

# Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Lecture 1

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Dr. Fred Putnam will be presenting four lectures on the book of Proverbs. Dr. Putnam is a graduate of Philadelphia College of the Bible with a master's from Biblical Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from the Dropsy College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, later known as the Annenberg Research Institute. His latest publication is *A New Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, published by the University of Sheffield in 2010.

He has also published a cumulative index to the grammar and syntax of Biblical Hebrew with Eisenbraun's in 1996. He has taught for over two decades at Biblical Theological Seminary and is currently on the graduate faculty of Philadelphia Biblical University. It is our privilege to have Dr. Fred Putnam present four lectures on the book of Proverbs. Dr. Putnam.

Hi, I'm Fred Putnam. I've been teaching Old Testament Biblical Hebrew for over 20 years.

This is a series of talks on the book of Proverbs found in the Bible right after the Psalter and right before Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. We're going to be talking about Proverbs for four different lectures. The first one is an introduction to the book and then a couple of talks on how we read a proverb and then the fourth lecture will actually be an example of working our way through a couple of individual proverbs. So first.

Okay. So, let's begin by talking about what is actually in this book and where did it come from. Begin by saying asking where it came from.

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. Now probably the stories about Solomon and his great wisdom are very familiar to you but I'm just going to briefly look at First Kings chapter three and a couple of other chapters to review this because this sets the stage for the book. Because one of the reasons for mentioning identifying the author of a book is so that we have some reason to trust what the book itself says.

And since Proverbs unlike say the books of Samuel or Kings or Joshua or Judges or Chronicles or almost every other biblical book tells us who wrote it. We act like we have some reason to suspect that we're told that Solomon is the author because we should know something about Solomon. So, in 1 Kings 3 I'm not going to read it I'm just going to summarize it.

After he became king and his father David had died Solomon went to make some sacrifices at the high place in Gibeon and the Lord appeared to him in a dream and basically promised him anything he wanted. Solomon said you've made your servant king in place of my father David. But then in verse nine, he says so give your servant a hearing heart or a listening heart to judge your people to discern between good and evil for who is able to judge this great or actually the word is heavy weighty people of yours.

And the Lord was pleased with Solomon's request and said I'll give that to you and since you didn't ask for the other things but you asked for this really wise thing I will give you wealth and a long life and a happy reign as well. Well, what was Solomon's request? His real request was for the ability to act as a judge so that when he heard court cases he would be able to tell who was telling the truth and who was lying.

That's why this story about Solomon's receiving this gift of wisdom is immediately followed by the story of the two women the baby the king and the sword when the two women bring their baby to the bring a baby to Solomon. And they said one says this is my baby. No, it's my baby.

And one says it's my baby. We both had babies. She rolled over and killed her baby in the night and then she stole mine away from me.

And the other one says, no it's my baby's alive. You're the one who did it. And Solomon says bring the sword.

We'll cut the baby in half give half to each woman and one woman says OK. And the other one says no, no, don't harm the baby. Give it to her.

And he says well she's the real mother. Give it to her. Now the upshot of that there are really two reasons for that story which by the way just a reminder that whenever we're told a story we always want to ask ourselves why has this story been preserved.

I mean sometimes it's because it's just a good story. So, it's fun to listen to. But other.

But at the same time, there's a reason that out of all the good stories that are fun to listen to this story or that story was chosen to be preserved for now three thousand years. Well, the last verse in 1 Kings 3, 1 Kings 3:28 says this when all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down they feared the king for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice. You see in the ancient Near East the world in which Solomon and Iron Age Israel lived the responsibility of the king was to ensure the well-being of his people by his ability to do justice.

That's why when we look at documents from the ancient Near East we find for example that Hammurabi perhaps a king of whom you've heard Hammurabi erected a huge about a six-foot-tall chunk of black stone with laws carved into it that are. Some people think they are court decisions that he made and this is a record of all his decisions. Some people think that these are laws that he codified.

