Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 4, Parallelism, Variant Repetitions, Lectures in Proverbs 1-9 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 4, Parallelism, Variant Repetitions, Lectures in Proverbs 1-9, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Knut Heim's lecture on the Book of Proverbs explores parallelism in biblical poetry, challenging the traditional, rigid three-category system (synonymous, antithetical, synthetic) proposed by Robert Lowth. Heim introduces four levels of parallelism—intra-linear, inter-linear, semi-linear, and trans-linear—highlighting the importance of repetition and variation. He critiques the over-reliance on precise parallelism in textual criticism and lexicography, advocating for more flexible and imaginative interpretations that embrace ambiguity. The lecture also examines the structure of Proverbs 1-9, analyzing the "ten lectures" and their introductions, arguing for deliberate editorial choices that link the seemingly independent units. Finally, Heim emphasizes the need for careful attention to detail and the role of the interpreter's imagination in understanding the poetic nuances of Proverbs.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Heim, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Proverbs).

Heim_Prov_Session 04.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 4, Parallelism, Variant Repetitions, Lectures in Proverbs 1-9

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt on Proverbs:

Briefing Document: Dr. Knut Heim on Parallelism and Structure in Proverbs

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Knut Heim focuses on three major aspects of the book of Proverbs, specifically chapters 1-9: parallelism, variant repetition, and structural design. Heim critiques the traditional understanding of parallelism, championed by Bishop Robert Lowth, arguing for a more nuanced and flexible approach. He also explores how variant repetitions and structural patterns contribute to the poetic and didactic power of Proverbs.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Critique of Traditional Parallelism:

- **Robert Lowth's Paradigm:** Heim outlines Bishop Robert Lowth's influential theory of *Parallelismus Membrorum* (parallelism of members), which divides parallelism into three categories:

- **Synonymous Parallelism:** The two halves of a verse restate the same idea using different but similar words. Example: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, / and all that is within me, bless his holy name." (Psalm 103:1).

- **Antithetical Parallelism:** The two halves of a verse express contrasting ideas. Example: "The light of the righteous rejoices, / but the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out." (Proverbs 13:9).

- **Synthetic Parallelism:** The parallelism lies in the similar form of construction, with the second line expanding or completing the idea of the first. Example: "kings loathe wicked action, / for a throne is sustained by righteousness." (Proverbs 16:12).

- **Problems with Lowth's Strict System:** Heim argues that Lowth's system is too rigid and problematic because it:

- Alters the text to fit the theory. "You can see how the evidence, the material that the theory was designed to explain was altered in order to fit the theory."

- Presumes strict, precise parallels where they often don't exist.

- Can lead to textual emendation where the text is changed to make it fit a preconceived understanding of perfect parallelism, such as the example of Richard Clifford's suggested change of Proverbs 29.6. "Over the last two centuries, literally hundreds upon hundreds of suggestions of this sort have been made."

- Assumes that obscure words can be defined simply by their parallel counterparts. "The determination of word meanings on the basis of parallelism with unknown words being identified as synonyms of their parallel counterparts in the case of synonymous parallelism and as antonyms of their parallel counterparts in the case of antithetic parallelism needs to be reconsidered."

- **The problem with "better parallelism":** "The widely practiced procedure of improving the text of actual poetic lines on the basis of an apparently better parallelism is, in my view, an exegetical fallacy."

- **Need for a More Flexible Approach:** "Poetic parallelism, in my view, consists of repetition and variation, of difference and similarity." Heim calls for a more flexible, imaginative, and specific analysis that recognizes:

- Parallelism operates on multiple levels (see below).

- Parallelism involves both repetition and variation. "The creative combination of repetition with variation is the very essence of Hebrew poetry."

- Imprecise parallelism has a poetic function and is a clever technique. "Imprecise parallelism violates readers' expectations that parallel lines in Hebrew poetry are similar."

