

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Lecture 4, Parallelism

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This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number four, Variant Repetitions, Parallelism, Lectures in Proverbs chapters one through nine.

Welcome to lesson four on the biblical book of Proverbs.

In this lesson, we're going to look at three particular aspects of the book of Proverbs in general. So, this is kind of methodological background work that we're going to do, which I hope will inspire you to read the book of Proverbs for yourself, for all its worth. So, the method is kind of theoretical.

It's perhaps in some aspects also a little bit complicated, but I hope you will by the end of this share my excitement about the intricacies of proverbial poetry and how beauty is created through art in language. The three areas are, first of all, we're going to look at one of the three most prominent features of biblical poetry, namely parallelism. I will talk about the other two features later on.

Then we're also going to look at a significant phenomenon that's very special in the book of Proverbs, which is what I call variant repetition. That means the repetition of similar verses in different parts of the book of Proverbs. One such example we've already seen with the partial repetition of chapter 1, verse 7, and chapter 9, verse 10 in the previous lecture, in lecture 3. And then the third area that we're going to look at is the, you could call it the structural design, the architecture of the various parts of the lectures in Proverbs chapters 1 to 9, which are quite different from the material from chapter 10 onwards.

So those are the three areas. So, let's begin with parallelism. For this, I'm going to read several sections from my recent book, *Poetic Imagination in the Book of Proverbs*.

That's this one. It's turned out a little bit heavier than I originally intended, but it was a lot of fun writing this. And in the process, of course, I learned a thing or two which I've tried to put into writing, and some of this I now want to share with you.

So, if we do a survey of scholarship on parallelism in biblical poetry, we need to notice, first of all, that for the last 250 years or so, the reigning paradigm for the study of Hebrew poetry, and of parallelism in particular, has been the paradigm developed by Bishop Robert Lowth in his famous lectures, *De Sacra Poesiae Hebraeorum, Praelectiones*, from 1753. This was a series of lectures that he actually gave at the University of Oxford while he was a professor of poetry there.

Nonetheless, of course, in recent decades, especially since the 1980s, a significant process has been made, and I now want to talk specifically, first of all, about the contributions of Robert Lowth, so that we get a sense of the context of the scholarly discussions of parallelism in biblical poetry.

Over one-third of the Bible is written in poetry. Just imagine that. Over one-third of the Bible.

The study, as I mentioned, of parallelism in particular has been dominated by Robert Lowth, and the theory is usually nowadays known by its Latin name that Lowth gave it, which is called *Parallelismus Membrorum*, which literally translated simply means parallelism of the members. And to give you just one example, I think I want to choose one that's very close to my heart, very dear to my heart, which is the opening verse of Psalm 103,

Praise the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

And can you see how there is a parallelism of the members of the two halves of this double statement? It's one verse, but there are two halves to it.

Let me just repeat this. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. And you can see that in some ways the two halves of the verse are restatements of one another with variation, of course.

Bishop Lowth called this synonymous parallelism because the two halves of the parallel describe synonymous, similar things. Now, Bishop Lowth proposed originally three categories of parallelism, namely synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic. In synonymous parallelism, the partial lines of a poetic line repeat, quote, the same sense in different but equivalent terms, end quote.

A good example, another one, is Proverbs 18, verse 15.

The heart of the discerning acquires learning,
and the ear of wise men seeks learning.

Here, every expression, or so it seems, in the first part of the proverb finds a very similar, in Lowth's view, synonymous counterpart in the second.

The second of these parallelisms, namely antithetical parallelism, occurs when, quote, when two lines, that is, our partial lines, correspond with one another by an opposition of terms and sentiments, when the second is contrasted with the first, sometimes in expressions, sometimes in sense only, end quote. A typical example is Proverbs 13, verse 9. Listen to this.

The light of the righteous rejoices,
but the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Here, every expression in the opening half-line finds a contrasting expression in the second part of the poetic parallelism.

Third, in synthetic parallelism, quote, the parallelism consists only in this similar form of construction, end quote. It is not without reason that Lowth's description of synthetic parallelism is somewhat vague, for it was designed to cover very different kinds of parallelism, where the supposed answer in the second half of poetic lines is not always obvious.

Proverbs 16, 12 may serve as a typical example of the less obvious kind of synthetic parallelism. Quote,

kings loathe wicked action,
for a throne is sustained by righteousness.

Well, you decide whether that's really parallelism.

Well, it's something, and we'll come back to that. So, Lowth thought that the regularities inherent in the threefold system of parallelism that he had discovered were so strong that they could serve two important functions in the critical interpretation of Hebrew poetry, namely lexicography and textual criticism. The following quotation illustrates Lowth's view, a stance taken up in practice by Lowth's successors largely to the present day.

