs.: Kregel Publications - well done](#))

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The **Septuagint (LXX)** translation of **Proverbs 29:18** is interesting for it reads

BGT ou me huparche exegetes ethenei paranomo ho de phulasson ton nomon makaristos

Here is **my paraphrase** of the Greek...

Where there is existing absolutely no revelation from God, the people are undisciplined, out of control (Ex 32:25) and run wild, but in striking contrast are those who will be fully satisfied regardless of the circumstances (meaning of Greek word **makarios**) because they continually (**present tense**) guard the treasure (**phulasso** = like a watchman standing guard to keep something valuable from being lost or snatched away [cp Mt 13:19]) of God's Word.

It is notable that **vision** is translated with the Greek **exegetes** the verb form (**exegeomai** in Lk 24:35) of which means literally to lead out, to unfold, to declare, to tell, to provide detailed information in a systematic manner) **Exegetes** obviously gives us our English word **"exegesis"** which can be defined as the unfolding of the interpretation through teaching of Scripture. America's pulpits need modern day prophets who rightly dividing the Word of Truth so that they might proclaim sound doctrine which in turn produces "salty saints"!

The upshot is that when those who have been called as prophets fail to speak **thus saith the LORD** regardless of whether it is "politically incorrect" or "seeker unfriendly" (Jer 1:17,18,19), the result will be a people that **"run wild"** (spiritually, morally, ethically) so that it becomes very difficult to discern the difference between the church and the world (see kosmos)! To reiterate, **vision** in Pr 29:18 does not refer to far-sighted imagination, as is commonly interpreted by some preachers! No wonder the Church is in such ill health. No bread, no growth! (Dt 8:3, 1Pe 2:2,3-note).

Proverbs 29:18 teaches that when there is not correct **exegesis** of the Scripture, the people are in one sense (emphasized by the Hebrew word **para'**) uncovered and open to deception and on the other side (as emphasized by the Greek word **paranomos** used to translate the Hebrew **para'** - **paranomos** is from **para** = side + **nomos** = law and means literally beside the law) act contrary to the Law. It does not mean they did not know the Law but that they act as if it had been placed at their side (**para** = side + **nomos** = law) (cp Lk 11:28). BDAG on **paranomos** = pertaining to being contrary to the law, lawless. We need men and women who will rightly divide Scripture, not just teaching the Law, but teaching how to live the Christ life in His grace and power, because He was the Only One Who was able to truly live the "Christian" life.

Lord, give us men who are controlled by the Holy Ghost and therefore will speak "Thus saith the Lord..." not shrinking back from declaration of the whole counsel of God's Word, so that then Your people will be adequate for every good work and able to glorify (to give a proper opinion of) Your Name. Amen.

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**Paranomos** (from **para** = side + **nomos** - law) is most often found as an **adjective** - pertaining to being contrary to the law, lawless. Ps 36:38 **"Transgressors** will be altogether destroyed." (Ps 37:38). 'Dt 13:13 = **"worthless** men." 2Sa 16:7, 2Sa 20:1 = **"worthless** fellow", 1Ki 21:10, 13, 2Chr 13:7 = **"worthless** men." (**paranomōs** as an adverb = unlawfully; illegally. 2x - 1 נָפְלָה—plan; infamy, shameful behavior - Pr 21:27 illegally Job 34:20) Definitions below relate to the adjective **paranomos**.



**Liddell-Scott - παρانونος**, ον, lawless, violent, ῥγά, δάκος, E.Ba.997 (lyr.), Tr.284 (lyr.); π. δ .. δόξει γεγονέναι κ νομίμου Pl.R.539a; ες γυνάκας κα ες τν λλην δίαπαν Antisth.ap.Ath.5.220c; χειρ παρانونώτ Ar.Fr.387.10; ο .. τίς ν δύναιτο παρانونώτερον φράσαι; Anaxil.22.2. Il. of things, unlawful, δι τν π. νοίκησιν Th.2.17; τ π. τ τ' νόσια Ar.Th.684; πέπονθα δειν κα π. Id.PI.967; δικά κα π. Pl.Ap.31e; τ π. illegality, Aeschin.3.197. Adv. -μως illegally, Antipho 5.94, Th.3.65; opp. κατ νόμους, Pl.Pl.302e: Comp. -ωτέρως And.4.22: Sup. -ώτατα Antipho 5.8. 2. in Law, παράνομα γράφειν, ε πε ν, to propose an illegal or unconstitutional measure, D.21.182, 183; παρانونών γράψασθαι τινα to indict one for proposing such a measure, And.1.17; γράφοντα παράνομα παρانونών γραφόμενος D.18.13; παρانونών γραφή Aeschin.3.197, etc.; παρانونών φεύγειν, λ ναι, Lys.18.14, Antiph.196.14: Sup., παρانونώτατα γεγραφότα Aeschin.3.31.

[Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint](#): paranomos, adj., lawless; unlawful. 71x +AF

### Hebrew Alignment

לֹא־לְעֵל—uselessness, wickedness; adj. good for nothing (9): Dt 13:13; Jdg 19:22; 2 Kgdms 16:7; 20:1; 23:5; 3 Kgdms 20:10; 2 Ch 13:7; Ps 40:9; 100:3

בגד—deal treacherously with; depart treacherously from (6): Pr 2:22; 11:6; 13:2; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19

הָנֹחַ—godless (2): Job 17:8; 20:5

עֲשֵׂי־פָ—crime; offence concerning property; wantonness; misdemeanor; wrongdoing (2): Ps 35:2; Pr 19:8

טִי—insolent, presumptuous (2): Ps 85:14; 118:85

חַמַּד—violence, wrong (2): Pr 4:17; 16:29

אֱלִיל—evil; calamity; sin, injustice; deception; false, idolatrous (2): Pr 6:12; 17:4

### Unique Hebrew Alignment

בֶּן—son; young animal; grandson; member: Dt 13:13; עֲלֵל—criminal, sinner: Job 27:7; 3 ללל—be infatuated; make look foolish; make a mockery of; act like a madman: Ps 5:6; פִּשַׁע—break with or away from; behave as a criminal; disloyal: Ps 36:38; חֲדָל—divided, disunited, futile: Ps 118:113; לוֹל—escape someone's sight; go wrong, crookedness, cunning: Pr 3:32; בָּעַל—badly made, of small worth, poor; contemptible, evil, reprobate: Pr 4:14; 1 בושׁ—be ashamed; put to shame, act shamefully: Pr 10:5; חָכָם—skillful; clever, experienced; wise man: Pr 11:30; תַּחֲמָה—project, plan; wicked plan, scheme; discretion, prudence: Pr 12:2; לִיץ—brag, speak boastfully; scoff, deride; encourage scorn; put on airs: Pr 14:9; זָר—strange, different; heterogeneous, illicit; unauthorized; non-Israelite; prohibited; other: Pr 22:14; 1 כְּסִיל—stupid; insolent: Pr 26:3; תְּרוּמָה—contribution; offering: Pr 29:4; חַשָּׁשׁ—guilty; wicked person: Pr 29:12; פָּרַע—let free; make someone go out of control, allow to run wild; leave unattended: Pr 29:18

### English Gloss

lawless (16): Pr 1:18; 21:24; 28:17a; Sus 28; 1 Mac 1:11; 2 Mac 8:4; 3 Mac 2:17; 4 Mac 9:4; Ps Sol 4:11, 13, 21, 27; 12:title, 1, 4; 17:27

lawless ones (4): Ps Sol 12:3, 4; 14:4; Sus 32 (var.)

unlawful (3): Wis 3:16; 2 Mac 4:14; 6:21

wicked (3): 1 Mac 1:34; 10:61; 11:21

lawlessness (1): Jdg 20:13

lawless one (1): 2 Mac 13:7

wicked men (1): Sus 32

antithetical to the Law (1): 2 Mac 4:11

**Paranomos** - 45v - Deut. 13:13; Jdg. 19:22; Jdg. 20:13; 2 Sam. 16:7; 2 Sam. 20:1; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Ki. 21:10; 1 Ki. 21:13; 2 Chr. 13:7; Job 17:8; Job 20:5; Job 27:7; Ps. 5:5; Ps. 36:1; Ps. 37:38; Ps. 41:8; Ps. 86:14; Ps. 101:3; Ps. 119:85; Ps. 119:113; Prov. 1:18; Prov. 2:22; Prov. 3:32; Prov. 4:14; Prov. 4:17; Prov. 6:12; Prov. 10:5; Prov. 11:6; Prov. 11:30; Prov. 12:2; Prov. 13:2; Prov. 14:9; Prov. 16:29; Prov. 17:4; Prov. 19:11; Prov. 21:24; Prov. 22:12; Prov. 22:14; Prov. 23:28; Prov. 25:19; Prov. 26:3; Prov. 28:17; Prov. 29:4; Prov. 29:12; Prov. 29:18