- Emphasis should be placed on *how* the different parts of poetic lines interrelate rather than forcing them into categories. "Often the imprecise nature of the parallelism allows a range of complex and highly productive implications and inferences that immensely enrich meaning and significance."

2. Levels of Parallelism:

Heim expands on Lowth's concept by proposing four levels of parallelism: * **Semi-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism within a half-line of a verse (internal parallelism). Example: "A little sleep, a little slumber" (Proverbs 6:10). * **Intra-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between the two halves of a verse (Lowth's classic view). * **Inter-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between adjacent verses. Example: Proverbs 26:4-5. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you too will become like him. / Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he will become wise in his own eyes." * **Trans-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between non-adjacent lines or partial lines. Example: Proverbs 10:6b and 10:11b.

3. Variant Repetition:

- **Creative Repetition:** Heim views variant repetitions as a product of "skillful poetic creativity," not simply errors or redundancies. "Often, we were able to reconstruct the editorial and creative poetic process and we could observe what poets did, how they did it, and why they did it."

- **Purposeful Variation:** The variations between repeated verses or phrases are deliberate and introduce new nuances and meanings, highlighting the dynamism of the poetic technique. "It is the differences between variants and between corresponding elements on the various levels of parallelism that are most interesting."

- **Challenging Ambiguity:** Ambiguity in proverbs is not a flaw but a deliberate technique to engage the reader's imagination. "Ambiguity is very frequently the point of the poetic statement."

- **Refining Interpretation:** Comparing variants can help us understand a verse's meaning, but not with the goal of assimilation of their meanings to one another. "The compulsion of many modern Western interpreters to remove ambiguity has frequently resulted in the appearance of totalizing truth claims in the Proverbs of the Book of Proverbs when it was, in fact, the interpreters themselves who had robbed those Proverbs of their nuances through their strict application of precise parallelism."

4. Structural Design of Proverbs 1-9:

- **Ten "Lectures" or "Instructions":** Heim mentions the widely recognized structure of ten lectures or instructions within Proverbs 1-9.

- **Typical Three-Part Structure:** Each lecture often consists of an exordium (introduction), a lesson (main part), and a conclusion.

- **Exordium:** Typically includes an address to "a son," an exhortation to hear, and a motivation.

- **Lesson:** Presents a coherent message based on a specific theme.

- **Conclusion:** A summary statement or capstone proverb.

- **Interconnected Introductions:** Variant repetitions are often found in the introductions of these lectures, suggesting a deliberate editorial activity and that the lectures were intended to be read and heard together, rather than as independent units. "What this suggests then is that whoever composed chapters 1 to 9 as we now have them was quite deliberately repeating introduction sentences from the introductions in the 10 lectures in subsequent introductions of a following lecture."

- **Repetitions within 1-9:** 18% of the verses within Proverbs 1-9 appear more than once, which is a significant indicator of poetic and thematic structure within this section of Proverbs. "Altogether, 46 verses in Proverbs 1 to 9 are involved in variant repetition."

5. Exegetical Fallacies:

Heim identifies several common fallacies in the interpretation of biblical poetry, rooted in the theory of strict parallelism:

- **Referencing other verses to settle ambiguities:** Ambiguity is not a flaw, but often the point.

- **Lexicography and textual criticism based on strict parallelism:** Word meanings cannot be determined solely based on parallelism.

- **Improving the text based on "better parallelism":** Textual emendations should be approached with caution.

6. Interpretive Skills and Techniques:

Heim proposes guidelines for reading biblical poetry with imagination:

- **Heuristic norms combined with flexibility:** Analyzers of parallelism need to identify the precise parts of the partial lines that correspond, but they must remain flexible and specific.

- **Embracing the truly unusual:** Pay attention to features that are surprising even to those familiar with the poetic genre. "The truly unusual in poetry is not the unusual features that conform to our expectations of unusual features of poetry, which is the pattern, but those features that surprise even the readers and hearers who know the poetic genre well."

