

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 1, Where is Wisdom to be Found? Proverbs as Wisdom Literature

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Konkell, Proverbs, Session 1, Where is Wisdom to be Found? Proverbs as Wisdom Literature, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is the first session of Dr. August Konkell's lectures on the Book of Proverbs. **Dr. Konkell**, a professor of Old Testament, **introduces Proverbs as wisdom literature**, explaining its presence across cultures and its connection to the Hebrew word *hokmah*. He **differentiates Proverbs from Ecclesiastes and Job**, focusing on Proverbs' practical application to daily life. The lecture **explores the nature of wisdom**, its acquisition, and its role as a means of knowing God's will, and **provides an overview of the structure and content of the Book of Proverbs**.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Konkell, Session 1 – 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).**



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3. Briefing Document: Konkel, Proverbs, Session 1, Where is Wisdom to be Found? Proverbs as Wisdom Literature

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. August Konkel's lecture on Proverbs:

Briefing Document: Dr. August Konkel on Proverbs, Session 1

Date: October 26, 2023 (based on date in provided text: "© 2024 August Konkel and Ted Hildebrandt") **Source:** Excerpts from "Konkel_Proverbs_EN_Session01.pdf" **Presenter:** Dr. August Konkel, Professor of Old Testament at McMaster Divinity College

I. Introduction and Context:

- **Personal Anecdote:** Dr. Konkel opens with a personal story about milking cows and the proverb "don't cry over spilled milk" to illustrate the universal nature of proverbs and how they relate to life experiences. He states: "Every culture has Proverbs, and of course what the Proverbs mean, how they're understood, and how they're used, depends on the culture itself."
- **Proverbs as Wisdom Literature:** The book of Proverbs is categorized as "wisdom literature," a genre found across cultures, using the Hebrew term "hokmah".
- **Hokmah Defined:** *Hokmah* encompasses a broad range of meanings, including technical skills (e.g. mining) and life skills (knowing how to live). It is more comprehensive than the English understanding of "wisdom" which "has to do with making decisions." The central theme of *hokmah* is tied to "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" meaning that wisdom begins with a disposition and conduct.

II. The Nature of Wisdom Literature:

- **Three Books of Wisdom:** Dr. Konkel identifies three books in the Bible classified as wisdom literature: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, each addressing a different aspect:
- **Proverbs:** How to deal with daily life, "how we deal with all the ordinary events of life."
- **Ecclesiastes:** The meaning of life, asking "What is it in life that can give significance, that can give meaning, that matters?"

- **Job:** Questions about knowledge and suffering, focusing on "What do we understand about ourselves and about the universe?"
- **Purpose Statements of Proverbs:** The book begins with purpose statements outlining its objectives: "to know wisdom and discipline, to understand words of knowledge, to acquire the discipline of insight, righteousness, justice, and equity, and to give the gullible craftiness to give the youth informed discretion."
- **Wisdom as Knowing God's Will:** Wisdom is presented as a means of understanding and living according to God's will in both big life decisions and everyday situations.

III. Means of Knowing God in Scripture:

- **Three Sources of Revelation:** Scripture provides three means of knowing God:
- **Torah (Instruction):** The first five books of the Bible, the teaching of Moses about God, his world, his people and their relationship.
- **Nevi'im (Prophets):** Applying Torah teaching to specific life situations, and assessing obedience to the covenant. These books may contain proverbs.
- **Ketuvim (Wisdom):** A third means of revelation, described in Jeremiah 18:18, includes counsel from the wise. This is a "literary means by which the word of God comes to us as humans."

IV. Structure and Types of Wisdom in Proverbs:

- **Two Divisions of Proverbs:** The book is broadly divided into two sections:
- **Didactic Wisdom (Chapters 1-9):** Instruction on leading a proper, virtuous life, presented as teaching from a father to a child, these texts are written to "prepare for understanding the ideals of faith and of culture."
- **Collections of Proverbs (Chapters 10-31):** Hundreds of individual proverbs in various collections.
- **Critical Wisdom:** Distinguished from didactic wisdom, critical wisdom, seen in Job and Ecclesiastes, asks the big questions of life such as meaning, value, and what we can actually know about the world.
- **Mashal:** The Hebrew term for proverb, *mashal*, is broad and encompasses various forms beyond short sayings such as metaphors, parables and poems.

- Examples: The lecture provides examples of *mashal* from the teachings of Jesus including: "Physician, heal thyself," and "no prophet is accepted in his own country," and the parable of the prodigal son.
- **Characteristics of Proverbs:** Proverbs are typically:
 - Short and memorable
 - Express a truth or viewpoint, often applicable to particular situations
 - Reflect observations of order, in nature and in social relationships.
 - Often ambiguous and can seem contradictory (e.g. "Distance makes the heart grow fonder" vs "Out of sight out of mind.")
 - Characterized by assonance and ambiguity, using an example from Ecclesiastes 7:1 "A good name is better than oil, and the day of death than the day of birth."

