

## Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 14

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 14, Sayings of the Wise, Proverbs 22:17-24:22.

Welcome to a talk on the book of Proverbs. In this session of Proverbs, we want to look at a section that is called the Sayings of the Wise.

This is one of the several collections that have been brought together in the whole book of Proverbs. This is one of the shorter sections actually in Proverbs. And the first of the collections of the Sayings of the Wise is Proverbs 22:17-24:22. These are quite clearly marked off and recognizable in most translations.

It actually begins with a title. The title is the Words of the Wise. Now, translators have not always set this apart as a title because the title is somewhat embedded in the verse.

Bend your ear and listen to the words of the wise, set your mind to knowledge. Now, the Words of the Wise really is a title and the verse is bend your ear and listen, set your mind to knowledge. But it clearly is set apart as a section.

So, it has that exhortation, bend your ear to knowledge. And then it gives the motivation for why these Words of the Wise are so important. You need to internalize them.

And in wisdom, saying sometimes is described in the same way as you internalize food. We internalize food and it becomes part of our life and gives us energy when it goes down into our belly. So, in the same way, you need to take the words of the mind and you need to internalize them so that they control your life and control your whole body.

Now, these have always come now to be understood as 30 sayings. Though in more traditional translations, they were known as excellent things or sometimes they were known as former things. Now, all of this has to do with a word, as you can see it here on the screen, that has the same letters.

The letters of this word are the number three and this is used in several expressions. It means simply three or it means three days ago, formerly, or it means a chief, one of the three top people. So, depending on how you pronounce it, it means all three things.

And in the way that the Masoretes pronounced it, it meant something like excellent things. Though this term is not usually used of words, it's usually used of a military officer. But in any case, we have come to believe that it means 30 largely because in the first section of these wise sayings, it corresponds literarily and sometimes verbally to an Egyptian writing called the Instruction of Amenemope.

This association was made at the end of 19th, and beginning of 20th century with the discovery and translation of a papyrus that is now in the British Museum, where it is preserved completely, but it is a well-known Egyptian writing that's preserved in numerous portions and fragments in different places. The actual origin of the teaching of Amenemope goes back to the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II. Ramses II is generally the pharaoh associated with Moses.

You'll remember that in the book of Exodus, the Israelites built the city of Ramses. Well, that city was built and named after this particular pharaoh. So, this is a strong connection between Israel and Egypt.

One of the very, very many strong connections between Israel and Egypt. And in this Instruction of Amenemope, there are 30 chapters. If you're interested in this, Google will get you there very, very quickly.

You can type the Instruction of Amenemope or just the name Amenemope and you get a translation of all 30. And you can look at the parallels. But we can just observe some of them.

They're all in the very first part of this whole collection. Do not steal from the poor just because they are poor. You know, it's strange that when someone is vulnerable or seems to be of a lower status than we are, we seem to think that we don't need to respect them as people.

Well, Amenemope already warns about that. Beware of angry people. There's a very good bit of advice.

Beware of loan guarantees. Well, we've spent some time talking about that. Do not move land borders.

Now, this is a Deuteronomic command, but it occurs also in the wisdom sayings. Of course, the main value in an early society was always in property. In fact, currency, the way that we know currency, is not something that began until later times.

Silver and gold were money in the sense that they were weighed. And so you just had a certain quantity. And that's why Proverbs talked about honest weights or the bag of honest stones so that when you were weighing silver or gold or any other substance, you weighed it against the known quantity.

And the temptation could be to vary that quantity to your advantage. Well, with land boundaries, there was the same issue. I was visiting a friend who was a farmer and who showed me how a field that belonged to him had a fence that was incorrectly built.

It was far off what legally belonged to him in terms of the land survey. And he was losing every single year, I think about 15 or 20 acres of crop just because somebody moved the land boundary. His neighbor knew about it perfectly well, but in order to correct the situation, he would have had to take his neighbor to court and get a legal settlement.

