

# **Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Lecture 8, Prosperity Gospel Part 1**

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This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number eight, Prosperity Gospel in Proverbs, part one.

Welcome to lecture eight on the biblical book of Proverbs.

Today, in lecture eight and in lecture nine, we will be looking at various aspects of the prosperity teaching of the book of Proverbs and try to relate it to some of the teachings and some of the ideas that are going around, especially in the Christian church worldwide, with regards to prosperity gospel teaching. You will notice in lectures eight and nine on this topic, they will be much shorter than lectures six and seven. We kept those lectures together because they were all in one and the same theme, but they turned out rather long.

So, if you have persisted with us, well done. From now on, the lectures will be much shorter and of a more manageable length. So, let's begin with looking at the teaching of the book of Proverbs on prosperity.

Biblical wisdom in general, and the book of Proverbs in particular, offers serious engagement with all aspects of social reality, including wealth, poverty, and the best ways to use one's resources. This includes careful guidelines for individuals to learn and practice the economic rules, moral and ethical principles, and religious sentiments conducive to economic success. What we have in the book of Proverbs is a holistic approach to the pursuit of happiness in life.

Biblical wisdom also warns of the dire consequences, the dire economic consequences of certain behaviors, activities, and choices. It provides practical and spiritual wisdom on how wealth may properly be made, kept, consumed, and invested. Furthermore, biblical wisdom employs economic calculation in the construction of value systems in order to critically evaluate and prioritize various things, attitudes, habits, and values in life.

Interestingly, while material prosperity is seen as a blessing, it is not the sole and ultimate measure of success, as we shall see. Nor is poverty always the most undesirable consequence of one's life choices. The material we are offering here presents resources for modern Jews and Christians on how to live well and do well in today's late capitalist global environment.

The argument I am presenting in Lectures 8 and 9 is first that the book of Proverbs is even more concerned with prosperity than is usually assumed but rather rarely

demonstrated. And second, that this preoccupation with prosperity is more complex, multifaceted, and holistic than is generally assumed. And thirdly, the materials about prosperity offered in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job do not offer a corrective or critique of the book of Proverbs but expand appreciatively on its main themes.

I want to do this against the background of the popular accusation against the book of Proverbs that it seems to promote, or at least forms the unwitting resource for simplistic types of prosperity gospel theologies or approaches. I turn now to a brief and somewhat simplistic definition of the prosperity gospel. The following definition is from the Collins Dictionary.

The prosperity gospel is, I quote, a modern version or, according to some, perversion of the gospel according to which the full blessings of God available to those who approach him in faith and obedience include wealth, health, and power. Two comments on this. The first one is it is rather unusual to have a dictionary entry making a value statement according to some perversion of the gospel, which seems to indicate the strength of feeling of the author of this dictionary entry and highlights the controversy and the problems associated with some, certainly, excesses of prosperity gospel teaching in recent decades.

The other thing I want to say is that, yes, indeed, prosperity gospel teaching usually focuses at least on these three aspects. Not only wealth, which is what prosperity most directly refers to, but also health, so physical and mental, emotional health, and social power, whether that is social prestige, political power, or economic power. All of these are involved.

Now, because all three are involved, we can see that, of course, the issues are so complex rich, and fascinating that in two brief lectures, I cannot cover all aspects of prosperity gospel teaching. I hope to do this in writing in the publication of a book on prosperity in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job in the near future. But for now, in these lectures, I want to focus only on teaching related to wealth.

So, I exclude health and power from these lectures, not because they're not important, but simply because the material would be so huge. It is really a book-length. It would be a book-length study to look at all three of these.

A brief survey of scholarly opinion. Again, this is very brief, just to put a few highlights and put my comments into a larger academic and scholarly perspective. But I realize, of course, that there is much more that could and perhaps even should be said in a longer contribution to the topic.

Very important in the discussions, the scholarly discussions, related to prosperity-type teaching in the book of Proverbs is the idea first raised by Klaus Koch in an article in 1955, originally in German, of the so-called deed-consequence connection

that seems to be so apparent in many of the sayings of the book of Proverbs. Koch called this the Tunergehenzusammenhang, and literally translated it means deed-consequence connection. The phrase was translated into English in 1983 as deed-consequence construct, and translating Zusammenhang as construct rather than connection made the fixed nature of the relationship between deed and consequence even stronger.

