

Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Lecture 2

Welcome back for our second talk I'm going to talk a bit right now about: what are we actually reading when we read a proverb, that is what is a proverb? And then look at the first few verses of the book to ask: why was this book written? That will help us again as we saw knowing who wrote. It helps us to understand how we should read what we find in it.

So the question is what is a proverb? Well, that's a question to which there is no agreed upon answer. If you read the dictionary you'll find something like a brief pithy saying of folk wisdom that passes along traditional advice or something like that. In fact, if you Google "proverb" and look on the Internet you will find many definitions by many scholars. All of them seem to have certain maybe if not key words at least key ideas. Proverbs are short, there's something that makes them memorable, that is, easy to remember, they are fairly simple, that is easy to grasp. That doesn't mean there easy necessarily to figure out what to do with them but to know what they are talking about. They are widely use that is a proverb is not something that just one person uses, that becomes more of an aphorism perhaps or even just a saying. They are often usually image based, or built around some sort of picture or image. In a lot of modern definitions we find terms like, they are socially accepted, experientially based, and there's even modern psycholinguistic research that goes into how actually listening to a proverb or hearing a proverb, effects certain portions of the brain so that the structure of the proverb itself, the nature of the proverb effects both halves of the brain at the same time. Which is a pretty unusual way of communicating, usually we talk to somebody's left side or right side or we use our right side or left side independently. Proverbs usually go for both sides at the same time.

Now, you see part of the problem is we can define a proverb in terms of what is looks like and sounds like or we can define it in terms of the effect it has on the person who hears it, or the uses to which we can put it. So some people just end up saying, I know it when I see it, which doesn't seem pretty fair but unfortunately but that's kind of

what we come down to because there really isn't an internationally agreed upon definition. Although, again, if you look at the dictionary's they'll all say basically the same thing, but those definitions are not written paremiologists, that is those who study proverbs professionally.

What is a biblical proverb, well they have some of the same aspects, they're short, and they don't look that way in English. I did an interesting experiment one time, I counted all the words in each proverb in chapters 10-16 in Hebrew, and then all the words in a very literal translation, I counted all the words. The average number of words in Hebrew per verse is 7.6; the average number of words in English is over 18. So, they don't sound like English proverbs, which is something like, "a stitch in time saves nine," or "money talks" or something like that. Even a proverb of ten words in English would feel very long to us. But the proverbs in Hebrew are very compact because Hebrew allows the same kind of compression that takes place in English when you translate that very compressed form of Hebrew into English it has to expand. There is no way to translate it in the same tight format at least not a way that would make any sense to any to us.

But in the Bible the big difference probably, is that in the Bible a lot of proverbs seem to say the same thing a couple of different ways a feature that we call parallelism and I'll talk about that just a little later in this lecture. That doesn't sound like English at all most English proverbs, although they may have two parts like "Out of sight, out of mind, now that's kind of cute, but that's one statement, it's not two different statements that are together but a lot of biblical proverbs are that way. I mention that because, very often when people quote from the book of Proverbs they only quote half of the verse and that's a little bit like reading the first half of a novel and leaving the second half untouched or reading the second half without reading the first half. That's not the way it's meant to be understood. It's a single saying made up of a couple of statements, the two statements function together and it's not that they lay side by side they actually are woven together and they're meant to be read in light of each other because together they say something that neither of them can say independently of the other.

