

Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Session 1 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Putnam, Proverbs, Session 1 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Fred Putnam's lecture introduces the Book of Proverbs, emphasizing its authorship and compilation by Solomon and later additions. **He highlights the book's structure**, noting its progression from motivational poems to proverbial sayings, contrasting wisdom and folly. **Putnam explains the different types of proverbs**, including emblematic and those offering commands with justifications. **The lecture stresses the deliberate organization** of Proverbs, urging readers to approach it as a unified text rather than a random collection. Finally, **the lecture emphasizes that wisdom in Proverbs is not secular**, but a divinely ordained aspect of creation.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Putnam, 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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on01.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Putnam, Proverbs, Session 1 of 4

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Fred Putnam's lecture on the Book of Proverbs:

Briefing Document: Dr. Fred Putnam on the Book of Proverbs (Lecture 1)

Overview:

This lecture serves as an introduction to the Book of Proverbs, exploring its authorship, historical context, structure, and intended purpose. Dr. Putnam emphasizes that Proverbs is not a haphazard collection of sayings, but rather a carefully curated and organized work designed to guide the reader towards wisdom. He highlights the importance of understanding the historical and literary context to properly interpret the proverbs and their underlying messages.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Authorship and Authority:

- **Solomon's Wisdom:** The Book of Proverbs begins by identifying Solomon, son of David, King of Israel, as the author (Proverbs 1:1). This attribution is crucial, as Solomon was renowned for his God-given wisdom and his ability to discern justice, as illustrated in the story of the two women and the baby (1 Kings 3).
- **Not Sole Author:** While Solomon is the central figure, Dr. Putnam argues that he is likely not the sole *author* of every proverb. Instead, Solomon acted as a collector and authenticator of wisdom. He likely gathered proverbs from various sources, including those presented by foreign dignitaries who came to test his wisdom.
- **Authority, Not Authorship:** The title "Proverbs of Solomon" should be understood as a statement of *authority* rather than strict authorship. Solomon's "stamp of approval" validates the collection. As Putnam notes, "the title then is not really a statement of authorship so much as it is a statement of authority. And Solomon's stamp stands on the whole on the whole collection."
- **Other Contributors:** Chapters 30 and 31 include sayings from Agur and King Lemuel (or his mother), further supporting the idea that Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings endorsed by Solomon, not exclusively originated by him. This suggests a broader cultural context where wisdom was tested and shared.

1. Historical Context:

- **Kingship and Justice:** In the ancient Near East, the king's primary responsibility was to ensure justice and the well-being of his people. This is demonstrated by Hammurabi's code, which depicts the god Marduk authorizing the king. Solomon's wisdom, like Hammurabi's laws, is a gift that enables him to judge rightly.
- **Wisdom as a Test:** Wise men from other nations would visit Solomon to test his wisdom, and how they tested him was likely through the sharing and interpreting of proverbs, which also acted as legal arguments in some cultures. The Queen of Sheba's visit is an example of this process. Putnam notes, "So, it's entirely possible that people came from Egypt to see if Solomon's wisdom greater than the wisdom of 2000 years of Egyptian history... They came to test him and to find out if Solomon's reputation really was valid."

1. Literary Structure and Organization:

- **Two Types of Instruction:** The book's structure reflects instruction literature common in Mesopotamia and Egypt, with elements of both simple lists of sayings and more complex works containing poetic introductions, subtitles, and multiple collections of proverbs.
- **Deliberate Arrangement:** The book is deliberately shaped, not a haphazard collection. There is careful organization, evident even in the later additions (chapters 25-29) collected during Hezekiah's reign.
- **Subtitles:** The book is divided by subtitles, including "Proverbs of Solomon" in chapters 1:1 and 10:1; "Words of the Wise" in 22:17 and 24:23; and the sayings of Agur in chapter 30 and King Lemuel's mother in chapter 31.
- **Motifs:** Various sections have distinct characteristics, such as the emblematic proverbs in chapters 25 and 26 and the emphasis on leadership and justice in chapters 28 and 29.
- **Acrostic Poem:** The acrostic poem in chapter 31 verses 10-31 serves a structural function as the ending of the book, with each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

