

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Lecture 16, Proverbs 28-29

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This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 16, Proverbs chapters 28 and 29.

Welcome to lecture 16 on the Biblical book of Proverbs.

As in the previous lecture, we are still looking at collection number 5 of the book chapters 25 to 29 which, as most people agree, is in a particular way addressed to leaders, fledgling leaders in society, helping to form them into competent representatives, leaders, supporters of their communities. Here I want to focus particularly on two variant repetitions, both of which appear in chapter 28, namely verses 12 and verse 28, and then compare them with some other interesting related proverbs, two in chapter 29 and one in chapter 11. Let me read verses 12 and 28.

When the righteous rejoice, great glory. But when the wicked arise, people take cover. When the wicked arise, people hide.

But when they perish, the righteous increase. Again, it would be easy to read over these verses quickly and think, oh yeah, okay, that makes sense, straightforward, obvious, not worth mentioning any further or reflecting further on. It seems all straightforward.

But what I want to do first of all now in the next few minutes is to again help us focus on the details and nuances of the parallelism and then to begin to unpack imaginatively how these proverbs can be read for all their worth. In verse 28, the traditional paradigm would have described this verse as antithetical parallelism. This would have raised the expectation that every word in the first half-line has a semantic counterpart in the second.

But this is not the case. Listen to the corresponding elements now again in translation, a quite literal translation. In the rejoicing, in the rising, the righteous, the wicked, great glory, people take cover.

The terms righteous and wicked, of course, are the standard contrasting appellations for good and bad people in the wisdom thinking of ancient Israel. And when considered in isolation, the expressions in the rejoicing and in the rising, however, are not equivalent or even similar in meaning from a semantic point of view. However, the expression, when the righteous rejoice, envisions the emotions that would accompany the well-being and high social status that righteous people would have in a just society.

And so, the elation of the righteous is a metonymy equivalent to the rise of the wicked mentioned in the contrasting second half-verse. The expressions great glory and people hide, again, also seem entirely unrelated. But again, there are metaphorical correspondences.

The expression great glory, in conjunction with the description of a just society, envisions the open celebrations of justice and happiness that might accompany the liberation of an oppressed society. Conversely, if wicked people are in control, the general population will be afraid and will try to keep out of harm's way. Consequently, the two expressions describe contrasting patterns of behavior by focusing on different aspects, namely the accompanying emotions, as opposed to the action itself, of this conduct.

Now we look at verse 28 and the parallelism there. When the wicked arise, when they perish, hide, increase, people, the righteous. The correspondences in this verse are, again, not what they appear.

If the verse is seen as an antithetical parallelism, the traditional label that would have been applied, one would expect some of the words to be antonyms and perhaps one element to be synonymous. Yet this is not so. I want to highlight the following three aspects of parallelism in this verse.

First, the phrases in the first set of correspondences are not exact opposites. They clearly contrast with one another, but the opposite of the rise of the wicked would be their decline, not their death. They perish.

Second, the situation in the second set is similar. While there is a contrast of some sort, the opposite of increase would be decrease or diminish, not hide. Conversely, the opposite of hide would emerge or come into the open, not increase.

Third, the way in which the parallelism is set up makes the words in the third set of corresponding terms match up in some way, but they are not synonyms. Not all people are righteous. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the natural semantic antonym or antithesis of zadiqim, righteous, is wicked, that is the first word in the verse, not adam, people, the word with which it is paralleled here.

Why am I going into such detail over this? Well, these considerations have in fact wide-ranging consequences for the interpretation of the proverb, which is far more subtle than appears at first sight. To illustrate this, let me now look in some detail at the interpretation of Roland Murphy of this verse in his commentary, which is, by the way, representative of the traditional interpretation. He says, I quote, One goes into hiding to avoid harm from wicked authorities, but with the downfall of the wicked, the just come into the open.

They are many, that is, they emerge and prosper. They are now in positions of some power. First of all, I want to highlight here that this kind of interpretation is really kind of confirming our initial impression of these proverbs that, well, they are just saying the opposite, they are saying the obvious.