So we recognize them because we can see them or usually in our culture we hear them. So somebody says, “a stitch in time saves nine,” and even if we’re standing out, I grew up on a farm so I can use this illustration, I saw this and even if we’re standing out on the back pasture and there’s a fencepost that’s rotting off at the ground and we’re standing there looking at it and someone says well “a stitch in time saves nine,” cause the debate is do we take the time now to fix it or just kind of prop it up and hope it will make it through the winter. Well, nobody’s talking about sewing the fence post back together. No, we all know that they’re saying is it that you fix something right now before it gets a whole lot worse because if that fencepost falls over then the cows will get into the corn or maybe the horses will run away or something else really bad will happen. So we hear the proverb, we recognize it and we apply it, and how we do that is really a mystery we don’t actually know how we recognize them and that’s why we say the definition is sort of “I know it when I see it” rather than coming up with a strict definition. A lot of them, like that one, “a stitch in time saves nine,” is very poetic isn’t it? We have stitch, time, saves, and if you notice the sounds there it actually goes, s,t,t,s, and isn’t that cute? A stitch, st, a time, t, saves nine, so we have a little, reversal in sound consonant order. You have the rhyme of “time” and “nine,” and if you listen to the meter “a stitch in time, saves nine,” it’s very symmetrical, it’s iambic. So all of those things together, plus the picture make it easy for us to remember, and also somehow make it easy for us to understand that we’re not talking about sewing up a fencepost and nobody thinks the person is being silly. We all understand that they’re advising us. That’s what proverbs really are they’re really counselors or advisors and somebody’s advising us to fix it now, before things get a lot worse. Now they’re not always that poetic, so we have proverbs in English like “absence makes the heart grow fonder” well there’s rhythm there, “absence makes the heart grow fonder” but there’s no rhyme. There’s no consonant selection going on. Or “love is blind” that is pretty prosaic or “money talks” or something like that. But by in large proverbs have something about them that is memorable and recognizable. We even find that when we use them in our own society, which by the way doesn’t happen a whole lot because people who use proverbs are generally thought to be kind of fuddy-duddyish and old

fashioned. But there are lots of societies in the world as I mentioned in my first lecture, where proverbs are extremely important and in fact are the common circulation of life, that is the way conversation is even carried on. When we re-think about the way that we use them we realize that we don't think about them as laws, or promises, or guarantees. But we actually use a proverb like we would use a piece of advice. Or maybe even like we would use a counselor or an advisor. You know some people think when you go to the doctor and the doctor says "take three pills and call me in the morning," that we have to do what the doctor says, but in fact what is a doctor? A medical doctor is somebody who is specialized in medicine. There's no legal requirement that forces us to do what the doctor says. In fact, we can go to three different doctors, get three different pieces of advice and choose which one we like the best because that's what it is, it's counsel, and that's actually what a proverb is. A proverb is like a medical doctor or like a lawyer from whom we get advice. Lawyers are called counselors of law, from whom we get advice that we then have to decide what to do with it.

And that maybe helps us understand why we can have what are called dueling proverbs. So we say for example, "he who hesitates is lost" and "look before you leap." Both those things can't be true because you have to hesitate to look and if you spend all your time hesitating or looking you'll never leap. So the two proverbs seem to be contradictory, they are contradictory. Not really, they're actually complementary because part of the point of proverbial wisdom and part of the reason for the length of the book of proverbs among other things is that no one proverb ever tries to do justice to the whole of a situation or to every situation.

Now any individual proverb, the thing that makes a proverb function or functional is that they can be extended to apply to all sort of situations. So we say, in English, "like father, like son," which actually is a take off on Jeremiah's statement "like mother, like daughter" and Ezekiel says about Israel and Judah but we can also say "like teacher, like student." We can actually apply that to a whole range of settings which we don't actually use. But we could say, "like a pastor so the church." So if you wanted to get to know what a pastor's like, go to his church sometime, or her church sometime when the

pastor is not there, and see what the people are like, because once a pastor has been positioned for a long enough time, that congregation will become like the pastor. You can actually find out more about the pastor through the congregation than talking to the pastor. Or if you want to find out what kind of teacher someone is, get to know their students, especially students who have been out of their classroom for a year or two. Talk to them about the kinds of things that they studied, don't talk to them about the teacher, that's not the kind of information you need. But you want to find out about the teacher, you talk to them and you begin to find out, how does this teacher actually think and teach, because his students or her students if they have had the teacher enough, now not one course probably won't do it, but if they've had that teacher often enough, they will begin to absorb that teacher's way of thinking. So, is the is the teacher the father? Well no, but we can say like father like son, because that relationship can be extended to describe all sorts of situations, and explain actually, all sorts of relationships between human beings. So when we, when we use proverbs in our own lives, we recognize this proverb is making an observation or its telling me to do something or suggesting that I do something, and its advice, it's counsel. So "like father like son" actually says, here's if I remember that I can understand the son by knowing what the father's like or vice versa.