And he wasn't sure that taking his neighbor to court was worth what he was losing on this 20 acres of property. But this is a very, very sensible kind of proverb, advice. Exercise skills in your work.

I always think of Ezra, the diligent scribe, the ready scribe. The more I learn about the work of scribes, the more I feel diminished in terms of any scholarly work that I have ever done because these people had an incredible amount to learn and the skills that they actually had. I could have never been a scribe.

I can't even sign my name so that someone can read it. And these scribes wrote the tiniest dots and dashes and kept them distinct on not what we call paper, on something we call an animal skin, a parchment, or on a papyrus that was bumpy and so forth. And all they had was a reed or kind of a pointed pen which they would dip in some kind of lamp black and they could make the tiniest little dots and clear distinctions of letters and did it for hundreds of pages.

The Scroll of Isaiah is something like, well, I have to operate in feet, so it's about 26 feet long. I'll leave someone else to convert that to meters. That's a little taxing to my mind.

But in any case, be diligent in your work and the scribe is a good example. You didn't get to be a scribe without being a really good craftsman. Be careful about etiquette.

You know, I've been one of those people who's a little disdainful of etiquette. When we were in England, there is very much something called class. A class doesn't belong to money, it just belongs to heritage.

And I was being invited to a friend's place that I came to know through a friend. She came from a higher class and one of my colleagues gave me a long list of instructions as to where I put my cutlery, what I put on my plate and everything else. This is the way you do it when it's high class.

And I ignored all of it because I said, I'm Canadian and I'm not of that class and culture and I just do what I do. And thankfully for my guest, that was just fine. She didn't expect me at all to have to behave according to high class.

But the fact of the matter is that to all of us, there are standards of etiquette and they matter. And sometimes we need to pay attention to them. Wealth is fleeting, it takes up wings and flies away.

Oh, I read the Financial Pulse from time to time and not long ago read the story of someone who committed suicide because he lived for wealth and the way the stock markets went, all of a sudden, the fortune, I mean we are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that he had earned were disappearing and for him there was nothing else left. Wealth can disappear through many, many different ways. Be careful with misers.

He invites you over and he says, help yourself and enjoy everything that I've set before you. But he's watching you all of the time. Be a little bit careful.

Don't assume too much. Don't reason with the irrational. Well, we've talked about that in our earlier lectures already.

Don't be a fool lest you be a fool like he is. Don't reason with a fool lest you be a fool like he is. Don't take advantage of the poor.

Those are the proverbs that have a particular connection to the sayings of Ammon and Opie. The other sayings that we have here are more of the words of the wise. I've listed them out here and they all are pretty good common sense in terms of instruction for how you should live in a good society.

And of course, they are repetitive of some things we've discussed before. But I might just look at Maxim 17 here for a moment. The adultery of a man betrays his marriage.

It not only betrays his marriage but it violates another person's marriage. There's a whole section there. These days it just seems to me, in my culture, we don't actually take marriage vows very seriously.

We take them to our convenience and we assume they can be broken and that we'll go on to something better. But it really doesn't work that way. Now, the hopeless cycle of drinking.

I have gone over this passage many, many times. It's verses 23 to 29 in Proverbs 22, but the whole thing is a poem. It's actually constructed as a very carefully crafted poem.

I've gone over this poem in class several times and I remember one of the times when I went through it and kind of outlined the movement from the headache and the bruises and the search for wine to the drunkard who's got the headache and the bruises and he goes looking for more wine and kind of outlined the way in which this poem is trying to portray the life of a drinker. I didn't know everyone in my class, but I'll never forget that I concluded the first stanza. There was a gentleman right in the middle of the whole class who irresistibly burst out apparently with a voice of experience saying, Man, that's exactly the way that it is! And it is that way.

Drunkness, from what I know, is not a terribly good thing. Now, I had an experience one day when I was in a gas station looking for a drink, and in my old age I'm having trouble, I don't like things that are too sweet. I have certain things that I like and they aren't always there.