And Murphy's interpretation is not really so much an interpretation of this, but simply a slightly more expansive rephrasing of what the apparently obvious meaning and statements of this proverb are. Note in particular the threefold glossing of, come into the open, by means of the phrases, they are many, that is, they emerge and prosper. They are now in positions of some power.

This short paragraph records no less than five exegetical decisions, three of which bear all the hallmarks of the traditional interpretation based on the paradigm of strict parallelism. First, the expression wicked authorities interpret the phrase which literally says when the wicked arise. Secondly, the phrase one goes into hiding interprets the literal expression humanity hides.

These two interpretations are uncontroversial. By contrast, however, the remaining three exegetical decisions are less persuasive, in my opinion. So, thirdly, the phrase downfall of the wicked now paraphrases when they perish.

This is, of course, entirely in line with the traditional analysis of antithetical parallelism and the idea of strict or precise parallelism. However, while the downfall, the decline of the wicked is clearly the opposite of their rise, the concept in the parallel slot, is not what the expression means. The expression when they perish clearly implies not the rise from power, the decline of power, but the death of the wicked.

Fourth, Murphy's phrase, the just come into the open, is a reinterpretation of the Hebrew word, they increase, for they increase. The real meaning of which Murphy acknowledges with his first gloss, the expression, they are many. Note also that come into the open is a deliberate interpretation of the phrase in the light of its putative antonym, hide.

While Murphy correctly relates these two particular items as being parallel, the problem is that he feels constrained to see them as exact antonyms. This evaluation is confirmed by the second gloss, the gloss, they emerge and prosper is an attempt to combine the Hebrew term's literal meaning with Murphy's reinterpretation. For the word emerge is a gloss for come into the open and prosper is within the semantic range of the root to increase or to number.

And then finally, the curious third gloss, they are now in positions of some power, is unexpected, given Murphy's initial correlation of righteous with adam, man, and

humanity, in the expression, they go into hiding. What then led him to the conclusion that the righteous are now in positions of power? One influence may have been the immediate context, especially verse 22 in the following chapter, 29.2, and verse 16 in the following chapter, 29.16, and we will look at these verses in a few minutes. Furthermore, the traditional paradigm predicts that parallel slots in Hebrew parallelism are either synonyms or antonyms.

Murphy appears to have drawn an inverse inference from these presuppositions. Since the natural antonym of the righteous is the wicked, they must consequently be parallel. Since the wicked were more powerful in the first half of the antithetical parallelism, Murphy concluded that the righteous will become powerful once the wicked have lost their stronghold in society.

The old paradigm of precise parallelism has exerted a powerful, if probably unconscious, influence on his interpretation. There is a possible objection to my argument in what I have just been saying. Often the assumption is made that the Hebrew verb *rabah* carries both meanings, namely to increase and also to become powerful.

One might argue that Murphy has simply interpreted the verb based on its accepted meanings. However, I hope to show in the next few minutes that this is not the case at all. To anticipate the conclusion of my argument, which by the way will be rather long and very, very detailed, the lexical decisions on which these identifications of this supposed double meaning of the Hebrew verb *rabah* is based are in fact themselves dependent on methods already derived from the theory of precise parallelism in the first place.

Consequently, Murphy's interpretation of *rabah* to increase also to mean to be powerful is based on the theory either way, whether on the supposed meaning of the verb or on the supposed antithesis of the righteous and the wicked in this verse. In what follows, I will now present and defend my own interpretation of verse 28 based on the principles of analysis that I have been advocating throughout this lecture series. And while there will be a lot of detail in what follows now, I hope to kind of showcase just how much can be gained with a diligent imaginative interpretation that really takes a much broader view of parallelism and also of the significance of metaphor.

Now again, for ease of comparison with Murphy's understanding, I will now summarize his view here. When criminals gain significant influence in society, many people will withdraw from public life. When, however, such criminals are brought to justice, an increasing percentage of the population will adopt higher moral values and behavior.

Now, here are some comments on his phrase, on the phrase, many people will withdraw from public life. While the word people in Hebrew is a collective term for people in general, the word adam, does not mean that the term does regularly and here refer to everybody. In practice, there will always be people who feel attracted to power and success, people who will accommodate themselves to or who will join forces with the wicked.