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**Chr. Ridley Pearson - Counsels of the Wise King or Proverbs of Solomon Applied to Daily life, Volume 2-** December 15th

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”—29:18.

**Interpretation.**—The revelation of God's will made to prophets is called by this same word, “vision” (Isa. 1:1; Nah. 1:1). The word rendered “perish” (margin, “is made naked”) signifies literally to be left to run wild, like a horse without a rein. The general meaning is clear. A people deprived of the divine teaching through the human ministry is sure to break loose from all restraint of God's law, and

so become exposed to His wrath. On the contrary, how happy is he who, with whatever advantages, be they many or few, not only enjoys the knowledge of the law, but also keeps it!

**Illustrations.**—In the days when Samuel was born “the Word of the Lord was precious,” or rare; “there was no open vision,” and, as a consequence, great lawlessness prevailed: “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (1 Sam. 3:1; Judg. 21:25). The renunciation of the Aaronic priesthood by Jeroboam and his people—what sin and misfortune it entailed! (1 Kings 12:28, etc., 14:15, 16). Judah, through the impiety of Ahaz loosing her from all restraints of God’s law, was “brought low” and “made naked,” or exposed to His wrath (2 Chron. 28:19). The holy obedience of the first Christians under a duly appointed and faithful ministry, as contrasted with their previous state “as sheep having no shepherd” (Mark 6:34), points to the same truth.

**Application.**—Our Lord has taught that “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:28). But an Apostle has asked, “How shall they hear without a preacher?” And again, “How shall they preach except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:14, 15). The need of a divinely commissioned ministry for dispensing the Word of Life is thus clearly implied. The absence of it is as injurious to the interests of morality and religion in our day as formerly. Hence, every Christian should do his best to promote the maintenance of a wise and learned and holy body of clergy for the national instructors. If not myself called to belong to it, I may perhaps influence and help others, of whose fitness I am assured, in that direction. I may promote colleges for their training, or contribute to their support when ordained. I may at least pray heartily for them in private, in church, at all times, specially at the Ember seasons. Further, I may assist to diffuse their teaching among the masses by aiding home mission societies to send them forth. For what worse famine can a land endure than of the Word of God (Amos 8:11)? Or what sorer peril can overtake a people than that her prophets be “removed into a corner”?

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### **Where There Is No Vision Dr. Melvin Worthington**

SCRIPTURE: PROVERBS 29:18

INTRODUCTION: A word from God is essential to the well-being of individuals and nations. One writer translates the verse, “Without a revelation a people become ungovernable...”

- 1 The Precepts. “Where there is no revelation....” God’s revelation clearly, concisely and convincingly gives people the proper perspective regarding earthly and eternal things.
- 2 The Peril. “the people cast off restraint....” Without a word we have no message, morals, mission, ministry, methods, ministers—and no miracle of conversion. God’s Word confronts, convinces, convicts, corrects, cleanses and changes us.
- 3 The Peace. The last part of Proverbs 29:18 tells us genuine happiness flows from obedience to the Word of God. Those who are ruled by the Bible are happy; not just the hearers of the law, but the doers. (Jas 1:22+)

CONCLUSION: If you need vision in your life, turn to God and His Word. Hear it, heed it, and find it your hope.

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**David Rudolph** - Without a prophetic vision, the people throw off all restraint (Prov. 29:18).

Have you ever considered the relationship between chazon (prophetic vision) and the keeping of the Torah? How are they related? In addition to “prophetic vision,” chazon can also mean “prophetic revelation” or “current revelation.” Thus, we might translate the passage, “Where there is no current prophetic revelation, there is lawlessness.”