So, it strengthened the perception of an automatic connection between universal rules, as apparently expressed in many proverbs and their almost inevitable outcomes. Such rules are apparently so firmly built into how the universe works that God's active intervention was not even required according to Klaus Koch's argument. If humans follow the rules, they will more or less automatically reap the benefits of their actions.

I will come back to this a little bit later, but for now, I think it's important that we realize that the English translation of Klaus Koch's article has effectively only been challenged by Peter Hatton in a book published in 2008. But in the meantime, the idea of a mechanistic connection between how the world works and the consequences of human behavior has been widely accepted in the English-speaking world among scholars, academics, and pastors. And much of this kind of understanding also underlies much of popular prosperity-type teaching in very influential, big, large churches across the world, whether that's in North America, in some places in Europe, and especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia as well.

We will come back to this later after we have examined all the evidence that the book of Proverbs really provides to the topic. According to Craig Blomberg, in his book on Wealth and Prosperity, the Proverbs are arguably the most generalizable and timeless of the Old Testament teachings on material possessions. In his opinion, their proverbial nature means that they are often true, but not absolutely true in all circumstances.

So, Blomberg, a New Testament scholar, who in his book on Wealth has a significant chapter on the book of Proverbs, is actually challenging Klaus Koch's view and the view of many people who adhere to prosperity gospel teachings. We also have commentators on the book of Proverbs who have fundamentally different hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the various verses in the book of Proverbs. Trempe Longman is one of those who argue that individual proverbs in chapters 10-31 of the book should be read in isolation rather than in context.

I will actually show, on several occasions, how reading several proverbs together in the sequence in which they appear in the book as what I call clusters of proverbs, or proverbial clusters, rather than individual, independent sentences, enriches the meaning of those proverbs and also makes them much more nuanced, much more open-ended, and much more intelligent, in my view, so that proverbial clusters

together mean more than the sum of the individual parts. I will come back to this later in a later lecture when we will be looking at examples specifically in other areas, from chapters 10-29 in particular. Finally, surprisingly, considering how prominent the book of Proverbs is apparently in so many people's views related to the prosperity gospel phenomenon, it is actually relatively few specialist studies that do exist on wealth in the book of Proverbs.

The ones I want to mention are by Derek Kidner, by Catherine Dell, in the appendix of Trempe Longman's commentary, Blomberg's book already mentioned wealth and riches in his chapter on the book of Proverbs, and then most importantly, I think, Timothy Sandoval, also in a book on wealth in the book of Proverbs. A feature of many such treatments is that they recognize a sizable number of proverbs that apparently just tell the way things are, making statements of existence, characterizing reality apparently, without making value judgments. I will come back to this later, but as I hope to show when we go through the material, the relevant material in the book of Proverbs, that many of the statements that appear to be value-free are in fact contextually embedded in such a way, and sometimes also phrased, in the Hebrew at least, in such a subtle way, that they implicitly, indirectly challenge the reader to think, is this reality that is being described here a good thing or a bad thing? So, I would go beyond what many people, many academic interpreters of the book of Proverbs say, namely that even those statements, not all of them, but many of them, many, very many, who apparently just make a statement of how the reality of the world is, actually have subtle ways of adding value judgments to these statements.

Then I want to give a brief survey of popular treatments. I have to say at one level the material is of course huge because there is so much teaching and preaching on this going on, so many popular books on the subject, many TV sermons and so on. One could spend years of one's life exploring this.

My survey is just based on a small sample of TV, television sermons, and specific books or treatments of the subject by practitioners of prosperity gospel teaching and preaching. What I have found is, and I've summarized this under four headings, and again this is a very brief survey and of course, much more could be done and maybe should be done, but for the purpose of this lecture, I think to keep it manageable, I'll keep it relatively short. First of all, preachers and teachers select their materials to support prosperity gospel teachings from a wide range of sources in the Bible.

The book of Proverbs being only one of them, much sermon material, comes rather surprisingly, I was rather surprised by this, comes from the New Testament and disproportionately so from the Gospels and particularly with regard to quotations of Jesus' statements and teachings. They feature far more heavily than statements from the book of Proverbs. That really surprised me, I have to say, and it surprised me that

so much of the things that Jesus says in the Gospels can be interpreted or certainly has been interpreted in order to support prosperity gospel-type teaching.

