

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, “Prosperity Gospel,” Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, “Prosperity Gospel,” Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Knut Heim's lecture examines the concept of prosperity as portrayed in the Book of Proverbs, contrasting it with the modern "prosperity gospel." **Heim argues** that Proverbs engages more deeply with prosperity than commonly assumed, presenting a nuanced and holistic view. He **critiques** the prosperity gospel's tendency toward proof-texting and selective interpretation of scripture. **The lecture analyzes** various proverbs, exploring different interpretations and highlighting the importance of considering context. Finally, **Heim emphasizes** Proverbs' concern for social justice and the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized, even amidst discussions of wealth.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Heim, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Proverbs).**



**Heim_Prov_Session
08.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, "Prosperity Gospel," Part 1

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript, "Heim_Prov_EN_Lec08_ProspertyGospel_Pt1.pdf":

Briefing Document: Prosperity in the Book of Proverbs (Part 1)

Overview:

This lecture, the first of two on the topic of prosperity in the Book of Proverbs, aims to explore the complexities of the text's teachings on wealth, in contrast with simplistic "prosperity gospel" theologies. Dr. Heim argues that Proverbs is deeply concerned with prosperity, more so than commonly recognized, but in a nuanced and holistic way that considers social justice, ethics, and the role of divine involvement. The lecture contrasts the Proverbs with popular interpretations of the "Prosperity Gospel" and establishes the methodology for future discussions.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Holistic View of Prosperity in Proverbs:

- Proverbs engages with all aspects of social reality, including wealth, poverty, and the best use of resources.
- It provides guidelines for economic success, moral principles, and religious sentiments, aiming for "a holistic approach to the pursuit of happiness in life."
- The book warns of the consequences of certain behaviors and offers practical advice on how to make, keep, use and invest wealth.
- Material prosperity is seen as a blessing, but not the ultimate measure of success. Poverty is not always the worst outcome.
- The study is presented as a resource for modern engagement with prosperity.
- Heim will argue in lectures 8 and 9 that Proverbs is "even more concerned with prosperity than is usually assumed" and that this is "more complex, multifaceted, and holistic than is generally assumed."

1. The Prosperity Gospel Defined and Critiqued:

- Heim defines the prosperity gospel using the Collins Dictionary: "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."
- He notes that the "perversion" label reflects the controversy surrounding the prosperity gospel.
- He acknowledges that the prosperity gospel typically focuses on wealth, health, and power but will limit the scope of these lectures to wealth.
- Heim intends to demonstrate that the Book of Proverbs is not a simplistic support for the prosperity gospel, as is often assumed.

1. Scholarly Perspectives on Proverbs:

- **Klaus Koch's "Deed-Consequence Connection" (Tunergehenzusammenhang):** Koch's 1955 article suggested an automatic connection between deeds and consequences. This was translated in 1983 as "deed-consequence construct," strengthening the perception of an inevitable connection between actions and outcomes, even without direct divine intervention. Dr. Heim notes that the translation of "Zusammenhang" as construct made the connection seem even more mechanistic.
- **Critiques of Koch:** Heim notes that this view has been widely accepted, but notes that Peter Hatton's 2008 book is one of the few to challenge the view in the English speaking world. Craig Blomberg also challenged this view, arguing that the proverbs are often true, but not absolutely true in all circumstances.
- **Interpretation:** Tremper Longman argues that individual proverbs should be read in isolation. Heim will disagree with this approach, arguing that "proverbial clusters" add depth and nuance to interpretation.
- **Limited Academic Study:** Heim notes that, despite the prominence of Proverbs in relation to prosperity teachings, there are relatively few specialist studies of wealth in the book. He notes works by Derek Kidner, Catherine Dell, Tremper Longman, Craig Blomberg and Timothy Sandoval.
- **Value-Free Statements:** Many studies consider some proverbs as making objective statements without value judgements. Heim argues many statements that *seem* value-free are contextually embedded, with subtle ways to indicate

implied value judgements, thus urging readers to consider the implications of a given reality as being "good" or "bad".

1. Popular Treatments of the Prosperity Gospel:

- **Biblical Selection:** Prosperity gospel teachers draw materials from across the Bible, not just Proverbs. Heim was surprised that the Gospels and the words of Jesus are used even more often than Proverbs.
- **Proof-texting:** Preachers often use isolated verses ("proof-texting") without proper interpretation or consideration of context. Heim states that "a statement that is taken out of context ... can be made to support almost anything if the immediate or wider context is not being considered."
- **Out-of-Context Quotations:** Passages are often quoted out of context. This practice assumes that everything in the Bible is "straightforwardly true" and can be used without interpretation, which Heim argues is "a very dangerous thing." He gives examples of bible verses used out of context to support slavery and genocide.
- **Self-Evident Meaning:** Scripture is treated as having self-evident meaning, without the need for interpretation. This neglects the possibility of multiple interpretations and nuances in the text.

