

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 14, Sayings of the Wise, Proverbs 22:17-24:22 6-min. Video Overview

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Have you ever wondered where ancient wisdom really comes from? We kind of think of it as just appearing out of nowhere, right? Divinely inspired, fully formed. But what if I told you that a super important part of the Bible's Book of Proverbs, you know, the ultimate collection of wisdom, has this incredible, surprising origin story, one that connects King Solomon's world all the way back to the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Okay, let's dive into this hidden source of biblical wisdom.

So our journey kicks off with this really powerful invitation. This line, from Proverbs chapter 22, isn't just a suggestion. It's actually the title of a special, self-contained collection called the Sayings of the Wise.

It's telling you to do more than just read; it's saying, hey, lean in, absorb this, really listen. And that's the whole point, right? The motivation behind this entire collection. The writers wanted you to internalize these sayings.

Think about it like this. You take in wisdom the same way you take in food. You let it go down deep, let it become a part of your very being, and then let it fuel how you act and live your entire life.

It's all about making wisdom your instinct. Now, this is where a really fascinating puzzle pops up. It's a mystery that was hidden inside a single word for centuries, and it caused a huge debate among scholars.

Let's get into exactly how this all unfolded. Okay, so the whole mystery revolves around this one Hebrew word, shalashim. Get this: the exact same Hebrew letters can be pronounced in different ways to mean totally different things.

For the longest time, everyone translated it as excellent things. But another, more literal way to read it is 30. And that single word choice blew open a massive interpretive question.

So if the text is really talking about 30 sayings, then where are they? When scholars looked, the structure wasn't obvious, and they were kind of stumped. And why 30? What's so special about that number? Well, turns out the answer wasn't going to be found in ancient Israel, but somewhere else entirely. The solution to this whole biblical puzzle was literally discovered buried in the sands of Egypt, written on an ancient papyrus scroll.

And this discovery would create this undeniable link between Hebrew wisdom and the teachings of their powerful neighbors. And here it is, the key to the whole thing, a text called the Instruction of Amenemope. It was discovered back in the late 19th century, and this ancient Egyptian wisdom book contains, you guessed it, exactly 30 chapters.

The moment scholars put it side by side with Proverbs, the connection was just unmistakable. Let's just put this into historical perspective for a second, because this is wild. The Instruction of Amenemope comes from the time of Pharaoh Ramses II.

Yep, the same Pharaoh we often connect with Moses. That means this Egyptian text is actually hundreds of years older than the book of Proverbs. You can see the clear flow of ideas right there on the timeline.

And the proof is right here in the words themselves. Just look at this side-by-side comparison. Amenemope says, do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries.

And Proverbs says, do not move an ancient boundary stone. Amenemope warns, guard yourself from robbing the poor. And Proverbs echoes, do not exploit the poor.

I mean, come on, the parallels are just way too direct to be a coincidence. But this isn't just some ancient literary detective story. The advice from these 30 sayings is so practical and honestly just as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

Let's look at a couple of quick examples. So the first piece of advice is super simple. Respect property boundaries.

Back in an agricultural society, this was everything. It was about survival. It was about justice.

Moving a boundary stone wasn't just a small thing. It was a profound act of theft. And guess what? It still happens today.

Dr. August Konkell, whose research is a big part of this explainer, tells the story of a farmer friend of his. The guy was losing 15 to 20 acres of crops every single year just because a neighbor had quietly moved the fence. The ancient problem is still a modern problem.

It just shows you how timeless the simple rule is. All right. The next piece of wisdom is all about diligence.

It's about becoming a true craftsman, a real expert in whatever it is that you do. It's a call to excellence and to really dedicate yourself to your work. You know, Dr. Konkell has this funny way of putting it.

He talks about how much he admires the incredible skill of ancient scribes, you know, the guys who wrote these tiny, perfect letters on bumpy animal skins with reed pens. He jokes, I could have never been a scribe. I can't even sign my name so that someone can read it.

It's a hilarious but really powerful reminder of the kind of dedication this proverb is talking about. Now let's zoom in on one of the most powerful passages in this whole collection. It's this masterfully written poem that paints a vivid and tragically timeless picture of addiction.

So the poem starts off by asking these almost diagnostic questions, right? It's outlining the symptoms of someone who's in deep trouble, who has moans, who has groans, bruises, and constant arguments. The answer is so simple and direct. The one who lingers over the wine.

It just perfectly captures the external signs of a deep internal struggle. And then the poem just walks us through this absolutely hopeless cycle of addiction. It starts with the allure, right? How the wine sparkles in the glass.

Then comes the deception, where it stings you and your whole perception gets warped. That leads to this scary detachment, where the person can be physically beaten and not even know it. And finally, the tragic relapse.

When I awake, I will find another. It is a perfect, heartbreaking depiction of that downward spiral. Dr. Conkle tells this really poignant story about being in a gas station when a man who was clearly suffering came up and asked him, "Sir, what do you do for a hangover? And when Dr. Conkle told him he'd never had one, the man just looked at him with his moment of clarity and said, you are a very wise man.

It's this bittersweet, real-life encounter that just brings that ancient poem crashing right into our modern world. And that really brings us full circle, doesn't it? The discovery of the instruction of Amenemope is this incredible reminder that wisdom really does transcend cultures and generations. And it leaves us with this fascinating question.

What if the wisest advice isn't about finding some brand new revolutionary answer, but about learning to listen again to the timeless truths we've had all along, just waiting for us to rediscover them?