1. Purpose and Interpretation:

- **Motivation:** Chapters 1-9 are not merely introductory; they are designed to *motivate* the reader to pursue wisdom. They do so through both positive (rewards of wisdom) and negative (consequences of folly) examples. Putnam states, "The first nine chapters really are written as a foreword a preface to the rest of the book."
- **Moral Categories:** Proverbs uses contrasting ideas and behaviors to show that life is a *moral* undertaking, where choices and actions either lean toward wisdom or folly.
- **Wisdom as Godly:** The book should not be viewed as merely secular wisdom with a theological veneer, but rather as wisdom rooted in God's nature and part of creation itself. "There is no such thing as secular wisdom and that instead, wisdom is part of creation because wisdom is part of God." Living wisely means living in line with how God has designed the world to function.
- **Riddles and Pondering:** The book contains riddles ("dark sayings"), indicating that the reader is intended to ponder and learn how to interpret them progressively. The book is set up so that the reader will "learn how to read Proverbs as we read through the book."

1. Progression of Understanding:

- **Gradual Learning:** The book is designed to enable the reader to grow in their ability to understand. The longer poems in chapters 1-9 are easier to understand than the condensed proverbs, acting as a guide for interpreting the more subtle messages later in the book.
- **Importance of Whole Book:** Dr. Putnam emphasizes that the Book of Proverbs should be read and studied as a whole, not simply as a collection of individual sayings. The organization and arrangement are deliberate and important to the overall meaning and purpose.

Quotes:

- "The title says in the first verse of the Proverbs of Solomon son of David king of Israel and the way that the Bible works that actually means that Solomon is the king of Israel and that he is the son of David."
- "The point is that the king is authorized to be king by the gods because of his ability to administer justice."

- "...the request that Solomon made in the special gift that God gave him was an insight into the human heart."
- "So, what we actually have in the book of Proverbs is not Proverbs authored or dreamed up by Solomon but Proverbs instead that Solomon has given his seal of approval to or that he has authorized rather than authoring."
- "So, the title then is not really a statement of authorship so much as it is a statement of authority. And Solomon's stamp stands on the whole on the whole collection."
- "The first nine chapters really are written as a foreword a preface to the rest of the book."
- "There is no such thing as secular wisdom and that instead, wisdom is part of creation because wisdom is part of God."
- "...the book of Proverbs is not haphazard. Somebody thought about how they were going to set this book up."

Conclusion:

Dr. Putnam's first lecture lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the Book of Proverbs. By considering the historical context of authorship, the literary structure, and the book's purpose, he argues for a reading of Proverbs that recognizes its intentional design as a guide for living a life of wisdom, deeply rooted in faith and a relationship with God. He stresses that Proverbs isn't just a collection of wise sayings, but a structured pathway towards skilled and moral living.

4. Study Guide: Putnam, Proverbs, Session 1 of 4

Proverbs: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Who is traditionally identified as the primary author of the Book of Proverbs, and what is the significance of this attribution?
2. What specific request did Solomon make of God, and how did this request influence the kind of wisdom he received?
3. According to Dr. Putnam, what is the main purpose of the story of Solomon and the two women with the baby?
4. Why does the presence of the sayings of Agur and King Lemuel in Proverbs not undermine Solomon's authorship of the collection?
5. How did people of the ancient Near East test the wisdom of those with reputations for wisdom, and how does this relate to the content of the book of Proverbs?
6. What are the two primary kinds of instruction literature from Mesopotamia and Egypt that influenced the literary form of the book of Proverbs?
7. What are the two types of motivations that are used in chapters 1-9 to persuade readers to pursue wisdom?
8. What is the significance of the contrasts set up in chapters 10-15 between wisdom and folly?
9. How do the proverbs in chapters 25-26 differ from those in earlier chapters of the book?
10. What does the organization of the Book of Proverbs reveal about the intention of those who compiled it?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Solomon, the king of Israel and son of David, is traditionally identified as the primary author. This attribution is significant because it establishes credibility and authority for the book, drawing on Solomon's well-known reputation for wisdom.