Others, however, will indeed fear potential abuse and or exploitation. An open display of possessions and or optimistic happiness will be avoided. Public opposition to injustices will be rare.

Now, I make some comments on the phrase in the summary of Murphy, when such criminals are brought to justice, the severity of the punishment, they will perish, implies the serious nature of the crimes committed by these wicked and the extent of the threat they have posed to society. They are not just punished, they are killed. The wicked are not simply people who are less than perfect in a general sense.

The fear they inspire in the general population suggests that the term here refers to truly dangerous people who have both the means and the desire to impose their selfish goals on society through exploitation, coercion, and violence. The wicked here are hardened criminals. Now, I make some comments on Murphy's statement that they will adopt higher moral values and behavior with regard to the righteous.

The appellation righteous is not simply a generalized characterization of people who are in some indeterminate way considered good. Rather, I believe, the term refers to people of character and virtue who actively seek the good of society. And I have made that case just in the previous lecture when we looked at Proverbs 25 verse 28.

The righteous are a source of blessing for others, who should not give way before the wicked. These are the righteous we are talking about here. Then, also some comments on Murphy's statement, an increasing percentage of the population.

This phrase, an increasing percentage of the population, for Murphy, paraphrases the Hebrew verb rabah, to increase. Now, there is a general consensus that this verb sometimes means to increase or become powerful. So, for example, the relevant article in the standard Hebrew-English dictionary, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.

But if this were so, why repeat the increase as well? Now, the references listed to support this claim are few. Genesis 7, 17-18, Daniel 12, 4, Proverbs 28, 28, Proverbs 29, 2, and Proverbs 29, 16. This is six verses in all in which Murphy and Harlot and many others are saying that rabah does not just mean increase in number, but also means to become powerful.

Of these six, the first three are not persuasive and may be ruled out as support for the meaning to become powerful. The first is the verbs in Genesis 7, 17-18, which have water as the subject of rabah. So, water becoming powerful.

Indeed, in verse 18, the waters became powerful and increased greatly on the earth. Thus, speak of the waters becoming powerful. But this is expressed through a pl form of the verb gabar, giber.

The verb rabah has its normal meaning, to increase. Similarly, Daniel 12, verse 4 has knowledge as the subject of the verb rabah. Every Bible translation I have consulted has the normal meaning of the verb.

Even those who amend the word for knowledge, such as the NRSV, many such shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase. Use the normal meaning for rabah to increase in number rather than increase in power. So, as I just detailed, the first three of these are not persuasive.

This then leaves us only with three references, namely our variant 28-28 and then the two closely related 29-2 and 29-16 in Proverbs. In the next few minutes now, I will analyze these three verses in some detail to test whether 29:2, 29:16, and 22:28 really do support the case for assigning the meaning become powerful to the verb here. Since the present group of Proverbs is the final variant set that I have investigated here in my book, what I have done is I have tested some key analytical procedures that have been spawned by my work on parallelism in recent years.

In particular, I want to question the procedure of assigning specific lexical meanings to Hebrew words on the basis of the rigid application of precise parallelism. Do you see what I am doing? What in these remaining three references suggests that rabah means become powerful? In my opinion, there is not much. In fact, Murphy never translates the verb rabah in this way in these three verses.

In his commentary where he translates the whole book of Proverbs, here are his translations. 28-28 When the wicked arise, people hide, but when they perish, the just are many. 29-2 When the just are many, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rules, people groan.

And 29-16 The more wicked, the more wrongdoing, but the just shall see their downfall. Do you see what's happening? It seems all the more surprising then that he assigned rabah the meaning to become powerful in his interpretive comments. While we cannot be certain about his reasons, I suspect that the New Revised Standards Version's translation may reveal the reasoning that has influenced Murphy's decision.

Again, the words I will highlight when I raise my hand, the words that translate the verb rabah when I read now from the NRSV. When the wicked prevail, people go into hiding, but when they perish, the righteous increase. So that's the normal meaning, increase in number.

But now comes 29-2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan. And then 29-16 When the wicked are in authority, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall. Twice, rabah is rendered increase, and twice it is glossed as are in authority.

