

Proverbs, Lecture 14: Proverbs Chapters 22–24 and Amenemope

Author: Dr. Knut Heim

Session 14

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Abstract

This lecture explores the cross-cultural relationship between the biblical Book of Proverbs (specifically Collection 3: Prov 22:17–24:22) and the ancient Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. Dr. Knut Heim critically evaluates textual and translational issues in Proverbs 22:20—specifically the textual variation surrounding the Hebrew term (ketiv shilshom, qere shalishim, and Septuagint threis) modified by modern scholars to sheloshim ("thirty")—and cautions against forcing a strict thirty-saying structure onto the biblical text. Additionally, he analyzes the variant repetitions of boundary marker prohibitions in both Proverbs (Prov 22:28 and 23:10) and Amenemope (Chapter 6), demonstrating how biblical editors creatively adapted Egyptian literary techniques to reinforce moral teaching regarding property rights and the protection of the vulnerable.

Outline

I. Introduction and Contextual Framing

- A. Review of international wisdom literature dimension from Lecture 13
- B. Terminology problematization: poetic literature integrating theology into human life
- C. Focus of Lecture 14: Parallel between Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope and Proverbs Collection 3 (Prov 22:17–24:22)

II. Evaluation of Bruce Waltke's Structural Analysis

- A. Overview of Waltke's commentary on Amenemope (1186–1069 BC) and Proverbs
- B. The concept of 30 sayings derived from Amenemope section 27, line 6
- C. Limits of material dependence: direct connection only in first 11 sayings (22:17–23:11)
- D. Incorporation of Aramaic/Akkadian and broader Egyptian traditions in subsequent sayings

III. Textual and Translational Critique of Proverbs 22:20

- A. Analysis of the Hebrew textual traditions in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)
 - 1. Ketiv (written form): shilshom ("former" or "ancient sayings")
 - 2. Qere (read form): shalishim ("noble sayings")

B. Ancient translation witness: Septuagint (LXX) reads threis ("three")

C. Modern textual emendation to sheloshim ("thirty sayings") in NRSV and commentaries (Waltke, Fox)

1. Lack of critical footnotes in translations like NRSV regarding Egyptian-driven emendation
2. Critique of Waltke's arbitrary division of Collection 3 into exactly 30 numbered units

D. Conclusion on translation impact: international context influences translations, though core theology remains intact

IV. Case Study on Variant Repetition: Boundary Markers

A. Textual comparison within Proverbs Collection 3

1. Proverbs 22:28: Prohibition against removing ancient landmarks set by ancestors
2. Proverbs 23:10–11: Prohibition against removing landmarks/encroaching on fields of orphans, with theological motivation (Redeemer/Lord is strong)

B. Editorial significance: variant repetition as a conscious, ubiquitous editorial strategy within 12 verses (70-verse collection)

C. Parallels in Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope (Chapter 6, plate 7 line 11 to plate 9 line 8)

1. Repeated prohibitions against moving field boundary markers and shifting measuring cords
2. Mention of vulnerable groups (widows in Amenemope; widows and orphans in biblical text)
3. Theological motivation: pleasing God/might of the Lord by respecting land borders

V. Synthesis and Pedagogical Conclusions

A. Creative adaptation: Proverbs does not passively copy Amenemope but adapts source material creatively

B. Repeating of repetitions: Proverbs mimics Amenemope's internal editorial technique of repeating key ethical commands

C. Societal purpose: shared international emphasis on protecting the property rights of the vulnerable for societal well-being