God’s Torah needs to be proclaimed—to groups, to congregations, to society. If not, lawlessness, paganism, secular control and sin will pervade. Moshe (Moses), for example, was the voice of God to the children of Israel after they left Egypt. Through him, God revealed his will, his direction and his laws. Moshe was God’s prophetic voice. As long as the word of the Lord was proclaimed, the people followed the laws of God. When Moshe departed to the mountain to receive the commandments from the Lord, the people fell into idolatry, gross sin and lawlessness. The prophetic voice had ceased.

Today, we are called to be prophetic voices to our people and our nation. Like Moshe, we must proclaim God’s Word and call our people back to him. We are the salt of the earth, called to preserve godliness and prevent decay. Let’s begin our work today!

Today I Will

... pray, “Lord, make me a prophetic voice to my people and my nation. Give me boldness to speak the truth in love and not hide my light.”

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**F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision.**

What a difference it makes to our teaching and preaching where there is no vision! The people perish for want of seers of those who

can say with the apostle, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also, that ye may have fellowship with us." It is not difficult to know whether a poet or painter has a vision. If he have, there is glow and passion in his work. And it is not more difficult to detect in the accent of the speaker on divine things, whether he is speaking at secondhand, or as the result of direct vision.

This vision of God was vouchsafed to Moses and Elijah and the apostle Paul. Concerning the latter God said, "He shall be a minister and a witness of things which he has seen." This is our only qualification for teaching others; not intellect, nor imagination, nor rhetoric, but to have seen the King and beheld the pattern on the mount. For such a vision, on our part, there must be humility, patience, and faith, a definite withdrawal from the life of sense, and a definite fixedness of gaze on the things that are unseen and eternal. But on God's part there must be revelation. (**ED**: INDEED HIS WORD IS THE KEY AND WITHOUT IT WE TEND TO "RUN WILD!") "It pleased God," said the apostle, "to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him."

The apostle said, "I could not see for the glory of that light."

A party of tourists was divided one dull morning in Switzerland; the majority thought that it was useless to attempt the mountains. A few started, soon got beyond the low-hanging clouds, spent a day in the heights under marvellous skies, and returned at night, radiant, and overflowing with what they had seen. Ah, speaking is easy when one has seen!

**EDITORIAL ADDENDUM** - PERHAPS WE MIGHT CONSIDER FREQUENTLY PRAYING THE INCREDIBLE WORDS OF MOSES...

"I pray You, show me Your glory!"  
(Exodus 33:18+)

THEN WHEN WE OPEN HIS REVELATION, HIS SPIRIT MAY GIVE US VISIONS OF HOLY MAJESTY AS WE HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE! LET IT BE SO LORD FOR ALL WHO DARE PRAY THIS BOLD PRAYER. IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.

**RECOMMENDATION** - Watch and/or listen to Dr Steve Lawson's message - [Show Me Your Glory](#)

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### David Jeremiah - HAPPY IS HE WHO OBEYS

PROVERBS 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

Roger Staubach, who led the Dallas Cowboys to the World Championship in 1971, admitted that it was difficult for him to be a quarterback who didn't call his own signals. Coach Tom Landry told Staubach when to pass, when to run, and only in emergency situations could he change the play. Even though Staubach considered Coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, pride told him he should have been able to run his own defense.

Staubach later said, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey, there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."

Every Christian needs to come to terms with the issue of obedience as well. True happiness and fulfillment come in obeying God's commands. Many have turned down the wrong corridor in search of happiness. They have chased after possessions, pleasures, and positions, only to find themselves at a dead end. Disillusioned by a world that promised happiness, they stand before a chasm of emptiness and trouble.

Have you been searching for happiness in all the wrong places? True happiness awaits those who obey Christ. (See context in [Sanctuary: Finding Moments of Refuge in the Presence of God](#))

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### Oswald Chambers - Grasp without reach

Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint. Proverbs 29:18 (R.V.).

There is a difference between an ideal and a **vision**. An ideal has no moral inspiration; a **vision** has. The people who give themselves over to ideals rarely do anything. A man's conception of Deity may be used to justify his deliberate neglect of his duty. Jonah argued that because God was a God of justice and of mercy, therefore everything would be all right. I may have a right conception of God, and that may be the very reason why I do not do my duty. But wherever there is **vision**, there is also a life of rectitude because the **vision** imparts moral incentive.