Or we say something like "money talks," well that's a pretty cool proverb because its so compressed and actually contains two of what are called metonymies, where one thing stands for something else. So it's not the money that's talking but it's the person who has the money. And the person who has the money doesn't even have to talk, they just have to be present. If you've ever been in a room with, in a meeting with one person who's very wealthy and they're a part of the committee, the things that they say the committee should do, carry a lot more weight than anybody else all other things being equal. Well, that's kind of the advice the proverbs give us.

Remember Solomon asked for wisdom to understand the heart. Part of the purpose of the book is to give us the ability to look at the situation and understand what's really going on. Now, some people have recently said, even very recently in books on the Old Testament. That Proverbs 26:4-5 "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you

yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes” is a case of dueling proverbs, well that’s possible. I prefer to think of it as a single proverb, just a long one. I mean there were lots of long proverbs that consist, and remember the verse divisions are not necessarily original. I think we can say the book of Proverbs doesn’t have cases of verses that duel with each other. So we don’t have to judge between them like we do in English. So if we say in a meeting someone says, look you know this is an important decision, we have to “look before we leap,” then someone else says well “he who hesitates is lost,” they’re giving us two different sets of advice and at some point you have to make a decision. So at some point the hesitating has to stop and the leaping has to take place.

Wisdom comes you see in knowing which proverb to apply to which situation. That’s wisdom. Gertus said, who is a German poet, said the man of only one language knows none. What we could also say is that a fool knows only one proverb. So the book of Proverbs, for example, has many verses that deal with our money, or the way we use money. It has many verses that deal with speech and the way we use our mouths. It has many verses that deal with companionship, and friendship or justice or marriage or lots of topics. Why does it have so many verses on each topic? Because no one saying can do justice to the whole, to every situation.

So in order to properly use the book of proverbs we can’t simply know one verse and say well this takes care of it if I know this verse about child discipline then I know all I need to I’m just going to use this verse in every situation. No, you can’t do that. Because that’s not all that the proverbs, the book of Proverbs says, in fact that’s not all the Bible says. We don’t want to limit our child rearing habits, for example, to what proverbs says. But we also want to be careful that we don’t absolutize one proverb and make that the true statement and the others just sort of subsidiary to it. We want to make sure that we have a handle on, as much as we can, on everything that the book of proverbs says about leadership or about marital faithfulness or whatever other topic may be. So when we read the book of proverbs and we study an individual proverb and we say to ourselves this is the way things are, we have to remember that it’s giving us advice, it’s

giving us counsel.

This probably makes some of you nervous, because you're going to say wait a second, aren't you saying its inspired and if its inspired doesn't that mean if it says if I do this this will happen isn't that a promise from God? Well many people read the book of Proverbs that way. But that's reading the book of Proverbs as though it were a different kind of literature. And different kinds of literature have their own rules for how we read them. So this is a silly example. If you pick up a book it doesn't matter how heavy and authoritative and expensively bound it is, and the first four words are "once upon a time," you don't expect to find advice for living, right? Instead you know you're going to be reading a fairy tale, and you read it as a fairy tale. You don't think there really is a witch waiting and a house made out of candy in the woods with an oven to cook children in, we don't even we don't even pretend to think that that's real. And proverbs are the same way paremiologists have discovered that proverbs are apparently present in every human society that includes biblical proverbs from ancient Israel which suggests that God has built us in a certain way that we are prone to understand proverbs and use them. He has even included them in Scripture in this small book of Proverbs because that is a better way of understanding some aspects of what he expects from us and what he is doing in us. So when we read them we don't make them into laws or promises because just like proverbs in English they are meant to function as our advisors and counselors.

