

Proverbs: Sayings of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17–24:22)

Author: Dr. August Konkell

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Abstract

This session explores the "Sayings of the Wise" found in Proverbs 22:17–24:22, focusing on a collection of thirty distinct maxims. Dr. August Konkell highlights the historical and literary connections between these biblical proverbs and the ancient Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope from the era of Ramses II. The text provides practical moral guidance on protecting the vulnerable, exercising diligence, maintaining ethical land boundaries, handling wealth wisely, and avoiding the destructive cycle of drunkenness. Ultimately, these teachings urge listeners to internalize wisdom so that moral principles actively govern daily behavior and community life.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Sayings of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17–21)

A. Nature and Context of the Collection

1. Identified as the "Words of the Wise" in Proverbs 22:17–24:22
2. One of several distinct wisdom collections within the Book of Proverbs

B. Exhortation to Internalize Wisdom

1. Call to "bend your ear" and apply the mind to knowledge
2. Analogy of internalizing wisdom like digesting food to energize and direct life

II. The Thirty Sayings and Historical Parallels (Proverbs 22:20–21)

A. Understanding the Hebrew Term (Shalishim)

1. Root related to the number three (meaning "thirty", "former/excellent things", or "chiefs/officers")
2. Masoretic tradition translated it as "excellent things"

B. Connection to the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope

1. Papyrus discovery from late 19th / early 20th century preserved in the British Museum
2. Origin traces back to Pharaoh Ramses II (associated with Israel in Exodus)

3. Amenemope consists of thirty chapters with striking verbal and thematic parallels to Proverbs 22–24

III. Specific Moral Maxims and Practical Wisdom (Proverbs 22:22–23:18)

A. Protection of the Poor and Vulnerable

1. Prohibition against stealing from or exploiting lower-status individuals
2. Parallel warnings in Amenemope regarding social ethics

B. Personal Conduct and Self-Control

1. Beware of angry people and avoid loan guarantees
2. Respect land boundaries and practice honest weights in commerce
 - a. Historical reliance on property and weighed currency (silver/gold)
 - b. Modern comparison: property disputes and boundary changes

C. Professional Diligence and Skill

1. Exhortation to excel in one's craft and occupation
2. Example of ancient scribes (e.g., Ezra): extreme precision writing on parchment/papyrus scroll

D. Social Etiquette, Wealth, and Discretion

1. Observing proper etiquette in high-class or formal settings
2. Fleeting nature of wealth: riches can sprout wings and disappear instantly
3. Caution with misers and ungenerous hosts
4. Refusal to argue with irrational individuals or fools
5. Marital fidelity: adultery betrays marriage vows and violates community covenants

IV. The Poem on Drunkenness and Addiction (Proverbs 23:29–35)

A. Literary Structure and Realism

1. Formatted as a carefully crafted poetic poem
2. Vivid description of physical symptoms: headaches, unprovoked bruises, strife, and disorientation

B. Deception and Consequences of Alcohol Abuse

1. Wine appears attractive ("sparkles in the glass") but bites like a serpent
2. Loss of perception, hallucination ("lying on top of a mast"), and insensibility to pain
3. The tragic cycle of addiction: seeking another drink to cure the hangover

C. Cultural and Modern Context

1. Ancient context: diluted daily table wine vs. intentional drunkenness
2. Modern application to alcohol, substance abuse, and societal damage

V. Conclusion and Additional Words of the Wise (Proverbs 24:1–22, 23–34)

A. Final Maxims Completing the Thirty Sayings

1. Everyday, pragmatic instruction for living wisely in community
2. Transition at Proverbs 24:23 to additional sayings of the wise

B. Ultimate Goal of Wise Instruction

1. Shaping moral character and practical righteousness in daily life