I was surprised. Secondly, many of these sermons and treatments are spiked with biblical references all over. So, prosperity gospel teaching portrays itself as found fundamentally biblical teaching.

It is almost exclusively based, at least in the overt statements that are being made by preachers, on the Bible. However, very interesting, virtually all references that I have seen both in sermons and in popular books are used in a way that is often in academic circles described as proof-texting. Proof texting means that if a given reference, and I know I am rather harsh here, but I think the harsh point needs to be made, that if a given reference in the Bible, simply a statement, often just half of a verse or one verse, maximum two verses in sequence, quite regularly a range of four, five, six, seven verses from different parts of scripture all over the place, are being quoted to support the preacher's arguments.

If the reference says, what the preacher and teacher want to ground in biblical teaching is then quoted to prove the point, and here now comes the important part, without further interpretation or justification. Why is this so important? It is important because a statement that is taken out of context, and all of these statements, almost all of them, are taken out of context, can be made to support almost anything if the immediate or wider context is not being considered. And you could try this on anything yourself.

If you give an address or if you write a letter and any kind of statement in your letter is taken out of context, it can even be made to mean the opposite of what you actually wanted to say, which was clear to you as you composed the paragraph in your letter, but is not clear if only that one chunk from your letter is being quoted out of context. This brings me to the third point, which I've kind of hinted at already. Passages are almost always quoted out of context.

The underlying assumption is a fundamental trust in the Bible, and that is a good thing that I wholeheartedly support. But the underlying assumption behind that is that therefore everything and anything in the Bible is so straightforwardly true that it can be quoted in almost any circumstance as a bite-sized truth statement that does not need any further explanation, interpretation, or nuance. And that is a dangerous thing.

It is a very dangerous thing. And to draw a comparison, there were people in Second World War Germany who were quoting the Bible to support the genocide of Jews. There were people in the 18th, 19th, and even early 20th century, and maybe some still around here today in North America, who will quote passages from the Bible out of context to support slavery.

And I could go on with many other examples. Quoting biblical statements out of context is not acceptable if we truly believe that it is the living God who speaks through these words into the complex and important issues of the world then and now. Then my fourth point, and again I have slightly hinted at this already, throughout the meaning of scripture and individual passages or phrases or statements is seen as self-evidently obvious and without need of interpretation.

When we begin to look at the Book of Proverbs, I will try and show some examples of how one can interpret one and the same phrase in different ways, and that the statements are not nearly as straightforward and obvious as most people think they are. So, this really was the introduction to the lecture. We will now begin to look at prosperity in the Book of Proverbs itself.

First of all, I want to open with some general statements about wealth to set the scene. There are numerous general statements about wealth as a reward or consequence for wisdom or righteousness broadly conceived. Often, but not always, the Lord is explicitly named as the source of such a reward, the one who gives the reward for desirable behavior.

An example here is chapter 13, verse 11. Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

I will come back to chapter 13, verse 11 later on, but for now I just want to make a few brief comments. In conjunction with the preceding verse, verse 11, verse 12 on hope recognizes how hard it is to wait, but holds out great promise in the long term. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

And immediately we are hitting the possibility of different interpretations. The most straightforward interpretation of this verse, that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life, is that clearly to fulfill one's desire, being a tree of life, is much preferable than to defer one's hope because it makes the heart sick. That's the obvious, straightforward meaning of this verse.

But, if it is paired with verse 11, which says, wealth hastily, quickly, instantly, immediately gotten will dwindle away, whereas those who gather little by little by little, and it takes a long time to get there, will increase their wealth, highlights the importance of how quickly is this wealth gotten. And wealth that is gotten quickly is said to be no good, to dwindle away, whereas wealth that is gotten little by little, namely through hard work over a long time, through diligence, through skill, through hard labor, through patience, through persistence, all these important values, that will be a desire fulfilled, even though the urge for everybody, of course, is to have one's desire and hope fulfilled straight away, because the kind of delay of immediate

satisfaction, delayed satisfaction, is hard, is difficult. So, here we are, already, in one of those very first statements we've looked at.

I now turn to another group of Proverbs, which I'm just going to quote one after the other, and then make some comments on. Chapter 13, verse 21, Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous. The good leave an inheritance to their children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.

This seems to be straightforward. Again, of course, it is not. I don't have time to show why and how.