Now I said earlier that proverbs is a book that is organized and we should read it like a book, and an we are just going to pass over chapter 1 through 9 by saying that if you're interested in reading more of those poems you can listen to the lectures of the books of psalms because the same rules apply. We look for parallelism and imagery and we see how the poem is structured because they are poems. They are biblical poems and follow the same rules of composition. Now they don't say "hallelujah and things like that. But poetry is poetry and one can learn, one can study one type of poem as another given some slight differences for the content but that doesn't really doesn't matter. But I'm just going to go directly to the reading the proverbs to chapter 10 and the following, when we read them we need to read the proverbs in light of the purposes in which Solomon wrote.

In the gospel of John, John tells us why he wrote his gospel “so that be might believe that Jesus is Christ the son of God.” He tell us why he wrote his first epistle, same thing Jude write his first epistle, “to earnestly contend for the faith, once delivered once for all to the saints.” The book of revelation we are told why that is written too, “which God gave to his servant to reveal” or God gave to his son to reveal to his servant about the things about to come.”

Well we have the same thing here in the beginning of proverbs chapter 1 verses 2 through 6. “So that we might know wisdom and understanding, instruction to discern sayings of understanding, receive instruction of wise behavior and righteousness, justice and equity to give prudence to the naïve or the simple the inexperienced to give knowledge and discretion to the youth.” So why do we have this book, and it goes on for a couple more verses. Well without going into a great deal of detail there two purposes here, one is that the book of Proverbs has a moral purpose.

One of the great debates starting in the fifth century B.C. in ancient Greece was a debate begun in large part by people called Sophists, from which we get the words sophisticated and sophistry. Sophists were known for developing arguments that could be used to prove anything, that was actually the argument against them, that actually where the word sophomore comes from, is someone who is foolish and think they know the argument that can prove anything. The reason why the sophist had these discussions was because they wanted to know the right way to live life. How do we figure out what is good. That is actually the question that engaged a great deal of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle’s attention. It is even picked up by Aquinas thousands of years later and his *Summa Theologica*. Well, the question of what is a good life and how do we know it? Well one of the things that the Greek came up with that I think is strikingly foreshadowed in the book of Proverbs is the idea of prudence. Prudence in Greek philosophy and later in Aquinas and even later in 20th century and the writings of Joseph Pepper, is the ability to, as Pepper says “to be quiet so that we can understand what we are seeing.” One of the things Proverbs want to give us is insight. We cannot have insight if we are so busy coming up with our own answers. If we are so busy thinking about what we want to say,

or thinking about our hurt feelings or thinking we can't have real insight in situation without being still. And so different translations do this differently, but in verse four "to give prudence to the naïve." Prudence is this ability to stop, to think, to understand before acting. Because in the understanding of the Greeks which I believe is Solomon's also, all though he doesn't say it this way, being the situation, what really exists precedes understanding. We understand what is there, not what we wish was there, not what we think is there, not just how we feel, but we have to try to understand what is really there. It's not a very popular notion by the way, but understand that, than our actions and our words are based on that understanding to the extent that we try to fail to understand our actions or our words are going to not be right or wise.

So one of Solomon's goals is to help these young men, who I'll speak about in a minute, develop prudence. One of the ways that he does that in the book is by giving him things to read that are hard to understand, you can't just buzz through Proverbs. I mean you can, I guess, but it's pretty difficult to sit down and read five chapters of proverbs as compared to reading five chapters of Mathew or Isaiah. It's not meant to be buzzed through. It's meant to be pondered and thought about. So how do young people get wisdom, how do they get understanding. Well by learning to slow down, by recognizing that life doesn't have to be break neck, and by taking time to think about what they are seeing and what they are hearing.