It's kind of people disagree about it but the important thing is that the top of the front of what's called a stela or stele is about maybe 18-inch panel that doesn't contain any laws but it contains a picture and the picture is the god Marduk standing in front of Hammurabi and handing the laws to the king or maybe there's disagreement about exactly what it means. The king is showing the laws to the god for his approval. The point is that the king is authorized to be king by the gods because of his ability to administer justice.

Whether the gods give him the laws that he enforces or he's wise enough to act as a good king that is as a good judge is kind of debated and some stories about the king say one seem to say one thing some seem to say the other. But we have exactly the same thing said here about Solomon that he's so he's not just given wisdom the way it's maybe perhaps told in Sunday school. He's not just made the wisest man in the world.

He's given a particular kind of wisdom the ability to see the truth of a situation and as a judge to render a judgment according to what is true. A little later in the first is in the end of chapter four says God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment breadth of heart a wide heart like the sand on the seashore. That's how wide his heart was it just stretched on and on and on.

So, it was able to comprehend lots of things. Well, this sounds like the Lord just gave Solomon wisdom to understand everything. Well, it does say his wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the East and the wisdom of all Egypt.

Well, that's a lot of wisdom as we'll see in a few minutes. For he was wiser than all men and he goes on and lists the people he was wise than he spoke more than 3000 proverbs and wrote over a thousand songs and he talked about trees and the cedars and the hyssop and animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Well, yes those are true things.

That's what I mean that's what that's the record that we have about Solomon. But the request that Solomon made in the special gift that God gave him was an insight into the human heart. And so people came from all over the world it says that is all over the ancient Near East.

We're not to think people came from Australia or North America to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And they're not just coming to hear him because as we find out in

chapter 10 when the queen of Sheba another story that perhaps you know comes to visit Solomon she comes and it says she comes to test him and she asks him questions and talked about him with everything that was in her heart and Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was hidden from her which he didn't explain to him.

And that would have been the way that it was. If you had a reputation for being wise then the wise men from other countries would come to see if you really are as wise as you claim or as the reports that they've heard about you. 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.

Is Solomon's wisdom greater than the wisdom of the Hittites or of the Mesopotamians that is a Babylonians or Akkadians or Syrians whoever else. They came to test him and to find out if Solomon's reputation really was valid. And so when the author or the editor probably of the book of Proverbs says the proverbs of Solomon king of Israel the son of David.

Well, he wants us to think back about all that history. He even wanted his original readers several thousand years ago to think in terms of what they knew about Solomon and understood about him. So, I encourage you if you haven't read those stories about Solomon recently to go back and read them read them in the book of Kings and also in the book of Second Chronicles because that provides some pretty important background for understanding what we find in the book of Proverbs knowing who the author is and knowing what kind of a person he was.

It also helps us understand something else. People read through the book of Proverbs and they get chapter 30 and they find something quite surprising in chapter 30. We find these are the words of a guru.

And I thought wait a second, I thought this was a book of Solomon's Proverbs. No, the words of a guru son of Yaka of Masa and then chapter 31. It's not even the words of King Lemuel it's the words that King Lemuel's mother said to him.

And I think we'll wait a second where is Solomon the source or are these other people the source? What does it mean to say that these are the Proverbs of Solomon? Does it mean that Solomon sat around and thought and made up all these Proverbs?

That's pretty unlikely. We do know it says then from Kings that he spoke over three thousand Proverbs. But if you read about the subjects of those Proverbs in Kings the list that I mentioned a minute ago it says plants and animals and fish and creeping things.

There are not very many verses in the book of Proverbs about those topics. Most of the verses in Proverbs with really just a few exceptions are about people and not about animals or plants or other non-human aspects of creation. Maybe we should think about it this way.

Here's Solomon sitting on the throne of Israel. He has a reputation across the ancient Near East as a wise man. And so, people come to Solomon to test him.

How did they test him? Well, we don't live in a very proverbial culture. That is people who quote Proverbs a lot can be thought of as kind of stodgy and unoriginal thinkers.