But I just want to show there are Proverbs that seem straightforward, and they suggest that if someone is not a sinner, but righteous, they will be blessed with wealth. This is formulated in a passive voice, so it's not said how the reward comes about. It is not clear how the wealth of the sinners is laid up for the righteous, and who is doing the laying up.

Is it the righteous themselves? Probably not, because it says, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous. So, the righteous are the ones who are doing the laying up. It seems, actually, it is the sinners who, as they accumulate their wealth unjustly, it is them who are laying it up for the righteous.

Really? Is that really true in the real world? Would it have been true then? To be honest, probably not. So, what may lie behind this indirect verbal statement is that it is actually God who is doing the laying up of the sinner's wealth for the righteous. And so, when it says, misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous, again in this sentence, verse 21, it appears to be prosperity itself doing the rewarding of the righteous.

But who is the one behind that? And this is partly why we have Klaus Koch's earlier argument that there is an almost automatic connection between deed and consequence. So, righteousness brings its own rewards in prosperity. And I would want to say because sinners are mentioned here, that it may well be God who is behind it, even though God is not mentioned.

And this is, of course, how most prosperity gospel teachers and preachers would interpret that verse. So, again, we have seen there are various kinds of interpretations possible. I turn to chapter 13, verse 23, so just one verse later.

The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. We will come back to this later. 1411, the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

If we compare this later statement with verse 11 in the same chapter, chapter 14, it says, the house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes. Who makes the tent of the upright flourish? Who destroys the house of the wicked? In verse 1, it is the wise woman herself who builds the house. It is the foolish woman herself who tears it down.

So, again, there are different nuances in verses, very similar verses in one and the same chapter. Chapter 15, verse 6, in the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. Again, this could be read as a straightforward prosperity statement.

Again, I would say, if we had the time, there was so much more nuance here. In chapter 15, verse 25, the Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries. So, here we have an explicit statement about the house of unsavory characters being torn down.

And here it is explicitly clear that it is the Lord who does the deed. Then chapter 19, verse 14, house and wealth are inherited from the parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. And it seems to be clear that, of course, there is some wealth that is not deserved, that is not gained, but that is just graciously received through an inheritance, for example.

And yet, chapter 19, verse 14 seems to suggest that to have a wise spouse, in this case, male-oriented ancient literature, a wife, but I think the same thing is true in all societies through all ages, the other way around, to have a wise husband is a gift from God. And here it seems very clear that positive familial relationships are seen as far more important, far more desirable than wealth. What emerges then from these verses is the impression that the acquisition or retention of wealth does not so much depend on faith and generous giving to religious causes, but rather on social justice and generosity towards the needy in society.

I now just want to highlight a few other fundamental assumptions in the Book of Proverbs, and I will support each of them just with one or two verses without further explanation, although again we could easily spend a long time on each of them, but the point I am trying to make is fairly clear in each of those verses, so I don't need to do the interpretation that would be worthwhile and would enrich what I'm trying to say, but nonetheless I think the verse itself speaks enough for itself to make the point. So first of all, the wise father's teaching commandments, identified with wisdom, bring long life and presumably health and wealth. For example, in chapter 3, verse 1, My child, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments.

For, and now comes the motivation, for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Again, so much more could be said. I'm proof-texting right

now myself, but I'm doing that for the sake of brevity, and here I think the statement is fairly straightforward.

Then another interesting thing, personified wisdom is the ultimate good, far more important than economic wealth. Chapter 8, verses 10 to 11, we've already touched on this in an earlier lecture. Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.

For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. So intellectual, spiritual virtue is seen as far more important than anything else we could possibly desire economically with regard to material wealth. That is what Lady Wisdom herself says about herself.

Then, personified wisdom brings social success or social prestige and abundant wealth through righteousness. Again, from chapter 8, verses 18 to 20, Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness along the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me and filling their treasuries. Wisdom brings success and abundant wealth, but she does so by helping the person who possesses wisdom to be righteous. I now turn, and this is quite a significant section in this lecture, I now turn to the fact that in many, many proverbs throughout the book, God delights in or favors professional honesty.

So, this is a theological category of sayings, but it's really important to understand that the spiritual connection between divine favor and blessings is not through one's faith, through one's spirituality, through one's emotions, through one's attitudes or whatever, but it is measured against straightforward economic exchange in the marketplace. This is about being honest in the workplace. Here are some of the sayings.