This then gives rise to what Solomon calls in chapter three, a straight life or an upright life sometimes it's translated. You see in Proverbs that proverbs envision us and either going in the way of wisdom or the way of folly. But that's not really quite true if we look at the way that proverbs reflect the language of the book of Deuteronomy. For example, Moses' great covenant renewal with Israel we find that the image is more, that there is a road and there is a path, and to turn aside to the right or the left is to turn aside. That's really the picture that Solomon uses, there is a path, and it's only that path and to get off that path in any direction is to be lost, is to be off the path, is to be heading for death that's the result of folly. So that this moral purpose is to give to the prudence to recognize the right or straight path in any circumstance. So that we can act in accord

with what is straight or what is upright.

Now remember, we can only learn in one way. We can only really learn things by experience. I know there's intuition and intuitive leaps, but intuition is actually, I think, the accumulation of lots of experience, and we're not conscious that we're accumulating this until all of a sudden something coalesces, and we have an idea that bursts through. But really we learn things because we do them ourselves. Our mother says "don't touch the stove, you'll burn yourself." We don't know what burn means when we're two years old so we touch the stove, we burn ourselves. Now I know what it means to burn myself, and I know why I shouldn't touch the stove. Or we learn because someone else tells us. So, our mother could say, "don't touch the stove you'll burn yourself", and we don't touch the stove. Now what have we learned? We haven't learned that the stove is hot, we don't really know *why* we shouldn't touch the stove, but we've learned obedience. The result of both may be the same in the long run, we won't burn ourselves anymore. It is much more painful to learn many things by personal experience than it is to learn them from someone else.

What Solomon is doing is giving us the opportunity of learning from the accumulated experience of the wise men of the ancient Near East, taking their sayings and saying these things are worth pondering and thinking about, therefore take the time to do it. So we have this moral purpose, and underlying that is this word here at the end of verse five, he says, "a wise man will hear and increase in learning, a man of understanding will increase wise counsel." Now the word "counsel" there is very interesting. It's not the usual word used for counselors or advisors, like a king has an advisor, for example. It's only used once in Job and about five or six times in the book of proverbs. Most of the time it's used for when a king is going to go out to war. But half of its occurrences refer to a king going out to war. It says, "How to you wage battle? You wage battle by getting lots of counsel." Where do you get counsel? You get it from counselors. The person who studies the book of Proverbs, who studies it, by studying it gets as it were a bunch of verbal counselors. The proverbs themselves will become a circle, or a part of your advice. They'll become part of the counsel that you have on

which you can base a decision. And they will become moral guides. Now that's one big purpose. And it's probably the purpose that we all associate with Proverb. "Why do you read the book of Proverbs?--to be a better person. Ok, well really to be an upright person. To be an upright person, as I said in the last lecture means to live in accord with the way that God has made the world, because that is to live in accord with the nature of God himself.

But there's a second purpose here. If we look at verses five and six, we find this "a wise man will hear and increase in learning, a man of understanding will acquire wise council to understand a proverb and a figure." There's that word *melitsah*, dark saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. That suggests a couple of things. First of all, it's not just the naïve that need to learn, and that's as we said before, you can't be stagnant. You're always working toward either folly or wisdom. So you can't just say I'm wise now I can stop learning, that doesn't work. Solomon says, no you have to keep on learning. In fact, later on in the book, one of the proverbs specifically says to "cease listening discipline my son is to stray from the words of knowledge." As soon as we stop learning, as soon as we stop growing, as soon as we stop seeking wisdom, we begin drifting toward folly. Some people actually don't just drift; some people stop seeking for wisdom and run headlong for it. That's easier to recognize. But there is a moral purpose, not just for the naïve, but for those who are already mature, for those who are experienced, for those who may be considered wise, or may even, although the danger here is if you're a fool, you may consider yourself wise. Even the wise can and must seek to become more wise.