Presumably, the translators saw a warrant for this distinction through their application of the traditional paradigm of strict or precise parallelism. To test this hypothesis, I now want to look at the use of rabah in these three verses. From my own perspective.

Let us observe the use of rabah in 28-28 first. Here the verb is rendered by words that express the concept of increase by both Murphy and the NRSV. Why, then, does the Hebrew Aramaic lexicon that I've mentioned earlier, list it as an instance where rabah has the meaning to increase, and become powerful? The answers remain the same as above when we ask the question with regard to Murphy's interpretation.

Proverbs 28-28 does not serve as evidence to support the conclusion that rabah carries the meaning become powerful. But as an instance, where this meaning is assigned on the basis of other evidence, most notably its contextual association and overall similarity with the nearby 29-2, to which I now turn. An analysis of parallelism in 29-2 seems, initially at least, to confirm that here, rabah means become powerful.

Here are the corresponding elements in English. When the righteous increase, become powerful, compared with when the, we get, rules, parallel rule, rabah rule. The second set of correspondences, of course, is traditional, the righteous and the wicked.

And then the third one is the people rejoice or will be happy with a people will grow. There appears then to be perfect parallelism among three sets of parallels that, according to the traditional paradigm, are either synonymous or antonymous. Sure enough, this seems to work with the traditional pairing of righteous and wicked, antonyms, and the identical subject am, a synonym of the two antonymous verbs to be happy, rejoice, and to groan, at the end of the two half lines.

Given the rules of the traditional paradigm of strict parallelism then, it must seem only natural for the first two words of the half-lines, which are in identical syntactic positions and clearly parallel, to mean the same thing. Since the meaning of the verb to rule clearly has to do with power, the conclusion seems logical that the verb rabah here must mean something similar, namely, to become powerful. Can you see the

circularity of the reasoning? There are two sets of reasons, in my view, however, for a different interpretation of the verse.

The verse is unusual in several respects, and the context has a strong bearing on its meaning. I will first provide my own translation, together with a brief explanation. Then we are going to look at the context of the verse, and finally, I will explain what consequences these matters have for the interpretation.

Bear with me. So here is my translation of 29.2. When the righteous increase, the people will be happy, but when a wicked man rules, the people groans. I will forego the normal procedure in my analysis of parallelism to align the elements of one-half line with corresponding statements in the other.

Because it is not necessary, since my translation is more literal. But nonetheless, I believe it is also not only more literal, but also more rich in meaning. First, I have resisted translating the verb *rabah* as a precise antonym of the corresponding verb to rule, and I have retained its normal meaning to increase in number.

I will provide a defense for this in a few moments. Second, the word for people is determined in the second half line, the people. Most interpreters don't pay attention to this.

While it is indeterminate, in the second half line, a people. I will demonstrate the significance of this in a moment. Third, in contrast to the related 28:12, 28:28, and 29:16, as well as 11:10, which we will come to a little bit later on, the word for wicked here is singular.

Hence the translation making this explicit in my translation, the wicked man. This distinction, by the way, is crucial to my understanding of the verse, as we will see in a moment. And I am just highlighting this.

So, what I am doing is, I am very literal and very precise. I just repeat in the English translation what the Hebrew actually says, and not what I think it says, which is what everybody else does. Fourth, the Hebrew verb to rejoice has two slightly different meanings.

It can either mean feel great joy, or it could mean showing signs of great happiness. And the distinction is significant. In light of the verse's classification as an antithetic precise parallelism, interpreters in the past have tended to assign the verb in 29.2 the second meaning, namely, show signs of great happiness, since this provides a closer antithesis with groan, feeling unhappy.

Clearly an audible, I should say, an expression of feeling unhappy, to groan. Clearly an audible sign of great distress or unhappiness. However, inner joy and

contentment over the growing number of virtuous people in society seems a more natural response than open celebrations.

Yeah, let me just see. I think I need to repeat this. Yeah, okay.

Sorry, I will repeat just the last few sentences, because I think I may have missed out on a few things here. So let me say again, fourthly, the Hebrew verb to rejoice has two slightly different meanings. First of all, the inner feeling of great joy, and then secondly, show signs of great happiness.