You know you don't have anything to say so you repeat what you heard somebody else say. Well, there are other cultures in the world however where the ability to recite Proverbs is paramount. In fact, there are some cultures in sub-Saharan Africa where there really aren't any lawyers.

And if you have a court case against someone else in your village or someone from another village each of the two parties in the case find someone that they know is very wise. Someone who has a reputation for wisdom and takes them before the king of the tribe or the chief of the village and one of the parties one of the wise men speaks and gives a couple of Proverbs that apply to the particular case at hand. Then the other wise man replies with a proverb or two and then the first one replies with a proverb.

And they keep doing that. Basically, they quote Proverbs back and forth at each other. The Proverbs are the legal argument.

That probably sounds a little bizarre to us but that's how the case is decided. In fact, in some tribes, the case is decided when one of the men runs out of a proverb to respond with. He doesn't have anything else to say.

That's how they know who's right because one lawyer and one lawyer in our terms came up with an unanswerable argument. So, here's Solomon sitting on the throne people coming from all over the ancient Near East to test his wisdom. How do they test his wisdom?

Well, we'll talk about this in a few minutes but at the beginning of Proverbs, it says these are riddles. And there's another word there that we don't know exactly what it means. I kind of like the King James translation which says they're dark sayings.

Malitza is the word. But it's they're not all meant to be understood the first time we read through them. Or maybe even it's saying there's a lot more to these verses than they're saying and they really need to be pondered and thought about.

So, someone comes to Solomon and says have you ever heard this one. Solomon listens to it and says OK I can explain that. And he explains it to them.

And the point of 1 Kings especially in chapter four the end of four in chapter 10 with the Queen of Sheba is not that Solomon is spouting proverbs continually but that he's able to understand what's said to remember the gift he asked for was the gift of insight and the ability to distinguish good from evil. So, when we read that these are the words of Agur or these are the words of King Lemuel which his mother spoke to him and taught him. It's entirely possible that in both of those chapters, you probably read the word the Oracle in verse one depending on your translation of Masa or the Masaite.

There is a little Arab kingdom or what today would be an Arab kingdom in the northeast in the region of modern Syria that was bordered on Solomon's territory. That is the territory that Israel controlled. And it's possible.

I don't know if this is just a theory but it's one that helps me understand what's going on in these two chapters at least that Agur and Lemuel visited Solomon or sent wise men to test Solomon and Solomon hearing these proverbs that we find in chapters 30 and 31 at least the first nine verses of chapter 31. We'll come back to that in a minute. Solomon hearing those says you know those are good sayings.

And so, I'm going to incorporate them in my collection. And 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. In fact, we have a statement in chapter 24 verse 23 which says these also are words of the wise.

Who are the wise? Well, those apparently are some of the other people who came and tested Solomon's understanding. And Solomon said yeah, I like your sayings too so I'll use them in my collection.

So, what we 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. And somehow 250 years later when Hezekiah was king his men discovered or someone discovered another few hundred or about 150 proverbs that were somehow identified as Solomon's whether they had his signature on the scroll or some other way.

And so, they incorporated those. That's what we have in chapters 25 through 29. I'll talk about that in a minute when I look at a brief outline of the book.

When we look at the book of Proverbs it's very tempting to see it as sort of a hodgepodge or just a haphazard collection. But there are a couple of things that

show us that the book is very deliberately shaped. So not only did Solomon originate it but he had a plan in mind.

And even the parts that that were collected later like chapters 25 to 29 also show evidence of pretty careful organization. Now I'm going to say right off the bat that some of this only shows up in Hebrew. So, if you've not studied Hebrew you won't be able to hear the sounds that's you know words that sound alike or sometimes words that are closely related but don't come across the same way in translation.

But even without knowing Hebrew even just reading it in English or whatever language you're reading, we can see that the book has been pretty carefully organized. It actually looks like a combination of two different kinds of what's called instruction literature from the countries around Israel found in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. We have instructions written by fathers usually a king or a vizier or somebody pretty high in authority to a son who is tapped for stepping into a position of authority or leadership.

