

## **Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Session 3 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 3 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. Fred Putnam explores the structure and artistry of Hebrew poetry in the Book of Psalms. He explains the concept of parallelism, where lines reflect or contrast each other, and how variations in line length and structure create meaning. Putnam highlights the use of chiasms, a symmetrical arrangement of lines, and analyzes how these techniques shape the overall message of the Psalms. He emphasizes the importance of reading the Psalms in their original order and considering the relationships between lines to fully understand the poet's intent. The lecture concludes by examining different Psalm types and their common structural patterns.

**2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Putnam, Session 3 – 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 3 of 4

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from Dr. Fred Putnam's Lecture 3 on the Psalms:

#### Briefing Document: Dr. Fred Putnam - Psalms Lecture 3

##### Overview:

This lecture focuses on understanding the structure and poetic techniques employed in the Psalms, emphasizing that understanding the *how* of the poems is crucial for grasping the *what*. Dr. Putnam argues that biblical poetry, particularly the Psalms, is not simply a collection of random verses but carefully crafted works with specific patterns and purposes. The lecture emphasizes the importance of considering the author's intent through analysis of parallelism, chiasm, repetition, and overall structure. He challenges the reader to think *with* the poet rather than imposing a foreign interpretative structure.

##### Key Themes and Concepts:

##### 1. Pattern and Repetition:

- Poetry uses patterns to create an effect greater than its individual parts. This can be on a small scale (e.g. repeating questions in Christina Rossetti's "Water Heavy") or large scale (repeated ideas, line structures).
- Biblical poetry often appears to repeat itself, which is not "mental stuttering," but a key structural element.
- "And by pattern, we mean that things are repeated, or they're put together in certain ways so that the overall effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts."

##### 1. Parallelism:

- Hebrew poetry relies on parallelism instead of rhyme as an organizing method. Parallelism is where one line reflects, anticipates, or contrasts with the previous or following line.
- Archbishop Luth (Lowth) identified three main types of parallelism:
- **Synonymous Parallelism:** Two lines say the same thing in slightly different ways. This is common in the Psalms (e.g., "Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devise a vain thing?" - Psalm 2:1).

- **Antithetic Parallelism:** Two lines present a contrast, often seen in Proverbs. (e.g., "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish woman tears it down with her own hands.")
- There are also cases where no clear parallelism exists, lines are simply different in length. This is usually an indication that the end of a section has been reached.
- The purpose is to understand how each line relates to the next, "Each line reflects or contrasts with or steps away from the line before it."

#### 1. **Line Length and Structure**

- In Hebrew, lines are generally short with an average of 7 to 9 words. Translations, however, can balloon this to 13 to 28 words.
- A change in line length, particularly a significantly longer line following short parallel lines, often indicates the end of a section. ("Sometimes the line that signals we've come to the end of a section will be very short, one or two words. Usually, it's much longer than the preceding lines.")
- Discontinuity within the poem (like a line with a different length) helps to show the overall architecture of the psalm.

#### 1. **Chiasm:**

- A chiasm is a pattern where ideas or words are presented in an "ABBA" or reversed order within a set of lines.
- This technique can be seen in concepts, where the order of ideas is reversed or mirrored. Sometimes the words are actually flipped.
- Example from Psalm 113: A (Blessed be the name of Yahweh) B (from this time forth and forever) B (from the rising of the sun to its setting) A (the name of Yahweh is to be praised).
- There is no known manual as to why, but it is present throughout the psalms.
- This pattern emphasizes the central ideas and invites deeper reflection.

### 1. Repetition:

- Repetition, particularly at the beginning and end of a psalm, doesn't mean the repeated words have the same meaning or function. (e.g., *Hallelujah* at the beginning and the end of Psalm 113).
- The first instance often sets the stage, while the repetition provides a reminder after reasons for praising have been given, like a conclusion. ("The first one is a summons. The second one is a summons that is at the same time a reminder...")
- The meaning or function can change in the context of the poem.

### 1. Importance of Authorial Intent:

- The goal of studying the Bible should be to learn to think the poet's thoughts, not just impose modern organization and ideas on the text. ("Part of that submission is to learn to think the poet's thoughts after him or after her.")
- Scholars must pay attention to the poet's construction of the text and not just its thematic content, because form is part of the content. ("Because in poetry, the form and the content aren't just lying side by side. And it's not just that the form supports the content, but the form, the shape is actually part of it.")

### 1. Genre and Psalm Types:

- Psalms often follow recognizable patterns or genres, which help to understand their overall purpose and content.
- Putnam identifies two primary types:
- **Laments:** (e.g. Psalm 13) Typically include an address to God, a plea for help, reasons why God should answer, an expression of confidence, and a promise.
- Psalm 88 is an exception, lacking the final expression of confidence or promise.
- **Psalms of Praise:** (e.g. Psalm 113, 150) Typically start and end with a call to praise and include reasons for that praise in the middle.
- Recognizing these categories allows for a comparison between psalms within the same genre to highlight the unique emphasis of each poem.