And in light of the verse's classification traditionally as antithetical strict parallelism, interpreters have tended to assign the verb in 29.2a the second meaning, namely to show signs of great happiness, to celebrate. Since this provides a closer analysis with groan, which clearly is also an outward sign of the feeling of sadness. However, inner joy and contentment over the growing number of virtuous people in society seems a more natural response than open celebration.

These comments explain four choices reflected in my translation. Before we can consider the consequences of these decisions for the interpretation of 29:2, however, we now need to look more closely at this verse's contextual links. So I'm first of all going to look at the context of Proverbs 28:12, Proverbs 28:28, and we'll then also explore later on the context of Proverbs 29:2, but note here that the two similar statements in the preceding chapter in my analysis provide a very significant context for 29:2. But first of all, let's look at 29:2 itself.

Murphy pointed out that in Proverbs 28 something new begins, signaled among other things, by a change to a higher frequency of what he calls antithetical parallelisms than in previous chapters. Meinhold similarly offered a fourfold structure for 28.1 to the end of chapter 29 based on key verses, namely 28.1, 28.12, 28.28, and then also 29.16 and 27. Malko also saw such a structure with 21.8 and 29.27 about the just and the wicked forming a frame around a whole larger section about what he called the responsibility of a sovereign to reign righteously, which is structurally marked by, he argued, 28.12, 28.28, 29.2, and 29.16, our four verses that we have been looking at all along.

Important for our discussion here now is that in both proposals the repeated variants play an editorial role, and I agree with this. Whybray in his commentary may be correct in saying that there is no, quote, comprehensive structure in Proverbs 28 and 29. But it seems difficult to deny that there is at least some structure in these chapters.

With regard to Proverbs 28, one cannot but be impressed by the way certain ideas weave in and out of 28 verses. According to Murphy's summary explanation, Alonzo Schoeckel suggested that politics is the unifying theme of Proverbs 28. I quote, The

greater part of the verses deal with the correct exercise or abuse of power, either political or economical.

It is as if the instruction were directed expressly to youths destined for positions of power and influence in society. End quote. Malco went even further.

Proverbs 28 to 29 in his view are, quote, an intricately arranged collection serving as a manual for future monarchs. End quote. Similarly, Whybray emphasized that Proverbs concerning rulers play an important part in Proverbs 28 to 29.

Proverbs 28.2, 15, 16, 29.4, 12, 14, and 26 are, in his views, I quote, not simply submissive and admiring, but are all to some extent critical and show awareness of the existence of bad and cruel rulers. End quote. Now, various words for rulers are employed in these verses.

Verse 2, verse 15, verse 16, verse 29, verse 4, verse 29:12, and 29:14. Significantly, the word for king appears twice in Proverbs 29. The first of these is separated from 29:2 by only one verse, while the second of these is separated from 29:16 also only by one verse. What is more, the intervening verse on both occasions, that is 29:3 and 29:15, has to do with the education of children, thus creating a triadic, chiasmic frame around the enclosed materials about the dangers of bad government.

The contextual links and thematic connections, then, are so strong that I agree with Marco. Proverbs 29:2 can be interpreted as part of a range of verses that could have been used in the context of the education of future leaders in society, perhaps even a future ruler, the king. 29:2 needs to then to be interpreted in the context of a future ruler's preparation for government.

This person is encouraged to foster the spread of virtue throughout the population in order to bring contentment to the country's citizens. This is contrasted with a more general suggestion that if a country's rulers are wicked, the country's people will groan. A highly charged word that is invariably in the Hebrew Bible connected with deep discontent and frequently leads to or results from severe divine punishment.

In Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Joel, and several references here. Consequently, the second half-line of this verse is a stark warning to the future ruler to refrain from injustice during his reign for, it is implied, his people's groaning will prompt not only public discontent but national catastrophe through divine judgment. The following verses, chapter 9, verses 3 to 16, provide case studies of good and bad government.

In the next few minutes, I will investigate the use of *rabah* in Proverbs chapter 29, verse 16. This now is the final reference listed with the meaning to become powerful

for the verb *rabah*. An initial survey will detect the traditional pairing of wicked and righteous in corresponding slots.