There are two types of these. One type has a title very simple. You know the words of Ptah Hotep or someone else which he spoke to his son concerning.

And then there is then there is a list of sayings. And that actually sounds like a lot like what we find in chapters 25 to 29. It's what we see in Chapter 30 in Chapter 31 as well.

But the more complex type has a title and then an introduction maybe more poetic introduction that is longer poems and then a subtitle then some proverbs and maybe some of them even have a second subtitle and more proverbs. And we find that in chapters 1 through 24. So, it seems that that the book of Proverbs was compiled by Solomon 10th century B.C. in keeping with the pattern of the world around them.

He just took a literary form that everybody in his time would have recognized everybody who could read that is. And adapted it for his own purpose. And we'll talk about that purpose in a bit.

So, when we read through the book we find a title in Chapter 1 verse 1. Proverbs of Solomon King of Israel son of David. Then we come to chapter in chapters 1 through 9 we find these brief poems. Most of them are fairly short deal with wisdom and give us the really are meant to motivate us to want to read the book and want to understand it.

And then we come in in Chapter 10 the beginning of the verse which says the Proverbs of Solomon. There's a subtitle and there's another subtitle in Chapter 24 when we come to verse 23 it says these also are words of the wise. Some people think there's a subtitle in 22:17 as well.

The words of the wise and the collection itself then is broken up into a couple of smaller pieces. That first big collection. Then we have more Proverbs of Solomon set in order or transcribed or something like that.

The verb only occurs once or twice. Kind of hard to know how to translate it seems to be that they moved the men of Hezekiah moved 25 to 29. And then the words of Agur 30 the words of the mother of Lemuel of Massah in 31.

And then at the very end of the book in Chapter 31 verses 10 through 31 we have a poem that's of a type called an acrostic which means that each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 10 begins with Allah verse 11 with bait etc. through the end of chapter 22 letters 22 verses.

And should that be considered part of the words of Lemuel's mother? Well, the attraction there is that a mother is going to be very interested in the kind of woman that her son marries. The.

And so, it seems like good advice to give to your son. On the other hand, there may be some other purpose to that besides just telling you his son is a man what kind of woman to look for. And it doesn't fit with the style I guess we could say of the first nine verses which are quite clearly her words where she's talking to her she says my son and talks to him about what a cow a king should live and reign and make judgments actually.

So, whether that's a separate section some people think it's completely separate and it's a poem that's been kind of stuck on the end other people think no it's part of the words of Lemuel's mother and we could debate that and discuss that for a long time. But I'll let you read that yourself. So, we could.

The book itself is organized by subtitles sort of like the book of Ezekiel is organized by dates or Haggai is organized by dates or the Gospel of Matthew is organized by chapters about what Jesus did and then chapters of what he said and then chunk of what he did and a chunk of what he said. There's another way to look through at the organization of the book of Proverbs and that is when we look at the material that's contained in the different chapters we find that it actually shifts from one piece to the other. It's not simply that the whole thing is a long list of Proverbs like you might find in a collection on the Internet for example of American Proverbs and then there are 34 screens with hundreds and hundreds of sayings just jumbled all together.

We find in chapters 1 through 9 poems longer or shorter mostly shorter that are intended to persuade us to motivate us to pursue wisdom and they really do this in two ways. They do this by giving us positive motivations. So, they say for example in



chapter 2 if you pursue wisdom you will find the wisdom of God, or in chapter 3 you'll get a long life you'll get honor with God and with other people.

Wisdom says I hold riches in my right hand I hold power by me kings reign by me rulers judge. And so, there is this promise that if you study this book and become the kind of person that it's that it's enabling you to become then you will be rich. You'll have a long life a happy life.

You'll have power and authority. I mean that's a pretty strong motivation for most of us or many of us. But it also has another kind of motivation and that's the negative one where it describes the fool and says you know there's only one end for a fool.