- **Diligent exploration of correspondence:** Pay attention to all aspects of poetic language and embrace the unusual.

- **Emphasizing ambiguity and wordplay:** Apparent cruxes should be celebrated as instances of poetic ingenuity.

Implications:

- This lecture challenges readers to move beyond a mechanical approach to biblical poetry.

- It encourages close reading and thoughtful consideration of poetic devices.

- It highlights the creativity and imagination of the original authors.

- It sets the stage for future lectures by establishing an approach to the study of the Book of Proverbs which is nuanced and flexible.

This briefing document provides a concise overview of Dr. Heim's lecture, emphasizing his critical engagement with traditional scholarship and his call for a more imaginative and nuanced approach to reading the Book of Proverbs. His emphasis on variation, ambiguity, and multi-layered parallelism suggests an extremely thoughtful approach to interpreting wisdom literature.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 4, Parallelism, Variant Repetitions, Lectures in Proverbs 1-9

Proverbs: Parallelism, Repetition, and Structure Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences, demonstrating your understanding of the concepts.

1. What is Parallelismus Membrorum, and who developed this concept?

2. Briefly describe the three categories of parallelism proposed by Robert Lowth.

3. What were the two functions of parallelism that Lowth believed could be used for interpreting Hebrew poetry?

4. What are the four levels of parallelism identified in the lecture?

5. How does semi-linear parallelism differ from intra-linear parallelism?

6. What is trans-linear parallelism and how does it contribute to a broader understanding of poetry in the Book of Proverbs?

7. According to the lecture, what are the key components of poetic parallelism?

8. What are some of the exegetical fallacies that the lecture critiques regarding traditional approaches to parallelism?

9. What does the lecture propose as the nature of the "truly unusual" in poetry?

10. What are the three typical parts that make up the ten lectures of Proverbs chapters 1-9?

Answer Key

1. Parallelismus Membrorum, meaning "parallelism of the members," is a theory developed by Bishop Robert Lowth that describes the structural parallelism found in Hebrew poetry. Lowth believed that lines of Hebrew verse are often structured in a parallel way, either repeating, contrasting, or completing an idea from the first line.

2. Robert Lowth proposed three categories of parallelism: synonymous, where the lines repeat the same idea using different words; antithetical, where the lines

express contrasting ideas; and synthetic, where the second line builds upon or completes the thought of the first, but without explicit synonymy or contrast.

3. Lowth believed that the strictness of parallelism could be used for lexicography and textual criticism. He proposed that parallelism could reveal the meaning of obscure words based on their parallel counterparts and also identify potential errors in the text's transmission where parallelism was not as expected, and that this should be used to emend the text.

4. The four levels of parallelism are semi-linear parallelism (within a half-verse), intra-linear parallelism (between the two halves of a single verse), inter-linear parallelism (between adjacent verses), and trans-linear parallelism (between verses separated by other verses).

5. Semi-linear parallelism refers to the parallel structure within a single half-verse or partial line of poetry. In contrast, intra-linear parallelism refers to the more traditional understanding of parallelism between the two half lines of a single verse.

6. Trans-linear parallelism refers to the correspondence between poetic lines that are separated by one or more intervening lines. This concept helps reveal how poetic meaning extends beyond immediate verses.

7. Poetic parallelism is defined as a creative combination of repetition and variation. The differences between parallel components are key to understanding meaning, adding nuances to what is being expressed.

8. The lecture critiques the fallacies of using other verses to resolve ambiguities, using parallelism for strict lexicography and textual criticism, and correcting texts to create "better" parallelism. These practices are criticized for attempting to impose rigid interpretations on texts with natural poetic ambiguity.

9. The "truly unusual" in poetry is not the typical unusual features found in poetic language, but those that surprise readers who are familiar with the poetic genre and conventions. These features often carry deeper and unexpected meanings.