So, I was dawdling around in front of this cooler trying to figure out what I wanted to buy and this gentleman comes up to me and says, Sir, he says, what do you do for a hangover? I was a little surprised by the question. He swayed a little bit as he asked me and I said, You know, sir, you're actually asking the wrong person because I have never had a hangover. His eyes got kind of big and wondering and he swayed a little bit and I don't think he believed me.

But anyway, he looked right at me and he said, You are a very wise man. Now, the source may not be all that credible, but I accepted the compliment anyway. I have been wise about not being drunk.

But as much as Proverbs has good things to say about wine, it has warnings. Now, I went to an evangelistic service. I was actually the speaker on a native reservation.

One time early on in my pastoral career, and as the group was preparing for the service and so forth, I thought I'd go over to the teacher's house who was stationed at this particular reservation. And of course, I was carrying my Bible because my Bible goes with me when I preach. And so, I was suggested I should go and meet the teacher and be a good thing.

So, I knocked on his door and he invited me in. I sat down at the table and I put my Bible on top and he said, That is a wicked book! And I said, Oh, I said, Well, why do you think that this is such a bad book? He said Because that book has very many good things to say about wine. And I guess I just looked a little bit surprised.

And he went on a long rant of his frustrations with his class and his students who were always dysfunctional because of inebriation, which was, of course, intense to be a big problem. Drugs have become a big problem in virtually all of our societies everywhere. But this one was particularly rankling him.

So, I didn't read to him Proverbs 23, 29 to 35, because he wasn't in any mood to hear about what the Bible also had to say about wine. That was not good. He only needed a chance to rant and I let him have it.

But the fact is that as much as the Bible does consider wine to be a good thing, it doesn't consider it to be a good thing quite in the way that we often take it. You see, wine was their beverage and was very expensive. And most of the time their wine was mixed with water so that it was really just a beverage.

And all they were doing was quenching their thirst. But they knew how to get drunk. And what happens to the drinker? Who has moans? Who has groans? Who has bruises? Who has strife? The one who lingers over the wine.

So, all the things that we see in bars are the same thing that they saw. And then there's deception and it goes around the word sight. You see the wine, it sparkles in the glass.

And then you see strange things because the wine stings. And now you think that you're on a ship sitting at the top of the mast. You know, the whole world is swaying and moving back and forth.

Now this experience I've never had. I don't know. And I don't plan to have it.

They beat me and I didn't know it. Now I heard about that, you know, in the high school that I went to. For most of the students, if you came back Monday morning and couldn't remember very much of what happened between Friday and Sunday, then you knew you'd had a good weekend.

Now I was never quite sure how you could be so certain that that was true. But I heard it over and over again, mostly after every weekend in the town where I grew up. And I had a math teacher who I really admired.

He's passed away. I can give you his name. His name was Nestor Wachkowski.

He was Ukrainian. And he made me love math. But many a Monday he'd show up with a shiner.

I mean a real shiner. And as was typical for people in our little village of Theodore, he had encounters on the weekend that left you with shiners, you know, a big, big black eye, bruises. And what do you do for a hangover? Well, you know, this fellow who was doddering around in front of me asking what do you do for a hangover really has the answer here in this passage.

You get another drink, and that helps you solve the hangover. Of course, it's not a good long-term solution. But this really is the reality of drunkenness.

Sorry for the long sermon. But frankly, drugs are such a problem these days. It's not just alcohol, but I think we do well to ponder those verses.

More words of the wise to complete the maxims that we have in the 30 sayings. So if you want to follow this through as to how these verses may be divided up into 30 sayings, you have it there. And then we have the words of the wise.

Additionally, beginning in Proverbs 24, and 23, where there's a new heading and some of the new topics. So, this is the lessons, pragmatic, very useful instruction, daily instruction for the life of the wise person.

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