

## **Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM**

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

### **1. Abstract of Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Putnam's lecture explores the nature of poetry, particularly as it relates to the Psalms.** He begins by examining various definitions of poetry, considering the reader's experience, the author's intent, and the use of rhetorical devices. The lecture then transitions to biblical poetry, comparing and contrasting it with English poetry while emphasizing the importance of careful reading and understanding the poet's craft. **Putnam argues that poetry is a distinct way of thinking and communicating truth and understanding the poetic elements enhances our appreciation and comprehension of scripture.** He encourages a thoughtful engagement with the language and imagery of the Psalms, recognizing that poetry communicates what other forms of expression cannot. **Ultimately, the lecture advocates for a renewed appreciation for poetry within scripture.**

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Putnam, Session 2 – 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 → Psalms).**



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### 3. Briefing Document: Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Fred Putnam's lecture on poetry in the Bible, specifically in relation to the Psalms.

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. Fred Putnam on Poetry in the Psalms (Lecture 2)**

**Main Theme:** This lecture argues for recognizing and understanding the presence and importance of poetry in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, and to approach reading this poetry with a deliberate understanding of how poetry functions. The lecture emphasizes that understanding the poetic elements enhances our comprehension of the theological messages conveyed.

#### **Key Ideas & Facts:**

1. **The Debate on Biblical Poetry:** For the past 25 years, there has been a debate on whether or not the Bible contains real poetry. Dr. Putnam argues that this has significant implications for how we interpret passages like the Psalms.
2. **Defining Poetry:** Putnam outlines three approaches to defining poetry:
  - **Effect on the Reader:** Poetry is defined by the powerful emotional or intellectual impact it has on the reader. Examples cited include Robert Frost's statement about taking an "immortal wound" and Emily Dickinson's feeling as if "the top of my head had been removed."
  - **Author's Intent:** If the author intends a work to be a poem, then it is a poem, regardless of how it's perceived. This is contrasted with examples like a baseball announcer's commentary being rearranged as "poetry" without the announcer's intent.
  - **Use of Rhetorical Devices & Compressed Language:** Poetry utilizes rhetorical devices and is characterized by compressed language where every word is chosen deliberately for its meaning, sound, and relationship to other words. He references Wilfred Owen, whose manuscripts showed deliberate and extensive word choice, even if the final product sounds like prose. Putnam states, "poetry is compressed language. It's a language where every single word is chosen, not just for what it means, but for what it suggests, for how it sounds, for how it fits the other words, maybe for how it fits the mood of the poem."

1. **The Poetic Function of Language:** Referencing Roman Jakobson, Putnam describes the "poetic function" as focusing on language for its own sake, with poets choosing words deliberately for their connotations and associations, not just their literal meanings. The example of using "place," "castle," or "hovel" to invite someone over illustrates the varying connotations of word choice.
2. **Example: Christina Rossetti's Poem:** Putnam analyzes Christina Rossetti's short poem, highlighting its structured pattern (question/answer format, repeated phrase "What are"), rhyme, meter, and use of imagery (contrasting physical things with abstract qualities). This demonstrates how these elements compress meaning and create a deeper resonance.
3. **Poetry vs. Prose in Judges 4 & 5:** He compares the prose account (Judges 4) and the poetic account (Judges 5) of the story of Deborah, Barak, and Sisera, highlighting the differences in their focus, detail, and style. He notes that the poem uses compression and imagery, and repetition typical of Hebrew poetry. He contrasts Judges 4:18-5: "He turned aside to her into the tent...So he died." with Judges 5:24-27 "Most blessed of women is Jael...She smashed his head...Where he bowed, there he fell, destroyed." The lecture shows that both accounts are true, but they are two different ways of looking at the same event.
4. **Poetry and Truth:** Poetry is a form of truth, but not in the same way as expository prose. It creates a "golden world" (referencing Sir Philip Sidney), inviting the reader into a specific perspective. Poems do not try to tell the *whole* truth, but focus on specific aspects or relationships. Example: Psalm 121 might seem to promise protection from all harm, but that is not the poem's intention.
5. **Differences between English and Biblical Poetry:** He acknowledges differences (lack of rhythm and rhyme in the English sense, no real stanzas in the original manuscripts, sentences tend to end on each line in biblical poetry) but emphasizes that the core elements of compression and deliberate word choice are present in both.
6. **Poetry as a Different Language:** Quoting the Encyclopedia Britannica, Putnam states, "poetry is the other use of language." He emphasizes that poetry is language that is self-consciously manipulated.
7. **Practical Tools for Reading Poetry:** Dr. Putnam highlights the value of analyzing nouns, verbs, and images in a poem to understand its logic and structure, referencing Molly Peacock's book.