10. The three parts are the exordium (introduction), the lesson (main teaching), and the conclusion (summary or capstone). The exordium often includes an address to a son, an exhortation to learn, and a motivation.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following essay questions thoughtfully and thoroughly using the material provided, but do not feel limited to using only material from the text. Essays should demonstrate a high level of comprehension and critical thinking.

1. Critically evaluate Robert Lowth's theory of Parallelismus Membrorum, highlighting both its contributions to and limitations in understanding Hebrew poetry.

2. Explain how the four levels of parallelism identified by the lecture, semi-linear, intra-linear, inter-linear, and trans-linear, enrich the interpretation of the Book of Proverbs and move beyond Lowth's framework.

3. Discuss how the concepts of imprecise parallelism, ellipsis, and ambiguity contribute to a richer understanding of Hebrew poetry, as opposed to striving for precise synonymy or antithesis.

4. Analyze the lecture's critique of traditional exegetical practices, such as relying on other verses to settle ambiguities and using parallelism for strict lexicography, and discuss the implications for how we approach biblical interpretation.

5. Examine the argument that the "truly unusual" elements in poetry reveal the poet's creative imagination and analyze the importance of imaginative reading practices for discovering these hidden treasures.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Parallelism:** A literary device where parts of sentences, verses, or paragraphs are structured similarly to create balance, rhythm, and enhanced meaning.

- **Parallelismus Membrorum:** The Latin term used to describe the parallelism of poetic lines, specifically the way in which the parts of Hebrew verse are structured in parallel.

- **Synonymous Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second part of a line restates the idea of the first using different but equivalent terms.

- **Antithetical Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second part of a line presents a contrasting idea to the first.

- **Synthetic Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second part of a line completes, specifies or builds upon the idea of the first, but not through synonymy or contrast.

- **Semi-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism within a partial line of poetry, where a half-verse is further divided into parallel parts.

- **Intra-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between the two halves of a single line of poetry.

- **Inter-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between successive lines or verses of a poem.

- **Trans-linear Parallelism:** Parallelism between poetic lines that are separated by one or more intervening lines.

- **Repetition and Variation:** The combination of repeating elements with subtle differences to create a dynamic interplay of meaning.

- **Imprecise Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where elements correspond in general terms but not strictly, often creating nuances and opening up meaning.

- **Ellipsis:** The omission of words or phrases that are understood or implied by the context, often serving to add information or create wordplay.

- **Exordium:** The introductory section of a lecture or teaching, which typically addresses the audience, encourages learning, and points out the value of the teaching.

- **Lesson:** The main teaching or message of a lecture, usually based on one theme.

- **Lexicography:** The practice of compiling dictionaries by determining the meanings of words.

- **Textual Criticism:** The practice of comparing and analyzing the various handwritten copies of ancient documents in order to determine the most accurate wording of the original text.

- **Exegetical Fallacy:** A mistake in the interpretation or explanation of a text, often caused by improper methodology.

- **Multivalence:** The ability of a word, phrase, or text to have multiple valid interpretations, often deliberately created through the use of ambiguity.

- **Wordplay:** The creative use of language to create puns, ambiguities, or other interesting effects through the sound, meaning, or form of words.

5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 4, Parallelism, Variant Repetitions, Lectures in Proverbs 1-9, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Poetic Parallelism and the Book of Proverbs

- **What is parallelism in the context of Hebrew poetry, and why is it significant?**

- Parallelism, particularly "Parallelismus Membrorum" (parallelism of the members), is a fundamental feature of Hebrew poetry where different parts of a verse (or lines of a poem) correspond to each other. It involves repetition of similar ideas with variation, creating a sense of balance and depth. Traditionally, this was seen in three forms: synonymous (repeating the same sense in different words), antithetical (expressing opposing ideas), and synthetic (where the second line builds upon or completes the first). However, modern analysis expands this view to include more levels of parallelism. The significance lies in how it enriches meaning, creates a unique poetic identity and engages the reader's imagination.