Ideals may lull to ruin. Take stock of yourself spiritually and see whether you have ideals only or if you have **vision**. (**ED**: THIS FOCUS IS ON OUR VISION NOT GOD'S VISION, GOD'S WORD.)

'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?'

**"Where there is no vision ..."** When once we lose sight of God, we begin to be reckless, we cast off certain restraints, we cast off praying, we cast off the **vision** of God in little things, and begin to act on our own initiative. **(ED: THIS STATEMENT GETS CLOSER TO WHAT THE PROVERB IS ALLUDING TO)** If we are eating what we have out of our own hand, doing things on our own initiative without expecting God to come in, we are on the downward path, we have lost the **vision**. Is our attitude to-day an attitude that springs from our **vision** of God? Are we expecting God to do greater things than He has ever done? Is there a freshness and vigour in our spiritual outlook?

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#### **WHAT VISION? - Walter Kaiser** in [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

"For many years this proverb has been misinterpreted, probably because the KJV translates it "Where there is no vision, the people perish." One can infer from that translation that wise groups must have a five-, ten- or twenty-year plan for the future if they do not wish to become defunct as an organization. And many have taken just that meaning from this text.

However, the word vision does not refer to one's ability to formulate future goals and plans. Instead, it is a synonym for the prophetic word itself. It is what a prophet does. It refers to the prophetic vision, revelation which comes as the word of God.

Israel endured times when the prophetic word was silent. When Samuel was a young boy, "in those days the word of the LORD was rare" (1 Sam 3:1). For all the times Israel rejected the word, God sent a famine on the earth; not a famine of food and water, but an even more damaging famine: a famine of the word of God (Amos 8:12; see also 2 Chron 15:3; Ps 74:9).

Besides vision, a second key word has been misunderstood in this verse: the word perish. This does not refer to the perishing of churches with inactive planning committees (a fact which may be true on grounds other than those presented here in this text). Nor does it mean the perishing of the unevangelized heathen who will die in their sin if someone does not reach them quickly (a fact which is also true on other grounds).

The word translated in the KJV as "perish" has a very impressive background to it. It means "to cast off all restraint." It clearly warns that where the word of God is silenced so that it no longer comments on the local situation, the results are terrifying. The populace becomes ungovernable as they cast aside all that is decent and civil for whatever their own baser appetites wish to indulge in.

The best picture of how this takes place can be found in Exodus 32:25. While Moses was absent for a mere forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the law of God, the people began to fear that he would never return. Without the input of the prophetic word, the people began to get out of control. They cast off all restraint and began to dance about a newly made golden calf. They ate and drank and indulged in open immorality, apparently recalling what they had seen in Egypt.

Without the announcement of the word of God, teaches this text, the people will become unrestrained, disorderly and grossly obscene in their manner of life. The verb means to "let loose," that is, "to let one's hair down," whether literally or figuratively (see also Lev 13:45 and Num 5:18).

On the other hand, this proverb continues, "Blessed is he who keeps the law." Thus, on the one hand, people are in an untenable position when the voice of the preacher ceases, because they let loose and nothing is left to restrain them; but, on the other hand, they are only truly happy when they have the good fortune of possessing the word of God and then place themselves under the hearing and doing of that word. (Scroll down to page 262 in [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION OF Proverbs 29:18** - October 7, 1969 the Montreal, Canada police force went on strike. Because of what resulted, the day has been called **Black Tuesday**. A burglar and a policeman were slain. Forty-nine persons were wounded or injured in rioting. Nine bank holdups were committed (almost a tenth of the total number of holdups that occurred the previous year) along with 17 robberies at gunpoint. Usually disciplined, peaceful citizens joined the ruffraff and went wild, smashing some 1,000 plate glass windows in a stretch of 21 business blocks in the heart of the city, hauling away stereo units, radios, TVs and wearing apparel. While looters stripped windows of valuable merchandise, professional burglars entered stores by doors and made off with truckloads of goods. A smartly dressed man scampered down a street with a fur coat over each arm. With no police around to reign in crime, anarchy reigned! (A modern day picture of the book of Judges!)