But beyond this, there seems to be little parallelism that deserves the label. Nevertheless, such parallelism has been perceived. Here is Murphy's brief analysis.

I quote. The verse recalls 28:12, 28:28, and 29:2. The just and the wicked are contrasted, and the increase of either group leads to a greater power and influence. Here, an increase in wrongdoing will be reversed.

It is not said how, but the victory of the just is signaled by the witnessing of the downfall of the wicked. End quote. The following components of Murphy's exposition are of note.

First, appeal to the context. The verse recalls other verses, most notably 29:2. Second, the category of contrast between the traditional pairing of just and wicked is a cipher, for him, of parallelism. Third, the idea that somehow the increase of just or wicked people leads to greater power and influence for either group.

A closer inspection of the so-called parallelism in 29:16, however, reveals that the elements that correspond in any way are hard to come by. Here is one possible scenario for constructing a parallelism. And I want you to just follow this and see whether they in any way connect.

When someone increases or becomes powerful, as opposed to their collapse, the wicked and the righteous, transgression increases, people will observe. This analysis captures a contrast between the righteous and the wicked, and also perhaps an opposition between the verb *rabah*, whether it is increase or become powerful, and collapse or a sudden downfall. The third set of expressions, however, corresponds only in the broadest sense of that term.

According to the common application of traditional strict parallelism, one might indeed construe the idea that the opposite of the downfall of a certain group of people was their ascendancy to power. It seems to me, however, that this sort of construal is not a necessary conclusion from the existence of a contrast between the two expressions. Is loss of power really the essential and most salient consequence of the collapse of a certain group of people? And even if this were so, there was a perfectly suitable Hebrew term nearby to express the idea, namely the verb to rise, as in the expression, when the wicked arise in 28:12 and 28:28.

So, the author could have said that if he wanted to. This expression is readily available, and it would have been particularly suitable because it expresses an idea that is manifestly autonomous. It describes a moving up of the wicked, while the other expression here describes a sudden downfall.

This expression would have also expressed the idea of growing powerful, as we discussed earlier. However, this expression was not employed in the present context. The verb that was used instead was the verb *rabah*, which reappears in the very same half-line with its usual meaning, to increase in number.

The conclusion to be drawn from all of these considerations is that 29:16 also does not support the meaning *grow powerful* for the verb *rabah*. Let us now turn back to Proverbs 28:28, the verse that started us out on our exploration of the meaning *rabah*. We have shown, I hope I have shown, that once the hegemony of the traditional paradigm of strict parallelism is called into question, there is actually nothing in this verse, or in any of the other verses, that necessitates the meaning *grow powerful*.

Furthermore, the analysis that I have suggested here proposes that the meaning to *grow powerful* for *rabah*, as presented in contemporary Hebrew dictionaries, needs to be abundant. An important conclusion for the detailed imaginative analysis of Hebrew poetry, and also for lexicography in general, can be drawn, I believe, from this example, we have just looked at. There are numerous places where meanings for Hebrew words have been posited on the basis of parallelism in the strict sense.

Many of these identifications have entered current Hebrew-English, Hebrew-German, Hebrew-Spanish, Hebrew-French dictionaries, and so on. The results of the present investigation of what I have just argued, however, suggest that lexicographical identifications based on the notion of strict parallelism stand on potentially weak ground. They need to be checked again with an open eye to the possibility that words identified in this manner are not exact synonyms or antonyms of the words with which they are parallel.

I now want to say something more about the similarities and differences between Proverbs 28:12 and Proverbs 28:28. Many people previously have said, well, more or less the same thing is being said in both, in the repeated variants. But there are three other verses in Proverbs, namely chapter 11:10 and the ones we have already looked at, 29:2 and 29:16, that are so similar that I think they shed further light on not only the similarities but also the differences between 28:12 and 28:28. The Old Testament scholar Daniel Snell listed, in fact, 11:10 and 29:2 together with 21:11, 21:12 and 28:28 as what he called twice told Proverbs. And he says, this group shares the use of verbal nouns preceded by the, in, in both clauses.