All fools end up dead. And it says that over and over again whether the folly is sexual folly whether it's laziness whether it's foolishly committing yourself to pay someone else's debt or meet their obligation. He just says you are not going to escape the consequences of folly.

And so, the motivation is here are the good things that wisdom promises go after those. Here are the bad things that are the result of folly. Flee from those.

And Proverbs says again and again you can only go in one of two directions. You're either going toward wisdom or folly. There's nothing in between.

And so, if we're pursuing wisdom, we're abandoning folly. If we're abandoning folly we're seeking after wisdom. So, the first nine chapters really are written as a foreword a preface to the rest of the book.

And the importance of that is much of the material in those chapters don't is not proverbial. There are a few small collections of Proverbs like at the end of Chapter four but most of the material contain these poems some of which even tell stories like in chapter 7. There's the story about the youth who meets the woman goes to her house and commits adultery.

But they're not what we think of as Proverbs. So, I think a lot of readers tend to skip over chapters 1 through 9 to get to the real stuff the real sayings that we recognize. OK here's one verse on your enemy.

Here's another verse on the wind. Here's a verse on living in the house. And OK those are Proverbs.

But the importance of chapters 1 through 9 is that they provide a theological framework for reading and understanding the rest of the book. If we skip over them it's a bit like skipping the first two or three chapters of a book where the author

explains why he's writing the book how he's going about it and how the book is organized. Then we get the chapter.

We decide we're going to start with chapter 4 and we don't understand why he's writing the book. We don't understand how and why it's organized the way it is. We don't understand what he's trying to accomplish.

Well, we shouldn't. We ignored what he said. Well, chapters 1 through 9 are meant to give us a framework or to use another metaphor as a foundation some basis for understanding it.

So those chapters are where we read the most about what the Lord does and what the Lord thinks how God acts how God regards different kinds of people because that's meant to give us to protect us against thinking that the book of Proverbs is just secular wisdom. You'll often read that statement even from good biblical scholars who will say Proverbs contains secular wisdom that is given kind of a veneer of theological respectability. Well, maybe we could think of it another way.

And when we read Chapter 8 in the long poem about the creation of the world and wisdom's role in perhaps chapters 1 through 9 are to give us to understand that there is no such thing as secular wisdom and that instead, wisdom is part of creation because wisdom is part of God. It is something that is such a character or such a strong characteristic of God that it itself shaped the nature of the world in which we live as well as our own nature. So, living a life that's wise, or to use another translation skilled living is to live a life that is in line with the way that God has made the world.

And if you've ever cut a piece of wood you know that you get a much smoother cut if you go with the grain than if you go against it. Trying to live according to the way things are meant to function means that we're probably going to function a whole lot better than if we're trying to live against the grain. And that's really what chapters 1 through 9 are doing.

There are many other things they're doing as well that I don't have time to go into but that's what we find in there. These long poems are intended to motivate us positively and negatively. Well, when we come to chapter 10 now we come to what we think of as proverbs, and strikingly chapters 10 through 15 almost all of these proverbs contrast two things wisdom and folly diligence and laziness righteousness and wickedness, or innocence and guilt, or somebody who speaks somebody who speaks abusively and somebody who speaks healingly or selfishness and generosity all sorts of topics.

But in the first those six chapters most of the verses not all but most of the verses contrast two things that accomplish a couple of purposes. One is it sets up perhaps

what we might think of as a natural dichotomy between wisdom and folly. And so, we say OK I can see where he's going he's saying that all of these behaviors eventually fall out in one or the other of those two areas.

But another thing that it does by talking about wisdom and folly in one verse and then righteousness and wickedness or innocence and guilt in the next verse shows us that wisdom and folly are not merely behavioral categories but they're actually moral categories. It shows us that that the world itself life itself is a moral undertaking and sets a tone for our understanding of our lives that we are living we are making decisions in the way we speak the way we live the way we act the way we treat other people the way we treat ourselves. We are making decisions that are in fact moral in tone.