1. Initial Exploration of Proverbs on Wealth:

- **Wealth as Reward or Consequence:** Proverbs makes general statements about wealth as a reward for wisdom or righteousness, often with the Lord as the source. Examples given include Proverbs 13:11 "Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it." This is paired with Proverbs 13:12: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."
- **Interpretational Complexity:** Proverbs are not as straightforward as they may seem. Verses can be interpreted in different ways, and must be considered in conjunction with other verses. Heim shows that 13:11 and 13:12 can be interpreted in conjunction, with 13:11 emphasizing that wealth gained little by little will last, but 13:12 is about desire, and is made more clear by pairing the two.

- **Other Key Proverbs (with initial interpretations):13:21-22:** Righteousness leads to prosperity, and the wealth of sinners will be laid up for the righteous. Though these verses *appear* to support an automatic deed-consequence connection, Heim points out that it is unclear *who* is laying up wealth for the righteous, and says that it may well be God.
- **13:23:** The field of the poor may yield much food, but injustice can sweep it away.
- **14:1:** The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down.
- **14:11:** The house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes. The nuances of this verse are compared with 14:1.
- **15:6:** The house of the righteous has treasure, but the income of the wicked faces trouble.
- **15:25:** The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries.
- **19:14:** House and wealth are inherited, but a prudent wife is a gift from the Lord. This implies that relationships are more important than wealth.
- **Justice and Generosity:** Proverbs emphasizes the role of social justice and generosity toward the needy, implying that these factors, rather than faith, are crucial for acquiring and keeping wealth.

1. Key Assumptions in Proverbs

- **Wisdom Brings Life and Wealth:** The teachings of the wise bring long life, health and wealth (3:1).
- **Wisdom is the Ultimate Good:** Wisdom is more important than wealth (8:10-11).
- **Wisdom Brings Social Success:** Wisdom brings social success, prestige and wealth through righteousness (8:18-20).

1. God and Honesty:

- **Divine Favor:** God favors professional honesty and dislikes unjust economic behavior. These are theological categories, where God is seen as emotionally involved in the behavior of humans, not just offering detached value statements.
- **Examples:11:1:** False balances are an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight.

- **16:11:** Honest balances and scales are the Lord's work.
- **20:10:** Diverse weights and diverse measures are an abomination.
- **20:23:** Differing weights are an abomination.
- **20:17:** Bread gained by deceit is sweet but turns to gravel.
- **21:6:** Treasures gained by a lying tongue are fleeting and a snare of death.
- **God's Emotional Involvement:** God is not a detached judge, but is emotionally invested in human economic behavior and is actively involved in ensuring justice.

1. **The Vulnerability of the Righteous and Social Injustice**

- **Realistic View:** While Proverbs connects righteousness to prosperity, it also recognizes the reality of suffering due to injustice.
- **Examples:**
 - **11:30:** The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes life.
 - **11:28:** Those who trust in riches will wither.
 - **13:23:** The field of the poor can be swept away by injustice.
 - **22:28:** Do not remove an ancient landmark.
 - **23:10-11:** Do not encroach on the fields of orphans, for their Redeemer is strong.
 - **15:25:** The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.
 - **24:15-16:** Do not lie in wait against the home of the righteous.
- **God's Protection:** God is specifically concerned for the vulnerable (orphans, widows, foreigners) who are vulnerable to economic exploitation.
- **Long-term Consequences:** While the wicked don't always face immediate justice, Proverbs suggest they will experience long term consequences, while the righteous will ultimately be rewarded. This suggests that God's involvement guarantees justice, even when it is not immediately apparent.