- **What are the different levels of parallelism beyond the traditional intra-linear understanding?**

- Beyond the standard intra-linear parallelism (between halves of the same verse), there are three other notable levels: Semi-linear parallelism operates within a partial line (e.g., the two halves of the first half of a verse being parallel); inter-linear parallelism involves correspondences between successive verses; and trans-linear parallelism connects poetic lines separated by one or more intervening lines. This multi-layered approach highlights the interconnected nature of the poetic text, revealing patterns that might otherwise be missed.

- **How has the traditional understanding of parallelism impacted the interpretation of Hebrew poetry, and what are the criticisms of this approach?**

- The traditional view, largely based on Bishop Robert Lowth's work, emphasized strict and precise parallelism. This led to the use of parallelism for lexicography and textual criticism, where obscure words were interpreted based on their parallel counterparts, and textual emendations were made to "improve" parallelism. However, this approach has been criticized for altering the original text to fit the theory, ignoring the nuanced variations and complexities inherent in the poetry. The strict approach often led to forcing simplistic interpretations and removing ambiguity rather than appreciating it.

- **What is meant by "imprecise parallelism," and what is its role in Hebrew poetry?**

- Imprecise parallelism refers to situations where parallel lines don't exhibit perfect or close synonymy or antithesis, but are sufficiently similar to be recognized as such. The differences create new meanings and nuances that enhance the poetic impact. It is a deliberate technique to engage the reader's mind and prompt further interpretation. This also includes ellipsis as a tool to add more information into a parallel verse without making it unequal in length. Ambiguity is also another result, adding further interpretation and meaning.

- **What are some of the common exegetical fallacies that arise from the traditional understanding of precise parallelism?**

- Several fallacies include: (1) Using other verses to eliminate ambiguity, thus losing each verse's unique nuance; (2) relying on parallelism to determine meanings of obscure words without accounting for potential variation and ambiguity; and (3) altering the text to create "better" parallelism by assuming that a lack of precise parallelism indicates a textual error rather than a deliberate poetic device. In short, forcing conformity and losing the unique characteristics of each statement.

- **What strategies and skills are recommended for a more imaginative and nuanced reading of Hebrew poetry, especially in the Book of Proverbs?**

- A new approach should be flexible, specific, and imaginative. Analysts of parallelism should identify the precise elements in each part of the poetic lines that correspond to one another and not to assume that these correspondences are always obvious. Instead of focusing on neat categories, interpreters should value ambiguity, wordplays and the unusual. Slow reading or repeated hearing is key, along with embracing the uniqueness of each verse in its own context. Additionally, diligence, imagination, courage, and wisdom are essential to appreciate the multiple layers of meaning. In short, treat each instance of parallelism as unique and approach each with flexibility to gain greater meaning.

- **How does the idea of "variant repetition" play a role in the Book of Proverbs, particularly in chapters 1-9?**

- Variant repetition is the intentional repetition of similar verses in different parts of the Book of Proverbs, often with subtle but significant variations. In Proverbs 1-9, these repetitions are frequently found in the introductions to the ten lectures, connecting them and suggesting that they were created to be read and taught together. This reveals a deliberate editorial process, rather than originally independent texts. This underscores that meaning is created through variation as much as repetition.

- **What is the typical structure of the lectures in Proverbs 1-9 and what are their component parts?**

- The lectures in Proverbs 1-9 typically follow a three-part structure: an *exordium* (introduction), which includes an address to a son, an exhortation to listen, and a motivation for learning; a *lesson*, the main teaching focused on a theme; and a *conclusion*, summarizing the lesson, which can end with an apothecum, a memorable capstone proverb. While this is a general structure there is much variation both in the overall structure as well as the makeup of each component. Some lectures may miss the conclusion, for example, which is part of the poetic process.