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#### **JUDGES 21:25 A POIGNANT PASSAGE**

The book of Judges is vitally important for our post-Christian culture and the relatively somnolent American Church to consider and comprehend for it stands as a vivid, albeit tragic testimony to the fact that most of the nation of Israel continually went astray in their hearts (not all Israel for God always had a **believing remnant**). In other words their general **"direction"** (their walk, their conduct) was toward disobedience, not obedience to God's will and way! Centuries later the writer of Hebrews documented Israel's rebellious heart even from the very beginning. In Hebrews 3:10+ we see that the first generation of Israel, despite experiencing the miraculous

Divine deliverances through the Passover Lamb (a foreshadowing of Christ, cp Ex 12:3-14+, Jn 1:29+, 1Co 5:7, 8+, 1Pe 1:18, 19+, Lk 22:20+, Re 5:6+) and the Red Sea, nevertheless continually went astray in their hearts and did not know God's ways. While the Passover and the Red Sea are clearly beautiful OT **pictures** of salvation, they were still but **shadows** of genuine salvation. Salvation then as now is critically dependent upon one exercising his or her personal faith in the Good News (Gospel) of the Messiah (**Study the following passages** - Jn 1:11-13+, Jn 6:29, Jn 9:35-38, Jn 12:36, 44, Jn 14:1, Acts 4:12+, Acts 16:31+, Ro 10:9, 10+, 1Ti 1:16+, 1Pe 1:8,9+, 1Jn 3:23, 24+, 1Jn 5:13+, Jesus' own testimony Mk 1:15+). This **belief** or **faith** (See studies of **pistis** = **faith** and **pisteuo** = **believe**) is not merely **intellectual** assent, but is "**directional**", in that it puts a new desire in one's heart (2Co 5:17+, Ezek 36:26, 27+, Php 2:12+, Php 2:13+) to walk generally (not perfectly) in the **direction** of God's will and way (holiness, godliness, righteousness, etc). In other words while salvation was then and is now and forever entered into **ONLY by personal faith**, that **faith** is demonstrated to be real, genuine, saving faith by one's subsequent walk of obedience. To reiterate, obedience **does not** save a person, but it does show that one's faith is genuine.

#### Related Resources:

- Relationship of faith and obedience;
- Obedience of faith - Ro 1:5, 16:25
- Jas 2:14-26+

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**Vision** (02377) ([chazown/chazon](#)) describes a divine revelation by means of an oracle, a vision or a word from God (as to His prophets). The meaning is not so much the means (vision, oracle) but the end achieved (the message). This word speaks of God's direct revelation to people via His prophets, His "mouth pieces" as it were. Notice that in this passage "**vision**" is paralleled with the **law**, which further supports that the writer intends "**vision**" to mean a divine word or a word from God and, not someone's personal vision or dream.

**Chazon** - 35x in 34v - vision(31), visions(4) - 1 Sa 3:1; 1 Chr. 17:15; 2 Chr. 32:32; Ps. 89:19; Prov. 29:18; Isa. 1:1; Isa. 29:7; Jer. 14:14; Jer. 23:16; Lam. 2:9; Ezek. 7:13; Ezek. 7:26; Ezek. 12:22; Ezek. 12:23; Ezek. 12:24; Ezek. 12:27; Ezek. 13:16; Dan. 1:17; Dan. 8:1; Dan. 8:2; Dan. 8:13; Dan. 8:15; Dan. 8:17; Dan. 8:26; Dan. 9:21; Dan. 9:24; Dan. 10:14; Dan. 11:14; Hos. 12:10; Obad. 1:1; Mic. 3:6; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 2:2; Hab. 2:3

**Note** the first use of **chazon** in Scripture is found in 1Sa 3:1. Could this have anything to do with the fact that 1 Samuel historically immediately follows the book of Judges (Jdg 21:25)?