Conclusion:

This lecture provides a foundation for a deeper exploration of prosperity in the Book of Proverbs. Dr. Heim challenges simplistic interpretations, particularly those associated with the prosperity gospel, and highlights the book's complex engagement with wealth, justice, ethics, and the divine. He introduces key themes that will be further developed in the next lecture, including the connection between divine favor and economic activity, and the vulnerability of the righteous. The emphasis is on a holistic understanding of prosperity, where wealth is a blessing only when it is intertwined with righteousness and a commitment to social justice.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, "Prosperity Gospel," Part 1

Proverbs and the Prosperity Gospel: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the central argument Dr. Heim presents regarding the book of Proverbs and prosperity?
2. How does the Collins Dictionary define the "prosperity gospel," and what is significant about its definition?
3. What is the "deed-consequence connection" as proposed by Klaus Koch, and how has it influenced interpretations of Proverbs?
4. According to Dr. Heim, how do popular preachers of the prosperity gospel use biblical references?
5. What does Dr. Heim mean by "proof-texting" and why does he find it problematic in prosperity gospel teachings?
6. How does Dr. Heim initially interpret Proverbs 13:11-12, and what is the significance of pairing the verses?
7. According to the lecture, what does Proverbs 13:21 suggest about the relationship between righteousness and prosperity?
8. What is the key takeaway from the Proverbs concerning God's delight in professional honesty (e.g. Proverbs 11:1, 16:11)?
9. How does the book of Proverbs address the reality that the righteous may suffer injustice?
10. What does Dr. Heim say about the significance of Proverbs 23:10-11 and their view of social justice?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Heim argues that the book of Proverbs is more concerned with prosperity than commonly assumed, and its approach to prosperity is more complex and holistic than often portrayed. He also argues that the books of Ecclesiastes and Job do not offer a critique but an expansion of Proverbs.

2. The Collins Dictionary defines the prosperity gospel as a version of the gospel where God's blessings include wealth, health, and power for those who approach him in faith and obedience. It's significant because the definition includes a value statement, calling it a "perversion," highlighting its controversial nature.
3. The "deed-consequence connection" is the idea that Proverbs teaches a mechanistic link between actions and outcomes, implying that following moral rules automatically leads to prosperity. This view has suggested that God's intervention isn't required.
4. Popular preachers select materials from across the Bible, not only Proverbs, to support prosperity gospel teachings, heavily featuring the Gospels and the words of Jesus. They often use these references to present their teachings as fundamentally biblical.
5. "Proof-texting" is the practice of quoting isolated biblical statements out of context to support a particular viewpoint without further interpretation or justification. Dr. Heim finds it problematic because these statements, when removed from their original context, can be made to support almost anything.
6. Initially, Dr. Heim interprets Proverbs 13:11-12 as showing the preference of fulfilling one's desires, but he suggests that, paired together, these verses highlight how quickly wealth is gained influences its value and lasting power. The verses suggest the importance of delayed gratification.
7. Proverbs 13:21 suggests that prosperity is the reward of the righteous, seemingly stating an almost automatic connection between righteousness and reward; however, Dr. Heim points out that it does not specifically say who or what provides that reward.
8. The Proverbs emphasize that God actively delights in professional honesty, viewing ethical practices like accurate scales and honest dealings in the marketplace as divinely favored. God is not detached, but emotionally involved in and delights in righteous economic behavior.
9. The book of Proverbs acknowledges that the righteous may suffer injustice and exploitation, despite their righteous behavior. It recognizes that their hard work and achievements can be taken away through the actions of others and systems of injustice.

10. These verses address property rights and the special protection of the vulnerable, especially orphans. God is said to be the "Redeemer" who will advocate for their cause, emphasizing divine concern for social justice, those who cannot defend themselves against economic exploitation.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following essay questions with reference to the source material.

1. Discuss the challenges Dr. Heim presents to the idea that the book of Proverbs promotes a simple "deed-consequence" relationship between righteousness and prosperity. Include specific examples of proverbs he uses in his argument.
2. Analyze Dr. Heim's critique of popular interpretations and applications of scripture within prosperity gospel teachings. Explain why he believes proof-texting and taking verses out of context is problematic.
3. Explore the tension between the book of Proverbs' emphasis on individual responsibility for wealth creation and its recognition of social injustices that may impact the righteous. How does Dr. Heim reconcile this tension?
4. How does Dr. Heim use the concepts of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs to critique the excessive pursuit of wealth? And how does that concept impact his reading of prosperity-related proverbs?
5. Evaluate the importance of the divine favor and approval for the righteous that Dr. Heim identifies in Proverbs. What does the source material mean by 'delight' when describing God's feelings toward righteous behavior?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Prosperity Gospel:** A modern interpretation of the Christian gospel that emphasizes wealth, health, and power as blessings that are available to those who have faith and obedience.
- **Deed-Consequence Connection:** The idea, proposed by Klaus Koch, that the book of Proverbs implies a mechanistic and automatic relationship between human actions and their consequences (moral behavior leads to material success).
- **Tunergehenzusammenhang:** The original German phrase for the "deed-consequence connection," coined by Klaus Koch.
- **Proof-texting:** The practice of quoting isolated biblical verses or statements out of context to support a specific viewpoint without further interpretation or justification.
- **Proverbial Clusters:** The concept introduced by Dr. Heim that argues that some proverbs are best understood when read together, rather than in isolation.
- **Holistic Approach (to prosperity):** The idea that the concept of prosperity should not be limited to wealth alone, but should encompass ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions.
- **Personified Wisdom:** The literary technique in Proverbs where wisdom is presented as a female figure ("Lady Wisdom") and a source of moral guidance and prosperity.
- **Redeemer:** Often used in biblical contexts to mean one who advocates for or frees another, Dr. Heim connects this term to God who specifically looks after the vulnerable, especially orphans and widows.
- **Abomination:** A term frequently used in Proverbs to describe something that God detests or actively dislikes, particularly dishonest business practices and injustice.