- "Learning to look at the Psalms as falling within genres helps us to see that we don't just have 150 Psalms, but we actually have 150 poems that fall into general types that let us then look at each other, look at them individually in light of each other within that type and see how each one of them functions, what each one of them does with that pattern."

### 1. The Purpose of Praise

- The Bible always provides reasons for praising God.
- These reasons are based on God's actions, particularly his provision and deliverance, not just on his existence.
- "The Bible always gives us reasons. And the reasons are often our self-interest. What God has done for me, what God has done for us, that's why we praise him."

### Practical Implications:

- When reading a Psalm, always consider the relationship between parallel lines and verses (e.g., does the second line elaborate, contrast, or repeat?).
- Pay attention to changes in line length or structural discontinuities, as these often mark the end of a thought or section.
- Consider why the poet choose a particular word or phrase within the parallelism. What is being emphasized by the author's word choice?
- Be cautious of translations that force parallelism where it may not be originally present.
- Recognize the patterns within Psalm genres and note how individual Psalms emphasize different elements of the pattern.

### Conclusion:

Dr. Putnam's lecture provides a compelling case for the careful analysis of biblical poetry. By paying attention to the formal elements of the text, readers can more deeply understand the meaning and message intended by the authors, and not impose their own ideas. The lecture encourages a more nuanced reading that values and emphasizes the artistry and intentionality of the biblical poets.

## 4. Study Guide: Putnam, Psalms, Session 3 of 4

### Analyzing Biblical Poetry: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the concept of "pattern" in poetry, as described in the lecture?
2. How does Hebrew poetry differ from English poetry in terms of organizing its structure?
3. According to the lecture, what are the three main types of parallelism described by Archbishop Luth?
4. How can recognizing patterns help a reader better understand the psalms?
5. What is a chiasm, and how does it function in Hebrew poetry?
6. How does the length of a line sometimes signal a change in a poem's structure?
7. How do translations sometimes obscure the patterns of Hebrew poetry?
8. According to Molly Peacock, what is the interplay between the right and left brain when composing poetry?
9. What is the main structural outline for lament psalms?
10. What is unique about the ending of Psalm 88 in the context of this common lament structure?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Pattern in poetry refers to the repetition of elements or the arrangement of ideas in specific ways so that the combined impact is more significant than each individual part. These patterns can range from small repeated phrases to larger structural elements.
2. English poetry uses rhyme as an organizational tool to show connections between lines, while Hebrew poetry relies on parallelism where lines reflect or contrast with each other. Hebrew poetry does not employ rhyme.
3. Archbishop Luth identified three types of parallelism: synonymous parallelism, where lines say the same thing; antithetical parallelism, where lines express

contrasting ideas; and synthetic parallelism, where the second line builds on or specifies the first line.

4. Recognizing patterns allows us to see the poet's intention and understand how he structures his thoughts. It also helps readers notice the nuances and breaks in the pattern that create meaning.
5. A chiasm is a literary structure where elements are presented and then repeated in reverse order, creating an "X" pattern, often used to emphasize the central element or theme. This structure is used in Hebrew poetry to show the way a poet might think about an idea.
6. A line that is noticeably longer or shorter than the surrounding lines can signify the end of a section and the beginning of a new one or that the writer is trying to draw our attention to something. Longer lines often conclude a section.
7. Translations can sometimes alter or obscure the patterns of Hebrew poetry by adding or removing verbs or breaking up lines at arbitrary places, because translations try to make the text more readable or follow a two-column format.
8. Molly Peacock suggests that in poetic composition, the right and left brain work synergistically, resulting in an interplay of sound, image, and meaning that is integral to the poem's nature and meaning. The right brain forms, the left brain shapes, but the poet may not be fully aware of all this meaning packed into the poem.
9. Lament psalms typically begin with an address to God, followed by a complaint, then a plea for help, reasons for that plea, an expression of confidence, and finally, a promise to praise God.
10. Unlike other lament psalms, Psalm 88 does not end with an expression of hope or promise, but concludes with a somber statement about the psalmist's isolation and suffering, which makes it unique within its structure.

## Essay Questions

1. Discuss the importance of understanding the structural elements of Hebrew poetry, such as parallelism and chiasm, in interpreting the Psalms. How does this understanding change the way a reader might engage with the text?
2. Compare and contrast synonymous and antithetical parallelism. Explain how these two types of parallelism contribute to the meaning of a psalm and how

their use in different literary contexts might have impacted the interpretation of Hebrew scripture.

3. Analyze the significance of structural breaks and irregularities in a psalm. What do these breaks reveal about the poem's intent and the poet's thought process? Support your answer with specific examples from the lecture.
4. Explore the role of repetition in the Psalms, focusing specifically on the idea that repeated elements do not always have the same function. How can this idea affect a deeper reading of the text?
5. Evaluate the typical outline of a lament psalm. How does recognizing this pattern enhance our understanding of the specific concerns and messages of these types of psalms? Use Psalm 13 as an example.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Chiasm:** A literary device where elements are presented in one order and then repeated in reverse order, creating a symmetrical pattern, often resembling the Greek letter chi (X).