Actually, before I say that, I should also say, that when we hear of God's favor or God's approval or God's delight in these statements, we should not just think that this is somehow a detached value statement or judgment that the divine entity up in heaven somewhere remotely makes on human performance, but rather what these sayings seem to be suggesting is that God is emotionally involved in human behavior. The sayings really mean God delights in the right kind of economic behavior. Astonishing.

God actively delights in human honesty. Chapter 11, verse 1. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight. This, of course, goes back to ancient scales.

If we think of many of us, hopefully across the world, are still able to go to a local farmer's market and buy fresh produce, the produce will be weighed in scales, and the weight of the produce will be weighed, balanced, against a weight or a stone or a metal piece that designates a certain weight. And it is this false balance that is an abomination to the Lord. Again, not just a value, a legal value judgment, but God actually detests this.

God actively dislikes this. Whereas if merchants use accurate scales, or to put it more broadly, in other industries or commercial contexts, if people are honest and sell the product that they promise to the buyer, then God delights in that. God enjoys watching good business being done where everybody wins in the economic transaction.

Similarly, very similar, chapter 16, verse 11. Honest balances and scales are the Lord's. All the weights in the bag are His work.

Here the idea is that anybody who is an honest businessman, whether they know it or not, is somebody who has been energized and empowered and enabled and motivated by God to do it. A fascinating idea that the true force behind good market forces, and healthy market behavior, is God himself. Often in capitalist societies, in discussions of economics, when people talk about the market, the market becomes personified, similarly to personified wisdom.

And the market does this and the market does that and the market corrects and the market interacts with and all this sort of thing. Suddenly the market is an almost superhuman quasi-divine being. The book of Proverbs does not personify the market but says that it is God who is behind the ways in which good economic behavior and economic well-being for society is grounded.

God is the one who achieves this. And again we can see just how rich an interpretation or just such an apparently simple statement can be. Chapter 20, verse 10.

Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord. Now what's that about? First of all, the diverse weights and the measures, so the weights are about weight, measuring the weight of a commodity that is being sold and bought, whereas the measures are measuring the volume of a commodity that is being sold or bought. The fact that we are talking about diverse weights and diverse measures has to do with the fact that the merchants who are trying to trick the buyer into losing more money than they are getting value for, is when the merchants or sellers, when the merchants are selling a commodity, they will give a weight that says this is one kilogram or two pounds or whatever, but in reality the measure is actually only one and a half pounds or only 900 grams, not a thousand grams a kilogram.

Whereas if the same merchant is buying a commodity that they then want to sell on, they reverse the trick. And when they say, oh I want to buy from you one kilogram of rice, in fact, what they are doing is they are putting a weight on that is one and a half kilograms. So for the price of one kilogram, they get rice for the price of one and a half kilograms.

It's that kind of idea. And again, like they are an abomination to the Lord. This is not just a detached value statement.

God actively detests and hates this sort of thing. And God is emotionally involved when people take advantage of others in their business practices. Again chapter 20 verse 23, Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord and false scales are no good.

2017, bread gained by deceit is sweet, but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel. What a statement! Bread gained by deceit is sweet. So here now the bread of course is a metaphor that describes any kind of gain, economic gain that is being made.

And the metaphor is used to express a physical sensation, pleasurable physical sensation, namely whatever one gains through trickery and deceit looks very attractive, it tastes good to begin with, oh how nice, I got the better of her or him or whatever. It tastes sweet. But afterward, the proverb says, it will turn to gravel in one's mouth.

There is a long-term consequence for cheating. That's what the proverb is trying to say here. My final example, there could be many others, but my final example here is chapter 21 verse 6, The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapors and a snare of death.

What an astonishing statement! So here is someone who, whether it's to do, maybe they have been bribed, given a lot of money to be a false witness, or they are asked to give an expert opinion on the value of a commodity that is up for sale or whatever, and they are lying in order to make big money, and they may well make big money. They get treasures out of it. But the proverb says treasures gotten in this way are like a puff of wind, like the breath, a human breath on a cool early morning that instantly evaporates.

It looks great for a moment and then it's gone. And even worse, ultimately, this is a snare of death, because there will be consequences through, I believe implicitly, divine judgment. Another important thing is the flip side of this sort of unjust economic behavior.