**Unrestrained** (06544) (**para**) means to let go, to let loose (literally was used to describe hair that was "loose" or unkempt - Lev 10:6NIV, cp Lev 13:45, "unbind the hair" = Nu 5:18), to unbind, to let run wild, to become ungovernable, to become unable to be reined in. **Para**' means to let loose, e.g. to let one's hair down, literally (Lev 13:45; Nu 5:18) or figuratively as in Ex 32:25+ where it is translated **out of control**. Note that the children of Israel were **out of control** when Moses (who received the "**vision**") was out of vision (pun intended)!

**Gilbrant** - The Hebrew word **pāra'** means "to be loose." By extension, the term may be understood as "to let alone," "to release" or "to show lack of restraint." The general sense of the word is to loose something, and **pāra'** is occasionally used in reference to hair which hung loosely and uncut. For example, the priests were prohibited from letting their hair become unkempt (Lev. 10:6; 21:10). Also, in the community of Israel, a person infected by a disease was required to leave his hair disheveled as one of the observable indicators to others of his uncleanness (Lev. 13:45). Furthermore, loosening the hair of a woman accused of adultery was part of the priestly test of her fidelity (Num. 5:18).

Permitting an individual or group to get out of control is another aspect of "letting loose." For example, while Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, Aaron allowed the Israelites to run wild into pagan practices so that they became a "laughingstock to their enemies" (Exo. 32:25, NIV; cf. 2 Chr. 28:19). Proverbs 29:18 indicates a similar sense by stating, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law" (NIV).

Several times in Proverbs, **pāra'** denotes willful rejection of wise instruction which results in suffering such consequences as poverty and shame (Prov. 1:25; 8:33; 13:18; 15:32). Elsewhere, the wise man avoids a dangerous option such as the path of the wicked (Prov. 4:15). According to Pharaoh, the Hebrews in Egypt were exhorted by Moses and Aaron to discontinue the slave labor forced upon them (Exo. 5:4). Finally, the Lord will not ignore nor relent from punishing the wicked conduct of Israel (Ezek. 24:14).

**Para'** - 17x in 14v - avoid(1), brought about a lack(1), control(1), draw the away(1), get out of control(1), go loose(1), lack of restraint(1), let(1), neglect(1), neglected(1), neglects(2), relent(1), uncover(2), uncovered(1), unrestrained(1). -Exod. 5:4; Exod. 32:25; Lev. 10:6; Lev. 13:45; Lev. 21:10; Num. 5:18; 2 Chr. 28:19; Prov. 1:25; Prov. 4:15; Prov. 8:33; Prov. 13:18; Prov. 15:32; Prov. 29:18; Ezek. 24:14



**Happy** (0835) 'eshher/eser related to the verb 'ashar = to go or be straight, to go on, to advance, to be right) and always refers to people but never to God. **Vine** writes that "Basically, this word connotes the state of "prosperity" or "happiness" that comes when a superior bestows his favor (blessing) on one. In most passages, the one bestowing favor is God Himself = Dt. 33:29. The state that the blessed one enjoys does not always appear to be "happy" = (Job 5:17-18). Eliphaz was not describing Job's condition as a happy one; it was "blessed," however, inasmuch as God was concerned about him. Because it was a blessed state and the outcome would be good, Job was expected to laugh at his adversity (Job 5:22). God is not always the one who makes one "blessed." = 1Ki 10:8."

**Keeps** (careful, guard, kept, observe, watch) (08104) shamar means to keep, watch, preserve, to guard, to be careful, to watch over, to watch carefully over, to be on one's guard. Hedge about as with thorns - the word the Hebrews used for a shepherd's keeping watch over a flock of sheep. Conveyed the idea of protection as in Ps 121:7-8+ (used 3 times!) In the great Aaronic blessing Nu 6:24+ The first use of **shamar** in Ge 2:15 is instructive as Adam was placed in the garden (a perfect environment) and was commanded to "**keep**" it which in the [Septuagint](#) is translated with [phulasso](#) (which is used to translate many of the OT uses of **shamar**) which means to guard like a military sentinel would at his post. Clearly Adam did not do a good job at "keeping" the garden safe from intruders! And because of this failure he was cast out of the garden and angels stationed to "**guard** (Lxx = [phulasso](#)) the way to the tree of life" so that he would not eat of it (Ge 3:24+). After Cain murdered Abel he answered God "Am I my brother's **keeper**?" (Ge 4:9)