And those first six chapters of Proverbs proper as we might call them chapters 10 through 16 make this point over and over again by concatenating things. They're not random. The lists are not random.

Although sometimes it's pretty hard to see through why they're set up the way they are they are they are drawing these contrasts that encourage us to see things in terms of contrast, not a very popular notion today. We don't want to see things in shades of black and white. We really like the color gray and all its shades.

That is not the worldview of Proverbs in many ways. That's a I'll come back to that caveat in a few minutes. Then in chapters 16:1 through 22:16 we find a lot of Proverbs all different types some contrasting some where the two lines sort of say the same thing.

We're going to talk about parallelism in a later lecture and a number of them where they say one thing is better than another. It's a kind of a jumbled mix of different types. Again, when I say jumbled I don't mean it's random.

I just mean it's the order is not readily apparent to us. We might say why not put all the Proverbs that are of this type in chapter 16 and all the Proverbs in this type in the next chapter or might say why not. All the Proverbs that talk about money in chapter 16 all the Proverbs that talk about marriage in chapter 17 and so on.

I've often wondered perhaps the reason Solomon didn't do it that way at least partially is to not give us the option of skipping chapter 17 because we don't want to deal with marriage or fixing up our marriage. We never know when we're going to run across a verse that we say oh my goodness this applies to me. He doesn't let us give us that escape like someone I once read about who ripped out a certain chapter of an epistle in the New Testament because it condemned certain choices that they were making about their lives.

We're not given that choice in Proverbs.

Then in chapter 22 starting in verse 17 to the end of 24 we find a different kind of proverb that there have been a couple of them in the book up to this point. But most specifically in chapter 3:1 through 12 which is an extended poem.

But in chapter 22:17 and following to the end of 24 we find Proverbs almost every one of which consists of a command plus reasons for why we should obey that command. Again, a different kind of proverb. Our Proverbs don't usually command people to do things but sort of give us little bits of advice perhaps or sometimes just make observations as a lot of verses in the book of Proverbs do.

But these are very specific commands about what a person should or should not do and why. And at the end of 23 the last six or eight verses and at the end of 24 we find two short poems. At the end of 23 a poem on drunkenness and at the end of 24 a poem on laziness.

Then in chapter 25 where the Proverbs that were transcribed or whatever they did by the men of Hezekiah begin we find a new not a new type of proverb but one that again has occurred only sporadically in chapters 10 through 24. And that's a proverb that we call emblematic or you can think of it almost like a political cartoon in the newspaper where there's a picture and maybe there's a donkey and an elephant. And if you don't know anything about American politics you don't know that that stands for the Democratic and Republican Party respectively I think.

And then there's a caption underneath that says you know something about leading donkeys to elephant troughs or whatever it might say. Well, the caption is to help us understand the point of the picture.

And that's exactly what these Proverbs do. Not all the Proverbs in these chapters are that way but in chapters 25 and 26 most or many of the Proverbs are emblematic. A type again that hardly appeared earlier in the book and appears only rarely after that.

So, somebody made a choice that we're going to gather all these Proverbs together and put them. We're going to begin this second this later collection with this kind of saying. Now again we have to remember when I say chapters 25 and 26 the chapters aren't original.

In fact, not even the verse divisions as far as we know are original to the text. And that's why you get different verse divisions even in the Book of Proverbs different divisions in different translations. But the collection that begins in what we have is chapter 25 begins with these emblematic many many emblematic Proverbs.

And then in chapter 27 up through for most of the chapter, we have again sort of it's a lot like what we find in chapters 16 through 22 where there are different types and different topics. But at the end of 27 is another brief poem. This time it's about herds and flocks and we think that is why he talking about sheep herding and being a farmer.

Well, I think the answer to that is found in chapters 28 and 29. Many of the proverbs in 28 and 29 address leadership as being a judge making decisions in a court kingship having rule or authority and not all but many of them do. And many more proportionately than we've seen again earlier in the book.