And I think this is relevant and important to state and to pay attention to, especially with regard to prosperity-type teaching. And to be fair to prosperity gospel teaching practitioners, I think they are partly aware of this. And it is this, that sometimes, maybe quite often in fact, the righteous may suffer through the injustice of others.

So, while the Book of Proverbs promises those who behave in righteous ways, God's delight, God's blessings, rewards that come towards them, and everything else, it is also realistic about the fact that even though just righteous, decent, honest people may little by little save up something, do well for themselves, progress financially and socially and everything else, there is always the vulnerability and the possibility that other people snatch it away from them in the ways we have just described and many other ways that have to do both with direct individual crimes and also unjust systematic rules in wider society, systemic injustices in the world. So, here are some examples. Chapter 11, verse 30.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes lives away. Again, more could be said, but we have a lot of material to get through, so bear with me. In the context of two verses earlier in Chapter 11, verse 28, it says, those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.

So, here we have botanic imagery, a tree of life, the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but it can be taken away by violence. Whereas those who trust in their riches, and here this is not necessarily bad people or unjust people or wicked people, but it could be righteous people, decent people who trust in their riches, but because, as we read two verses earlier, that can be taken away by violence. If that is all they rely on, it may wither away under their hands.

Whereas those who are not only interested in riches but in the more important value of righteousness, of moral and economic decency, of honesty, of contributing to the welfare of their communities, proverb says, will flourish like green leaves. And ultimately then, their fruit, the fruit of the righteous in verse 30, will become a tree of life. Tree of life for whom? For themselves? Maybe.

But more likely, if they are righteous because they are not trusting in their riches, maybe the way the fruit of their righteousness becomes a tree of life, not for themselves, but for the good and benefit of others around them. They, in fact, are the tree of life for others, through their righteousness, which they put before their desire for riches. What they rely on are the divine virtues of love for one's neighbor.

That is what makes them righteous. We will come back to righteousness and its impact on other people in a few minutes. The following verse shows that poor people may gain financial success through hard work, but that social injustice or specific exploitation may deprive them of the fruit of their work.

Chapter 13, verse 23. The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. We are not told what that injustice is.

That is not a problem. But what we need to do is imaginatively interpret what that injustice could be. And that is why I have said it could be specific exploitation, it could be social injustice in general, it could be a crime, it could be a violent theft, all sorts of different kinds of things.

The underdetermined nature of the statement opens up all of these possibilities that make decent people's achievements, economic achievements in this life, vulnerable to being depleted. The next and several other verses are expressed as a piece of advice and phrased as a commandment in imperative form. Chapter 22, verse 28.

Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up. Again, much more could be said, but the verse shows that the violation of property rights is a serious matter. Compare this with the following verse, which puts orphans, one of the important triad of orphans, widows, and foreigners, who are under God's special protection throughout the Bible and especially in the prophetic books and in the book of Proverbs.

Those three, are orphans, widows, and foreigners. Chapter 23, verses 10 and 11. Do not remove an ancient landmark or encroach on the fields of orphans, for their Redeemer is strong.

He will plead their cause against you. Why do these people need a Redeemer and why does that Redeemer need to plead a cause? The reason is that normally in ancient Israelite society, the people who could stand up in court and make a case for just treatment would be men in the society. So, widows and orphans don't have fathers and husbands and foreigners would often not be allowed to represent themselves in the same way as indigenous Israelites in courts and therefore they needed special protection.

And the Redeemer here, which often has theological overtones, is very likely God in this verse. In fact, God is concerned for the vulnerable in society, those who cannot help or defend themselves against economic exploitation. As, for example, in 15, 25.

The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries. Chapter 24, verse 15. Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the righteous.

Do no violence to the place where the righteous live. Verse 16. For though they fall seven times, they will rise again.

But the wicked are overthrown by calamity. How so? Again, this is kind of perhaps a statement. The motivation is somewhat unrealistic if we look at it from a purely human perspective because often, of course, when the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the foreigners are mistreated, they cannot rise up seven times.

Very few people have that tenacity from a purely human perspective. And it is also the case that the wicked are not always overthrown by calamity in this life. But here the religious wisdom of the proverbial collection suggests that there is a long-term consequence on either side of the equation because God is interested in the affairs of human beings and especially in the well-being of those who are so vulnerable in society that they cannot help themselves.

We are now going to take a short break and we'll then return with lecture nine with the second part on prosperity in the book of Proverbs. Thank you.