V. Outline of the Book of Proverbs:

- **Instruction of Wisdom:** Chapters 1-9
- Lady Wisdom calls from the towers (chapter 1).
- Lady Wisdom prepares the feast (chapter 9).
- **Collections of Proverbs:** Solomon's collections (10:1 - 22:16). 375 proverbs in total.
- Collections of the wise.
- Collections from the time of Hezekiah.
- **Appendix:** Words of Acher.
- Sayings of the mother of King Lemuel.
- Wisdom of strength.

VI. Key Takeaways:

- **Universal Appeal of Proverbs:** Proverbs are a linguistic phenomenon found in every culture, reflecting shared human experiences.
- **Wisdom as a Process:** Wisdom ("hokmah") is not merely intellectual knowledge, but a disposition towards God and a way of living in accordance with His will. It is not a static concept, but something to be learned. "Knowledge is like a garden. It is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested."

- **Contextual Interpretation:** Proverbs are not simply self-evident, but must be understood within a specific context and application.
- **Practical Guidance:** Proverbs offer guidance for daily life, relationships, and understanding the order of both the natural and social world.
- **Proverbs are both traditional and evolving:** The book of Proverbs is not static, it was composed over time and evolved through the time of Hezekiah who was 250 years after Solomon.

This briefing document provides a comprehensive overview of the main themes and ideas presented in the first session of Dr. Konkel's lecture on the book of Proverbs.

4. Study Guide: Konkell, Proverbs, Session 1, Where is Wisdom to be Found? Proverbs as Wisdom Literature

Proverbs Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Konkell, what is the Hebrew word for wisdom, and what does it encompass?
2. What are the three books of the Bible considered to be wisdom literature, and how does Konkell briefly distinguish them?
3. What are the four or five purpose statements found at the beginning of the book of Proverbs?
4. Besides the Torah and the Nevi'im, what is the third means of revelation in the scriptures?
5. According to Jeremiah 18:18, what are the three sources of authority that would be used against him?
6. What are the two main divisions within the book of Proverbs?
7. What is "didactic wisdom," and how is it typically presented in Proverbs?
8. What is "critical wisdom," and which books of the Bible are associated with this type of wisdom?
9. What is a "mashal," and what forms can it take in Hebrew?
10. Why does Dr. Konkell say that proverbs are never simply self-evident?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Hebrew word for wisdom is "hokmah," which encompasses both technical knowledge (like mining) and life skills, especially knowing how to live. The common theme is "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
2. The three books of wisdom literature are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Proverbs deals with daily life questions, Ecclesiastes explores the meaning and significance of life, and Job grapples with the question of what we know about suffering.

3. The purpose statements at the beginning of Proverbs are: to know wisdom and discipline, to understand words of knowledge, to acquire the discipline of insight, righteousness, justice, and equity, and to give the gullible craftiness and the youth informed discretion.
4. Besides the Torah (instruction) and the Nevi'im (prophets), wisdom is a third means of revelation. It is seen as a literary means by which the word of God comes to humans.
5. According to Jeremiah 18:18, the three sources of authority that would be used against him are the law, which comes from the priest; the counsel, which comes from the wise; and the word, which comes from the prophet.
6. The book of Proverbs is divided into two main sections. The first nine chapters contain didactic wisdom, while chapters 10-31 contain collections of proverbs.
7. Didactic wisdom is instruction for leading a proper, virtuous life and preparing people to understand the ideals of faith and culture. In Proverbs, this teaching is presented as a father instructing a child.
8. Critical wisdom reflects on the big questions of life such as what is valuable, what has significance and what can be known about life. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are associated with critical wisdom.
9. A "mashal" is a Hebrew term that encompasses a variety of literary forms, including extended metaphors, parables, and poems. It does not have the specific meaning of the English word proverb.
10. Proverbs are never simply self-evident because their truth is dependent on the particular circumstance to which they are applied, and they must be understood in context.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following questions using a well-structured essay format that demonstrates your understanding of the source material.