Proverbs 29:16 also appears in Daniel Snell's list of Twice-Told Proverbs, here, however, under the category of the usage of a double verb. And at a glance, if we look at them together, the five verses do indeed reveal similarities that are even closer than Daniel Snell's analysis or description suggests. Let me read the verses to you.

When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices. So, this is 11:10. When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices. When the wicked perish, there is great revelry.

28:12. When the righteous rejoice, great glory. But when the wicked arise, people take cover. 28:28. When the wicked arise, people hide.

But when they perish, the righteous increase. 29:2. When the righteous increase, the people will be happy. But when the wicked rules, a people will groan.

29:16. When the wicked increase, transgression increases. But the righteous will observe their collapse. Now, I know, of course, when you just hear this being read as that, they do sound rather similar.

But I want to make the case now in the next few minutes of suggesting that the subtle nuances and differences between each and every one of them are hugely significant. And I will argue that when we pay attention to these differences, a hugely complex and nuanced picture of the exercise of rule in government and society emerges. That is not only incredibly intelligent, socially intelligent, and politically intelligent, but I would even go as far as saying that this can be truly instructive for modern government, both in the West and elsewhere in the world.

In my analysis, I have now made many different observations about this. And I think I will jump over most of these, but jump to my conclusion to give a sense of what the outcome of all this detailed analysis is. I just kind of pick it up from the description of wicked people's fortunes in these verses.

Four of the descriptions in these verses of the wicked people's fortunes are positive. When arising, when ruling, when arising, and when increasing. Again, all four of these developments for the wicked seem alike.

Certainly, we can assume that the two references to arising are the same, referring to an increasing importance in society, growing influence, and possibly ascendancy in the power structures of society. This may look akin to ruling, but again, the expressions are not necessarily the same. First, while arising may include climbing up the ladder of the power structures of society, this is not necessarily so.

And second, being part of the power structure is not the same at all as ruling, which normally implies absolute power. The reference to increasing has often been seen as another way of saying that the wicked will become powerful, but of course, I have argued, I hope persuasively, against that notion. A significant and sustained increase in the number of a certain group of people in society will of course admittedly eventually shift the power balance in their favor because they will have more influence, widely speaking, in society.

Nonetheless, there are subtle nuances between this expression and the others that should not be minimized. In this regard, I come back to Clifford's interpretation of 29:16, which sustains the notion of an increase in numbers rather than assimilating it to the other meanings, and this is instructive. I quote from Clifford, When a wicked faction becomes numerous, it sows the seeds of its destruction through the increase in offenses against others.

The very increase of the wicked class will bring about its downfall, for offenses bring social unrest as well as divine retribution. This brings me to the various responses in society to the respective fortunes of the wicked. There seem to be two kinds of responses, expressed by nouns referring to specific groups of people and verbs expressing what they do.

In response to the death of the wicked, there is revelry among the citizens of the city mentioned in verse 11:10a. In response to the increasing number of wicked people, transgression increases in 29:16. Other groups of people seem to respond similarly at first, especially when we just consider an English translation.

Clearly, the people in Proverbs 28 verse 12 and 28 verse 28 do refer to the general population without restriction to a particular group of society on either of these two occasions. The word people in 29:2 also seems identical in meaning at first sight. Yet, I believe and argue this is not so, for reference here is made to the general population as citizens of a kingdom ruled by a king.

Finally, the righteous, in my opinion, does not refer to the population in general but to specific kinds of people within society, namely people with character and integrity who actively seek the good of society. So, there are similarities and differences between the verbs employed in these verses. Two responses to a positive fate of the wicked are near synonyms, namely to take cover and to hide.

The response by people, however, is quite different. They will groan. With regard to the responses to a negative fate of the wicked, there are again significant differences.

There is popular revelry in one verse, increasing the number of righteous people in another, and an opportunity for righteous people to have the satisfaction of seeing how the wicked will eventually collapse in yet another. The more detailed comments in this, my final set of verses that I have analyzed in my book, showcase the fact that subtle differences between similar expressions in proverbial poetry matter. Taking them seriously has the potential to enrich our understanding of these verses in particular and of poetry in general.

This brings us to the close of our lecture.

This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 16, Proverbs chapters 28 and 29.