5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, “Prosperity Gospel,” Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Proverbs and Prosperity Gospel

- **What is the core argument about prosperity presented in the Book of Proverbs, according to Dr. Heim?** Dr. Heim argues that the Book of Proverbs is deeply concerned with prosperity, even more than typically assumed. However, this concern is complex and multifaceted, encompassing not just material wealth, but also ethical conduct, social justice, and divine favor. The book is not merely a simplistic guide to riches but a holistic approach to a good life. Further, the materials in Ecclesiastes and Job expand upon these themes rather than critique them.
- **How does the "prosperity gospel," as commonly understood, align with or differ from the teachings in Proverbs?** The "prosperity gospel" often suggests that faith and obedience will lead to wealth, health, and power as God's blessings. While Proverbs does connect righteous behavior with prosperity, it doesn't present this connection as a guarantee. Moreover, the prosperity gospel often focuses on individual material gain and lacks the social justice and ethical nuance present in Proverbs. It also tends to proof-text and use verses out of context.
- **What is the "deed-consequence construct," and how has it impacted interpretations of Proverbs?** The "deed-consequence construct," or *Tunergehenzusammenhang*, posits a direct, almost mechanistic link between one's actions and their outcomes, as if the universe operates through automatic rules rather than divine intervention. This concept, which has been widely accepted, especially in the English speaking world, and particularly among prosperity gospel teachers, implies that if people follow the rules (i.e., act righteously), they will automatically reap rewards like wealth. Dr. Heim notes that this oversimplification has recently been challenged but it continues to influence popular religious views.

- **How does Dr. Heim critique the practice of "proof-texting," common in prosperity gospel preaching?** Dr. Heim critiques proof-texting as the practice of quoting biblical verses out of context to support a predetermined argument without further interpretation. This practice is particularly problematic because verses taken out of their immediate and wider context can be made to mean almost anything, even the opposite of their intended meaning. For example, he notes that some used out-of-context verses from the Bible to support slavery and genocide in previous historical contexts. The Book of Proverbs, according to Dr. Heim, is not so straightforward, with multiple meanings depending on the way verses are interpreted in context.
- **What are some examples from Proverbs where wealth is linked to wisdom and righteousness?** Proverbs often states or suggests that wealth is a reward for wisdom and righteousness, often explicitly attributed to the Lord. For example, Proverbs 13:21 says "Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous" and Proverbs 15:6 says "in the house of the righteous there is much treasure". These verses, however, can be interpreted in various ways and require contextual interpretation to understand that God is behind the reward.
- **What are some nuances in Proverbs regarding the source of wealth and the actions that lead to it?** Proverbs stresses that wealth is best gained through honest work, patience, diligence, and skill. "Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it" (13:11) highlights the preference for slow, steady gain. Proverbs also mentions that inherited wealth exists (19:14) but that familial relations and wisdom are more valuable than simply having money.
- **How does Proverbs view honesty in the marketplace, and what is God's role in this?** Proverbs emphasizes that God delights in professional honesty. Passages such as Proverbs 11:1 ("A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight") and Proverbs 16:11 ("Honest balances and scales are the Lord's") indicate that dishonest business practices are abhorrent to God, and that God is actively involved with the world of human economic exchange. Honest business practices are not just viewed as a detached value statement but as an activity that God is emotionally invested in. Proverbs suggests that the true force behind healthy markets is God.

- **What does the book of Proverbs say about the vulnerability of the righteous and the possibility of injustice?** Proverbs recognizes that even the righteous can suffer due to the injustice of others, as in "The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice" (13:23). The book acknowledges that while righteous behavior is generally blessed, evil and systemic injustice may still cause the righteous to experience loss and suffering. God is seen as the protector of the vulnerable, especially orphans, widows, and foreigners, who are particularly susceptible to exploitation.