2. Solomon requested a "hearing heart" or "listening heart" to judge the people and discern between good and evil. This request led to God granting him wisdom specifically tailored to justice and discernment, not just general knowledge.
3. The main purpose of the story of Solomon and the two women with the baby is to illustrate the specific kind of wisdom that God had gifted to Solomon, the ability to discern the truth of a situation.
4. The sayings of Agur and King Lemuel are likely incorporated into Proverbs because Solomon recognized their value and granted them his authority, rather than authoring them himself. This means his seal of approval extends to their wisdom.
5. People in the ancient Near East tested the wisdom of others through riddles, challenging them to explain the meaning of sayings. This relates to Proverbs as the book is understood as a collection of wise sayings that require deep contemplation.
6. The two types of instruction literature are simple sayings with a title, and more complex ones with a title, introduction, subtitles, and additional proverbs. The Book of Proverbs combines both forms in its construction.
7. The book uses positive motivations by describing how a life of wisdom brings riches, long life, and honor. It also uses negative motivations by warning against the deadly consequences of folly, such as laziness or sexual immorality.
8. The contrasts between wisdom and folly, diligence and laziness, and other virtues and vices, establish a natural dichotomy but also illustrate that these categories are not merely behavioral, but also have a moral dimension.
9. Chapters 25-26 contain many emblematic proverbs which are similar to political cartoons with a picture and a caption. These often use analogies to make the proverbs' points.
10. The organization of Proverbs, such as the introductory poems and the arrangement of specific kinds of proverbs, reveals that the book was carefully compiled, not simply a haphazard collection. This suggests readers should approach it as a unified whole.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each essay question thoughtfully, drawing from the lecture material.

1. Discuss the role of Solomon as both an author and an authority in the Book of Proverbs. How does the lecture challenge or expand the traditional understanding of authorship?
2. Analyze the importance of the structure and organization of the Book of Proverbs. What does the structure reveal about its intended purpose and its approach to teaching wisdom?
3. Explore the relationship between wisdom and folly as portrayed in the Book of Proverbs, with an emphasis on the contrast and development from the opening chapters to the main collection.
4. Evaluate Dr. Putnam's argument that the book of Proverbs is more than just "secular wisdom." How do the first nine chapters function to emphasize that point?
5. Examine the variety of literary forms within the Book of Proverbs, with an emphasis on how these different forms contribute to the overall meaning and message of the book.

Glossary of Key Terms

Acrostic: A poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word or follows a specific sequence (e.g., the Hebrew alphabet in Proverbs 31:10-31).

Emblematic Proverb: A proverb that uses a picture or analogy, often like a political cartoon, to illustrate its point; especially found in Proverbs 25 and 26.

Folly: A lack of wisdom; foolishness characterized by unwise or immoral behavior, typically with negative consequences.

Guru: A teacher or spiritual guide, often with a focus on practical or philosophical wisdom.

Instruction Literature: A genre of ancient Near Eastern writing, typically from kings or authority figures to their sons, teaching wisdom and practical life advice.

Malitza: A Hebrew term for "dark sayings" or riddles, used to describe the complex nature of the proverbs, requiring thought and contemplation.

Proverb: A short, wise saying that expresses a general truth or principle, often based on observation and experience.

Riddle: A question or statement deliberately phrased to be puzzling or mysterious, requiring wit and insight to understand.

Secular Wisdom: A term used (but challenged by Putnam) to describe wisdom that is not specifically religious or spiritual but based on reason and experience in the world.

Stela/Stele: A stone slab or pillar, usually decorated with inscriptions or reliefs, often used to commemorate an event, such as the code of Hammurabi.

Wisdom: The ability to discern truth, make wise choices, and live skillfully in accordance with God's design; often connected with moral understanding.