But this is really in verses five and six he suggests there's not just a moral purpose but there's a mental purpose here. And that is we gain the ability to understand. There is something about studying Proverbs that makes us smarter and makes us better able to understand proverbs, even ones that we haven't studied yet. There is something about studying proverbs that gives us insight. The act of studying can increase our capacity for understanding. We grow in our intellectual ability. He says, the wise, the understanding will acquire, will increase will be able to better understand proverbs and riddles. We

probably don't think much about that because that's not really what proverbs are for, they give advice. But, in a sense, if we give ourselves over to studying things that are wise, as Solomon says later, "on the lips of the wise wisdom is found," well if we give ourselves over to studying things that are wise, then since insight and understanding are parallel aspects right along with understanding or wisdom, then we ourselves will become more wise.

I should of said this earlier, this is just an aside, but one of the things that we use the words "wise" and "wisdom" a lot, but in the Bible the words they are translated in a way that really refers to skill. They could be equally translated that way. If you go back to the book of Exodus and read the stories of Oholiab and Bezaleel, the craftsman who the Lord said he had given special wisdom or skill in working with wood, metal and cloth, that's the same word. *Hokma*, "wisdom" is really kind of skill in living or skill in doing anything in particular. In the book of proverbs it seems to be skill in understanding. And the understanding is both the understanding of the proverbs themselves, as well as the understanding, the ability to understand life and to understand the circumstances that we face. That's why there are many proverbs I believe subliminally or covertly, maybe that's a better way to say it, advise us to pay attention to the situation before we do anything. It's not just the king who should go out and get counselors. So for example the proverb that says "apples of gold and settings of silver is a wise ruler to a listening ear" chapter 25. The important verse, the important word in that verse is not wise or skilled it's that the ear has to be listening. So I can have great advice to give. I could know exactly what to tell you for the circumstance that you face, but if you're not listening, if you're not ready to hear it, it gains nothing. I'm better off not saying it because he says it's when the ear. You have to have the wise word and the listening ear that's when the apples of gold, which is probably a piece of jewelry or something like that, are in the silver setting.

Now there's one other thing in this that I feel I need to say in verses 2 through 6 there's a moral purpose and a mental purpose. I think we need to be very careful that we don't use the proverbs for what I call biblical bullets. You know Solomon says don't do

this bang your guilty. Solomon says do this bang you better do it. So the proverbs simply become another law another subset of the rules and regulations as in Leviticus, Exodus or Deuteronomy. I think actually there's a better way to understand all those laws as well and I think you'll see my point in just a minute. If we think about what God is doing in giving Scripture to us then we find that part of the purpose of Scripture is God revealing himself and we might ask: how does a proverb about how I use my money tell me anything about God? Or, how does a proverb that tells me how to choose a wife tell me anything about the Lord? Well that's part of what it means to study a proverb and think about it. But also when we have proverbs, maybe especially when we have proverbs that command us be wise, then maybe we need to understand that's the Lord is showing us what he wants us to be not because he's a bully but because he knows that that is how we will be most happy. He knows what will be best for us which by the way goes back to that early Greek discussion how can we be happy not in the sense of feel good but live a life that is good. So Solomon is saying or through the book of Proverbs the Lord himself is saying, this is what people who are becoming what I want them to be will look like. Now you see we could again react to that and say, "O my goodness I don't measure up. I'm condemned." Sure that's true but everybody is but we could also say if God, and I'm speaking specifically to people who are Christians, now if God has promised to finish the work that he's begun that is, he says, "I've begun a work in you by bringing you to Christ and I'm going to keep on doing that work until I'm finished. Then the proverbs show us part of the work. Here are some aspects that the work God is doing in us that we be honest, that we'd be faithful that we'd be good friends, we speak in ways that are helpful to bring life and encouragement and lots of other things. But then you see then that the point is far from condemning us all, though they always. They go far beyond condemning us maybe the better way of saying it is God is showing us the work that he is already doing in us so that the Proverbs then becomes really a basis for us saying to God I'm failing at this, forgive me. That's the repentance part that's the part that you know where we feel guilty but you've promised by commanding me to do this your showing me what you are in fact already desiring to do and see accomplished. So then the requirements of