**Hallel:** A collection of psalms (113-118) recited during Jewish festivals, specifically associated with Passover. The word "hallelujah" is featured prominently in these psalms.

**Lament:** A type of psalm that expresses sorrow, complaint, and a plea for God's help. They often follow a specific outline, including a complaint and a request.

**Parallelism:** A literary device in Hebrew poetry where two or more lines are related to each other by expressing similar or contrasting thoughts or ideas.

**Pattern:** The repetition or arrangement of elements in a poem, creating a unified effect. This concept may include sounds, ideas, structure and form.

**Synonymous Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second line essentially restates the first line, using different words with similar meanings.

**Antithetical Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second line expresses the opposite idea from the first line, often creating a contrast.

**Synthetic Parallelism:** A type of parallelism where the second line builds upon or specifies the thought of the first line, advancing the idea forward.

**Authorial Choice:** The decision a poet makes when composing a poem, as to how to use certain words or patterns or structures.



## 5. FAQs on Putnam, Psalms, Session 3 of 4, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on Biblical Poetry in Psalms

- **What is parallelism in Hebrew poetry, and how does it differ from rhyme in English poetry?**
- Parallelism is a literary device in Hebrew poetry where lines are related to each other, often by reflecting, contrasting, or expanding on the ideas presented. Unlike rhyme, which organizes English poetry by similar sounds, parallelism organizes Hebrew poetry by relationships in meaning or structure between lines. This can be through repeating an idea with different words (synonymous parallelism), contrasting ideas (antithetical parallelism) or building on an idea (synthetic parallelism).
- **What are the different types of parallelism that can be found in the Psalms?**
- The most common type is synonymous parallelism, where two lines essentially repeat the same idea using different words. Another type is antithetical parallelism, where two lines contrast with each other, often seen in the book of Proverbs. A third type is synthetic parallelism where the second line expands or builds on the thought of the first. Beyond this, the source discusses how lines can relate to each other not just in terms of meaning but by structural elements, such as chiasm or the omission of a verb in the second line.
- **What is a chiasm in biblical poetry, and how does it contribute to meaning?**
- A chiasm is a literary structure in which elements of a text are arranged in a mirror-like or A-B-B-A pattern. This can involve ideas, words, or phrases. The purpose of chiasm in Hebrew poetry is not entirely clear, but it is often used to create emphasis, show relationships, and underscore the central idea of a passage. It helps to draw attention to the overall structure of a text, not just its individual parts.

- **Why is it important to pay attention to the structure and patterns of biblical poetry, like parallelism and chiasm?**

Paying attention to the structure and patterns of biblical poetry is essential for a more in-depth understanding of the text. It moves beyond simply reading the words to grasping the poet's intended meaning, thought process, and the overall message of the poem. This involves asking what the relationship is between lines, how the second line adds to the first, and why the poet chose specific words or arrangements to express their thoughts. Understanding structure helps us to see why poets did not always write two separate sentences that are supposed to be put together, but rather as one single unified statement comprised of multiple parts.

- **How do changes in line length or structure within a Psalm signal shifts in meaning or sections?**
- Changes in line length and structure are crucial in biblical poetry to signal shifts in meaning or sections within a Psalm. For example, a longer line following a series of shorter, parallel lines often marks the end of a section, inviting the reader to ask, "What's going on here?". Conversely, a shorter line can do the same thing. These variations in structure are intentional, serving as cues to guide interpretation and indicate the beginning or end of a new idea or theme, or a different speaker.
- **What is the significance of the repetition of phrases or lines in Psalms, especially at the beginning and end of a Psalm?**
- Repetition, such as when a phrase like "Praise the Lord" or "Bless the Lord, O my soul" appears at both the beginning and end of a psalm, is not merely redundant. While the words and their dictionary definitions might be the same, the function of the statement is not. The first instance can function as a summons to praise, while the second functions as a reminder after reasons for praise have been given, thereby transforming the original summons into a form of statement and declaration. By the end, readers understand why the psalm is to end with the same command it began with. This technique emphasizes the psalm's content and underscores the journey the reader has been taken on.

- **What is the typical structure of a lament Psalm, and how does Psalm 88 deviate from this pattern?**
- A typical lament Psalm often includes an address to God, followed by a plea for help and reasons supporting that plea. It then presents an expression of confidence or hope in God's salvation, and typically ends with a promise to praise God or offer sacrifices. Psalm 88 notably deviates from this structure by ending without any assurance or hope, instead concluding with a sense of despair and darkness. This deviation emphasizes the complex reality that life will not always have an answer to our prayers or result in a positive outcome.
- **Why does the lecture emphasize the importance of reading the Psalms in the order they are written, rather than reorganizing them based on themes?**
- The lecture stresses reading the Psalms in their original sequence because it honors the poet's intention and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the psalm. Reorganizing verses can disrupt the flow of thought and prevent the reader from appreciating how each part builds upon the previous one. Reading in order provides insight into why the poet structured the text the way they did, and how they wanted the reader to understand and experience it. By following the order the psalmist intended, readers engage more completely with the psalm and can better understand why each element was included.