5. FAQs on Putnam, Proverbs, Session 1 of 4, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Proverbs

1. **Who is traditionally considered the author of the Book of Proverbs, and what is the basis for this attribution?** The Book of Proverbs is traditionally attributed to Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel. This attribution is based on the opening verse of the book, which identifies the proverbs as being "of Solomon." Furthermore, stories in 1 Kings emphasize Solomon's God-given wisdom and his reputation as a judge who could discern truth, lending credence to his authorship. However, it's important to note that the book also includes proverbs from other sources, suggesting that Solomon's role was more of a compiler and authorizer than a sole originator.
2. **Besides Solomon, are there other contributors to the Book of Proverbs?** Yes, the Book of Proverbs includes contributions from figures other than Solomon. Chapter 30 is attributed to "Agur, the son of Jakeh," and Chapter 31 (at least verses 1-9) contains the words of King Lemuel's mother. These inclusions highlight that Proverbs is not solely the work of one person but a collection of wisdom sayings that were recognized and authorized by Solomon. These other sources likely came to Solomon's attention, and he chose to include them in his collection.
3. **How did Solomon's wisdom, as described in the Bible, influence his role in the Book of Proverbs?** Solomon's wisdom, which was a gift from God, was not simply broad knowledge but a particular ability to discern truth and justice. This skill allowed him to function effectively as a judge and to evaluate the wisdom of others. It is this particular wisdom that enabled him to select and authorize the proverbs that would become part of the book, effectively giving them his "seal of approval." He was less the inventor of the proverbs and more of a curator of wisdom sayings.

4. **How is the Book of Proverbs organized, and what does this structure suggest about its purpose?** The Book of Proverbs has a deliberate structure, not just a haphazard collection. It begins with poems in chapters 1-9 that motivate the reader to pursue wisdom, providing a theological framework for understanding the rest of the book. Chapters 10-15 contrast wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness. Chapters 16-22 present a mix of different types of proverbs. Chapter 22-24 contain commands and reasons for obedience. Chapters 25-29 are a later collection which contains emblematic proverbs in 25-26, with proverbs about leadership in chapters 28-29. Chapter 30 features the words of Agur, and Chapter 31 includes the advice of King Lemuel's mother along with an acrostic poem at the end. This intentional organization suggests that the book is meant to be read as a whole, with each part contributing to a broader understanding of wisdom.
5. **What is the significance of the poetic sections in chapters 1-9, and how should they be approached in reading the book?** The poetic sections in chapters 1-9 serve as a foundation or a preface to the rest of the book. They provide both positive and negative motivations for seeking wisdom, describing the benefits of wisdom and the consequences of folly. These chapters also establish a theological basis, emphasizing that wisdom is part of God's nature and linked to creation itself. Rather than being skipped, these sections are essential for understanding the book's broader message and should be studied carefully, just like the individual proverbs.
6. **What are some of the different types of proverbs found in the book, and how do these differences impact our reading of the text?** The Book of Proverbs features a variety of types. There are contrast proverbs, those that contrast wisdom and folly (like in chapters 10-15), there are some emblematic proverbs that use comparisons to convey a deeper meaning (especially in chapters 25-26), and also those that provide commands with explanations (like in chapters 22-24). Some proverbs have one of the lines repeat or complete the idea from the other line. These differences demonstrate a complex and deliberate use of language, suggesting that the wisdom is not always to be found on a surface reading of a proverb but needs deeper reflection.

7. **How does the book portray the connection between wisdom and morality, and what implications does this have for how we should live?** The Book of Proverbs emphasizes that wisdom is not just about practical skills or intelligence but is deeply connected to morality. By juxtaposing wisdom with folly and righteousness with wickedness, the book shows that our decisions and behaviors have moral implications. Living wisely means living in line with God's design for the world and making morally sound choices that lead to a flourishing life.

8. **How does the inclusion of "riddles" and "dark sayings" impact how we are to understand the Book of Proverbs?** The Book of Proverbs contains what some translations term "riddles" and "dark sayings," indicating that these are not simple, one-dimensional statements. This complexity implies that the book is designed to be studied, pondered, and understood over time. It means that we should engage actively with the text, understanding that meaning may not always be obvious. This idea further highlights the purpose that wisdom is something that needs to be searched for, not merely found at a surface level.