1. Discuss the concept of "hokmah" as presented by Dr. Konkel. How does it relate to the concept of "wisdom" in English, and what are its key characteristics?
2. Compare and contrast the three types of wisdom literature in the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. How do their main themes, concerns, and approaches to life differ?
3. Dr. Konkel identifies three sources of authority in the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and Wisdom. Discuss the characteristics of each and how they function as channels of revelation.
4. Explain the distinction between didactic and critical wisdom in the context of the book of Proverbs and how that impacts our interpretation of the text.
5. Explore the nature of proverbs as a literary form. Consider the idea of the "mashal," and consider the ways in which proverbs express truth, noting their memorability, observation of order, and the potential for ambiguity.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hokmah:** The Hebrew word for wisdom; encompasses technical knowledge and life skills, with a central theme of the fear of the Lord.
- **Torah:** Hebrew for "instruction"; refers to the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), often considered the foundational law.
- **Nevi'im:** Hebrew for "prophets"; refers to the books of the prophets in the Old Testament, including historical books and the books of prophecy.
- **Ketuvim:** Hebrew for "writings"; the third section of the Hebrew Bible, containing books of poetry, wisdom, and other writings like Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.
- **Didactic Wisdom:** A form of wisdom literature focused on instruction for leading a proper, virtuous life.
- **Critical Wisdom:** A form of wisdom literature that reflects on the significant and fundamental questions of life.
- **Mashal:** A Hebrew term encompassing a broad range of literary forms, including parables, metaphors, poems, and proverbs.

5. FAQs on Konkel, Proverbs, Session 1, Where is Wisdom to be Found? Proverbs as Wisdom Literature, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Proverbs based on Dr. Konkel's Lecture

- **What is the primary focus of the book of Proverbs?**
- The book of Proverbs primarily focuses on providing wisdom for daily life, specifically on how to make right decisions and live virtuously. It emphasizes practical knowledge and life skills, distinguishing itself from other wisdom books like Ecclesiastes (which explores the *why* of life) and Job (which delves into the *what* of life, especially in relation to suffering). Proverbs offers instruction on how to navigate everyday situations and make wise choices, based on the principle that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
- **What is the Hebrew word for "wisdom," and what is its range of meaning?**
- The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*. Its meaning is broad, encompassing not only knowledge but also skill, including technical skills (like mining) and, most importantly for the book of Proverbs, life skills. *Hokmah* is about having the ability to make right decisions and understanding how to live life in a way that is pleasing to God, which stems from having the proper attitude or disposition.
- **What is the relationship between "wisdom" and "the fear of the Lord"?**
- According to Proverbs, the "fear of the Lord" is the foundational element and the beginning point of wisdom. It's not about being scared, but rather about having a deep respect and reverence for God, acknowledging His authority and sovereignty. This reverence informs the attitude and conduct of a wise person. It is the disposition from which wise living arises.

- **How does the book of Proverbs fit into the broader context of the Hebrew scriptures?**
- Proverbs is considered one of the three books of wisdom literature in the Hebrew scriptures (the others being Ecclesiastes and Job). It represents one of three avenues through which God's word comes to humanity, alongside the Torah (instruction given by Moses) and the Nevi'im (the prophets' application of that instruction). While the Torah outlines God's laws and principles, and the prophets apply those to specific situations, wisdom literature offers practical guidance for how to live a life that aligns with God's will.
- **What are the main divisions within the book of Proverbs?**
- The book of Proverbs is generally divided into two main parts. The first nine chapters consist of didactic wisdom, which is instruction, often framed as a father's teachings to his child, intended to prepare the reader for a proper and virtuous life. Chapters 10-31, in contrast, are made up of various collections of individual proverbs. These collections are attributed to Solomon and others, and provide concrete examples of how to live wisely in different circumstances.
- **What is a 'mashal' and how does it relate to Proverbs?**
- The term 'mashal' refers to a form of saying or teaching that can take a variety of literary forms such as metaphors, parables, or poems. Proverbs are a form of 'mashal' within the Hebrew language, but not all 'mashals' are Proverbs. In many ways Jesus' teachings, especially the parables, can be categorized as mashal as well.
- **What are some characteristics of proverbs, and how are they meant to be understood?**
- Proverbs are typically short, memorable sayings that express truths or observations about life. They often employ assonance and can sometimes seem ambiguous or even contradictory (like "distance makes the heart grow fonder" and "out of sight, out of mind"). The key is that proverbs are not universally applicable truths but are meant to be understood in the context of specific situations. They offer insight into the order and dynamics of both the natural world and human relationships.

- **Why is a good reputation considered important in the book of Proverbs and within the wisdom tradition?**
- A good reputation, a legacy, is considered valuable because it represents how one has lived, and is the one thing people leave behind. The preacher in Ecclesiastes 7:1 indicates that a good reputation is more valuable than oil, and more important than the day of birth. Unlike hopes and aspirations, which are present at a birth, a good reputation, once fully earned by a life well-lived, cannot be ruined once a person dies. So, a focus on how you will be remembered is crucial and should be pursued throughout one's lifetime.