So that that becomes a motif of these chapters the nature of rulership and kingship. When we read that then it's possible to read these verses at the end of chapter 27 verses 23 to 27 know well the condition of the of your flocks the peace of your flocks. It's possible to read those as again reflecting the world of the ancient Near East.

Well, all the Proverbs reflect that of course because that's their world. But in the ancient Near East, the king was talked about as the shepherd of his people. Even if you know any ancient Near Eastern history perhaps you've heard about how cruel, wicked, and despotic the Assyrian kings were.

Well, even the Assyrian kings claimed that they were shepherds and called themselves shepherds appointed by the gods to shepherd the nation of Assyria. Well, if that's true then and that's a valid analogy or explanation then verses 23 through 27 this brief poem basically sets up as a king says as a king you need to pay attention to the condition of your country. And then goes on in chapters 28 and 29 to explain what is it that makes a king a good king and what is it that makes for a stable country. So, we read such verses as a king's throne is established on justice and righteousness or by his justice the king the country stands or falls. That's a paraphrase.

Then in chapter chapter 30 we come to another kind of proverb. After the first after a couple of brief poems of Agur there is a set of proverbs that say there are three things of which this is true even for again almost a new kind. We've had something like that back in chapter six where there are six things that the Lord hates, Yes, even seven. But we have another kind of proverb. So, somebody made a decision again we're going to put all these proverbs or most of them at least together in this spot.

And then as I mentioned earlier we have this acrostic poem that ends the book. Now you might say what's the point of reviewing all that? I mean do I really need to know that?

Well, maybe not. But it does show something that I think is very important and that is that the book of Proverbs is not haphazard. Somebody thought about how they were going to set this book up.

It's not just I'll just pull the next proverb I happen to think of and write that down and the next one and the next one and the next one. But somebody actually arranged the book which suggests then that we should read the book of Proverbs as a book. There's a reason that the acrostic poem comes at the end.

It could have been put anywhere but it's put at the end. There's a reason that the lengthy poems the motivational poems start the book. And when we realize when we remember that the book is set up or that the contents of the book are called riddles.

I mean they're called Proverbs as well or sayings. But there are some of them are called at least are called riddles. There's some sense in which the book is set up so that we will learn how to read Proverbs as we read through the book so that we begin with these poems in chapters 1 through 9 which are actually pretty easy to understand.

There's not much subtlety there. They're pretty straightforward. They're telling us what to do and what to avoid and giving us reasons and doing it in great detail much more detail than any individual proverb ever does.

Proverbs you know are just sort of smooshed language. But those nine first nine chapters give us maybe time and leisure to think about things rather than finding everything compressed into just a very few words. So we read the book than as a book and we study it as a book which doesn't mean or maybe positively which means we shouldn't just read through chapters 1 through 9 and say I've read the four words now I can get on to the now the real Proverbs but instead we should actually study our way through chapters 1 to 9 and study these poems as carefully as we would study the Psalter as carefully as we would study any individual proverb that these poems would in fact become what we would allow them to frame and shape our understanding.

So when we read through the book we come to chapter 30 and its mysteries and there are some verses here that people argue about. We don't really know exactly why they're written the way they are and or even precisely what they're referring to. So, for example to read this there are three things too wonderful for me for which I don't understand the way of an eagle in the sky the way of a serpent on a rock the way of a ship in the middle of the sea the way of a man with a maid.

OK, I'm not quite sure what the last one has to do with the first three which are all about things moving around. Well, if you read 10 commentaries on the book of

Proverbs you will probably find at least eight explanations for that particular saying. Well don't forget some of them are riddles and we're not expected I believe to jump into chapter 30 until we have tried our best to understand what we find in chapters 1 through 29.

The book itself is written in a way that enables us in studying it and reading through it and working through it to grow in our ability to understand. And I'll talk about that at the beginning of our next lecture when we look at the first six verses of the book.

That was Dr. Fred Putnam in the first presentation of four on the book of Proverbs.