8. **Technical Language (Rhetorical Devices):** While acknowledging potential intimidation, Putnam justifies the use of technical terms like "anaphora" as a way to efficiently communicate and understand poetic devices. He argues that it gives us a common language with which to understand the meaning of a poem. For example, anaphora can explain Psalm 13, beginning with "How long, O Lord."
9. **Avoiding Extremes in Interpretation:** Putnam draws from T.S. Eliot to caution against two pitfalls in reading poetry: casual impressions and excessive analysis. He advises against superficial readings driven by pre-conceived notions as well as overly analytical approaches that lose sight of the poem's meaning and artistry.
10. **Poetry as a Unique Mode of Communication:** He suggests that God's choice to use poetry for a significant portion of the Bible indicates its unique capacity to communicate certain truths and insights. Poetry gives us another way to think about reality.
11. **Appreciation as Part of Understanding:** Using an experiment with a poem and paragraph, Putnam shows that people read poetry with more care and thoughtfulness. He concludes that appreciation is key to understanding poetry and that we should approach biblical poetry with the same care.

## 4. Study Guide: Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4

### Exploring Biblical Poetry: A Study Guide to Putnam's Psalms Lecture 2

#### I. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. According to Putnam, what are the three approaches to defining poetry?
2. Explain what Roman Jakobson meant by the "poetic function of language."
3. How does Christina Rossetti's poem, "What are heavy?" demonstrate poetic compression and the use of rhetorical devices?
4. In the story of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4 and 5), what is the primary difference in focus between the prose account and the poetic account of the same event?
5. What does Putnam mean when he refers to poets creating a "golden world?"
6. How is rhythm used in English poetry?
7. What is the distinction between reading the Bible for information and reading the Bible as poetry?
8. What is anaphora, and why is it important to recognize it in biblical poetry?
9. Explain T.S. Eliot's analogy of walking a tightrope in relation to reading poetry.
10. Describe the experiment Putnam mentions at the end of the lecture regarding reading a poem versus reading a paragraph, and explain its significance.

#### II. Quiz: Answer Key

1. The three approaches to defining poetry are: the effect the poem has on the reader, the intention of the author, and the way the language itself is used (including rhetorical devices and compression).
2. Jakobson meant that the poetic function of language is the focus upon language for its own sake, where the poet chooses words far more deliberately than someone writing prose. The significance of these choices extends beyond mere meaning to include connotations and associations.
3. Rossetti's poem demonstrates compression through its concise questions and answers. It uses rhetorical devices like repetition ("What are"), rhyme (sorrow/tomorrow, youth/truth), and meter to create a deeper resonance than a plain statement of the same ideas.

4. The prose account of Deborah and Barak focuses on the events of the battle and the actions of the individuals, while the poetic account focuses on the participation (or lack thereof) of the different tribes of Israel and incorporates elements that may not be strictly factual.
5. Putnam is alluding to Sir Philip Sidney's defense of poetry in which poets create a golden world to invite the reader into a separate world. This golden world created by the poet may not be the whole universe but will communicate truth in a way that expository prose or logic cannot.
6. Rhythm involves the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in a pattern.
7. Reading the Bible for information emphasizes extracting factual details and historical context, while reading it as poetry involves engaging with the artistry of the language, considering the emotional impact, and exploring the deeper meanings and symbolic representations.
8. Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses. Recognizing anaphora helps us understand the poet's intention and the emphasis they place on certain ideas or emotions.
9. T.S. Eliot suggests avoiding the extremes of simply reading a poem once and getting a general impression, and spending so much time analyzing every aspect of the text that one forgets it is someone else's work.
10. In the experiment described by Putnam, people change the way they read when they know that they are reading a poem. They read a poem with more thoughtfulness and care compared to how they read prose.

### III. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the implications of recognizing poetry in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, and how it might affect our interpretation and understanding of these texts.
2. Analyze how the use of rhetorical devices, such as anaphora, parallelism, and imagery, contributes to the overall meaning and impact of biblical poetry.
3. Compare and contrast the prose and poetic accounts of the same events in the Bible, using examples such as Judges 4 and 5, to illustrate the different perspectives and purposes each form serves.
4. Examine the challenges of translating biblical poetry from Hebrew to English, considering the impact on elements such as rhythm, rhyme, and wordplay, and how translators attempt to preserve the poetic qualities.
5. Explain the importance of reading biblical poetry carefully and thoughtfully, considering the historical context, cultural background, and literary devices employed by the poet, to avoid misinterpretations and gain a deeper appreciation for the text.

## IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Poetry:** Compressed language that emphasizes aesthetics, sound, and evocative meaning in addition to, or in place of, strict conceptual meaning. It often utilizes rhetorical devices and imagery.
- **Prose:** Ordinary written or spoken language, without deliberate rhythmic structure or poetic devices.
- **Rhetorical Devices:** Techniques used by writers and speakers to convey meaning, persuade, or evoke emotion in an audience.
- **Connotation:** The associated or secondary meaning of a word or expression in addition to its explicit or primary meaning.
- **Imagery:** Visually descriptive or figurative language, especially in a literary work.
- **Anaphora:** The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences, or verses, often used for emphasis.
- **Meter:** A regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry, creating a rhythmic effect.
- **Compression:** The quality of poetic language that says much in a brief and efficient manner.
- **Poetic Function of Language (Jakobson):** A focus upon language for its own sake, where the poet chooses words deliberately for their sound, associations, and connotations.
- **Golden World:** A term borrowed from Sir Philip Sidney's defense of poetry, which refers to the idea that poets create an imaginative world that invites readers to explore truth in a unique way.
- **Paronomasia:** A pun.
- **Parallelism:** Phrases or sentences of similar construction and meaning placed close together.



## 5. FAQs on Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source:

### **What defines poetry, and how does that relate to biblical texts like the Psalms?**

There are several ways to define poetry. One approach focuses on the reader's emotional response (e.g., feeling profoundly moved). Another centers on the author's intention to create poetry. A third, more objective approach looks for the concentrated use of rhetorical devices and carefully chosen language for sound, suggestion, and context. Biblical texts, including the Psalms, often exhibit these poetic characteristics, leading to debate about whether they should be considered poetry, even if not explicitly intended as such. The Psalms demonstrate a different way of thinking about the same event with a more artistic interpretation of what is going on.

### **How does the intention of the author affect whether or not something is poetry?**

The intention of the author is one way to consider something to be poetry. If the author has no intention to create poetry, even if it looks like poetry, it is questionable whether or not it is poetry. Phil Rizzuto did not intend to create poetry, so is it really poetry if someone rearranged his work? The interplay is between the effect on the reader, the intention of the author, and how the language is being used.

### **What are some common characteristics found in poetry?**

Poetry commonly uses rhetorical devices, compressed language, and carefully chosen words. These words are selected not only for their literal meaning but also for their connotations, sounds, and how they fit within the overall context and mood. Patterns like repetition, rhyme, and meter are also frequently used to create resonance and depth. Biblical poetry uses all of these things.

### **How does the use of specific words impact the meaning and interpretation of poetry?**

The choice of specific words in poetry is crucial because each word carries connotations and associations beyond its basic definition. Poets deliberately select words to evoke certain feelings, suggest particular images, and create a specific tone. The words place, castle, and hovel all invoke different ideas.

### **How does the account of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 and 5 demonstrate the nature of poetry?**

Judges 4 presents a prose narrative of the story of Deborah and Barak, while Judges 5 offers a poetic account of the same event. Although both recount the same basic story, they do so with different details, emphases, and perspectives. The prose account focuses on Barak's role and Yael's role, while the poetic account focuses on the way the tribes of Israel did or did not join the war. The poetic version uses vivid imagery, repetition, and emotional language to convey the significance of the events, whereas the prose version relates what happened. Both versions complement each other, offering different yet valuable insights into the same historical event.

### **Why is poetry considered a "golden world?"**

Poetry invites the reader to enter a golden world. As a poet, he gets to create a golden world and the poet knows that this is not the whole universe, but a different world.

### **What are some of the key differences between English poetry and biblical poetry?**

English poetry often relies on rhythm, rhyme, stanzas, and sentence structure that extends across lines. Biblical poetry, however, generally lacks rhythm and rhyme in the English sense. It also lacks set stanzas and tends to have each line function as its own distinct clause or sentence. Despite these differences, both share fundamental similarities in their use of compression, deliberate language choices, imagery, and emotional resonance.

### **Why might God have chosen poetry as a means of communication in the Bible?**

The Bible is a fairly small book, so why would God choose poetry for one-third of this book if his purpose was to communicate? Poetry communicates things better than any other way. It can offer different ways of thinking about reality, encouraging readers to engage with the text on multiple levels and appreciate the artistry with which it is created. Also, poetry communicates things better than any other means. Instead of just saying, 'the Lord is king,' there are an additional 12 or 13 or 15 or 30 verses because God wants us to think about what that statement means.