the proverbs whether they're positive or negative prohibitions or commands the requirements become things that become bases upon which we can pray. We can say, "well God I know my words are not as kind as they can be. Work in me to that end, and I can thank the Lord then that he has promised that whatever he requires he will fulfill. So they're not bullets they really become a foundation or maybe building blocks for our prayers.

Now I think that though we talk about this moral purpose and this mental purpose I think that there's another larger purpose to the book of Proverbs. Solomon king Solomon was king of Israel which was not a real big country it was decent size but not real big. He had a gigantic sort of crumb in his day sort of crumbling from both the south and the north and the northeast.

But Solomon had a problem. The problem was how to ensure the continuity of his kingdom and his problem was exacerbated by this: he knows what he has to do to ensure the continuity of his kingdom. The kingdom of Israel will endure as long as Israel fulfills the conditions of the covenant that's the promise of God in Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 28. So the book of proverbs is addressed to what we might call, what I thought of growing up because there was a school like this nearby, a prep school it is addressed to the prep-school guys the guys who are going to go to the Ivy League colleges and universities the guys who are going to become leaders there going to become judges, military rulers, governors and maybe one of them would become king. They would become the king's advisors and counselors if you read through the book that explains immediately why so many proverbs, especially some of the later chapters, deal with how you are to act in front of a king. Do you think the farmers living in Bethlehem had ready access to rules for sitting with the king. No that's why verses deal with. There are verses that specifically deal with and warn against rebelling against the king. Who's going to rebel against the king the farmers out in Jabesh Gilead. No it's not going to be the farmers that rebel it's going to be the rulers. It's going to be the king's son like Absalom. Why do so many verses talk about wealth and how we use it? Why do they warn against unjust gain? Remember we're talking here about a world that is agrarian

when I was growing up we called it scratch farming. We learn enough we earn enough from farming to survive and that's all it's a fairly simple world. In that sense the book of Proverbs is addressed not to the population at large its addressed to the people who are going to step into the positions of leadership in the nations and because as the Bible shows clearly again and again and again as the leaders go so does the country. That's why if you read the prophets its always the king, the prophets and the priest who are wise that are being condemned because they misled the nation. Read Ezekiel 22 that's why he runs down that list there of the ones who are guilty and the nations guilty because they're guilty. That's why the book of Kings constantly says this king was wicked or this king was good because the nation's fate rides on the behavior or the life or the choices of the king these people are going to become the rulers which is incidentally why so many verses talk about justice. Do you think there were that many lawsuits in Israel? No, 70 percent of the lawyers in the world live in the United States. In fact in many verses in Proverbs the words translated righteous and wicked are better translated innocent and guilty. So Proverbs 18:5 says to show partiality to the guilty is not good, nor to thrust aside the innocent injustice why because the guy who this book is written to are going to become the judges. So they're going to be responsible for establishing what is right. They're going to set the standard. They are going to determine the fate of the nation.

So you see the purpose of the book is not just personal its communal or covenant or communitarian I can use that word the book of Proverbs is designed and very deliberately written for these young men so that their obedience will fulfill the requirements of the covenant in their own lives. Yes, but also and by their example in the lives of their countrymen and enable Israel then to continue in the land as a nation. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 by avoiding the curses of the covenant and by obtaining its blessing. One last thing and I'm almost out of time because it's in the Bible, that is, it's canonical it's no longer limited to young men. I don't think I need to say anything more on that but that's why it's such a masculine book because its addressed to these men but ladies young and old it's for all of us. So next time we'll look at what do we do with an individual proverb what do we look for when we are reading it.

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