

What does “heaping burning coals on your enemy’s head” mean?

Question: What does Romans 12:20 mean when it says, “If your enemy is hungry feed him, and if he is thirsty give him drink; **for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.**”

Answer: Heaping burning coals on the head is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22 and refers to a ritual in Egypt in which a person showed his repentance by carry a pan of burning charcoals on his head. In other words, when treat your enemy with kindness by meeting his needs, you are overcoming evil with good.

You’re piling up one good deed after another on your enemy, which is like piling up burning coals on his head. This creates a burning sense of shame, which will likely cause him to repent and change his attitude toward God and you.

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