I quote, this strict attention to the form and fashion of the composition will be of great use to him as an interpreter, and will often lead him into the meaning of obscure words and phrases. Sometimes it will suggest the true reading where the text in our present copies is faulty and will verify and confirm a correction offered on the authority of manuscripts or of the ancient versions. So, Lowth believed that the system of parallelism was so strict and precise that when we found an obscure word in the parallelism, that had a parallelism with a word that we do know its meaning of, then in synonymous parallelism the obscure word must mean the same as its parallel counterpart.

Similarly, he also argued, and many people followed him through the centuries until now, that whenever we had a poetic line in parallelism where the parallelism was not as perfect as he wanted it to be, that there might have been a mistake in the textual transmission, in the copying through the centuries of that text. And so he felt quite confident, and many people after him did the same, that when the parallelism was not as precise as people now expected it to be, that we were free as scholars to actually change that text and make it more parallel than the original, that we found in the original Hebrew. You can see the problems with that, because who is to say that this strict parallelism paradigm that Lowth had established was really true if

there were in fact so many hundreds of cases where the parallelism was not strict at all.

You can see how the evidence, the material that the theory was designed to explain was altered in order to fit the theory. A huge problem, to be honest. But what you need to just remember now, even though I now am, shortly I'm going to argue, that actually this precise system of these three different categories of parallelism is actually outdated now and hugely problematic, nonetheless you need to know about synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism, the idea of it at least because in many of the textbooks that you will read over the course of your studies of the Bible, you will come across this kind of theory.

Let me give you an example here of a typical situation where a textual emendation on the basis of better parallelism was actually practiced. This comes from Richard Clifford's otherwise very good commentary in the recent edition of the Old Testament Library commentary series. Commenting on Proverbs 29.6, he stated that, and I quote him a little bit freely, the Hebrew of the second half of the verse, namely, the righteous person sings out, yarun, and rejoices, is not a satisfactory parallel to the first half of the verse.

His amended version of the entire verse reads, a scoundrel's offences entrap him, but a righteous person runs rejoicing, in which he replaces yarun, sings out, with yarutz, he will run. And you can see how he fit the verse to the theory here. Over the last two centuries, literally hundreds upon hundreds of suggestions of this sort have been made.

Similarly, modern dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew contain hundreds of proposals for the meaning of obscure words or phrases based on Lauth's original idea of parallelism, *Parallelismus Membrorum*. The apparent usefulness of parallelism for lexicography and textual criticism and the neat categorizations described above, go some way towards explaining the success and longevity of Lauth's version of parallelism. I now will actually go to the next chapter in my book, in which I will present a number of proposals to widen the perspective of parallelism.

In my study of variant repetitions in the Book of Proverbs, I've encountered parallelism not only on the level of the poetic line, that is, the parallelism between the partial lines of one and the same verse, but also on three other levels. Two of these have been mentioned by other scholars. Semi-linear parallelism in the work of Wilfred Watson's contribution, and interlinear parallelism in a very important work by Robert Alter.

The fourth level of parallelism, what I call trans-linear parallelism, between non-adjacent poetic lines, completes, in my view, the picture of a much larger contextual consideration of parallelism in poetry. So, I'm not saying that there is no parallelism

in poetry. Rather, what I'm saying in my critique of Lauth's paradigm is, that there is far more parallelism than he ever imagined.

But secondly, I will also argue that that parallelism is far more flexible, less strict, and more dynamic than he ever thought. So here it goes. And perhaps I should just say that as I will develop this, I found, after I had developed this scheme of the various levels of parallelism, I found a similar idea expressed in the work by Denis Pardee in a volume on Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry, entitled *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism* of 1988.

So, I want to acknowledge this contribution, this very important contribution by a fellow scholar, who uses slightly different terminology, but by and large is arguing for the same kind of phenomenon. So, I start with what I call semi-linear parallelism. Semi-linear in the sense of parallelism, not on the level of the whole verse, but on the level of a half-verse.

So that even the first half or the second half of a verse has in itself two parts that are parallel to one another. So, this is on a lower level of poetic structure. So semi-linear parallelism is the first level of parallelism operating between the parts of the smallest poetic unit, what I call in my work the partial line.

A good example is Proverbs 6, verse 10, which is, by the way, identical with chapter 24, verse 33, a repetition of one and the same verse in different collections of the Book of Proverbs. In English translation, the two verses read like this. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest.

And you can see that the first partial line, a little sleep, a little slumber, is very nicely parallel. And then both of these in the first partial line are parallel to the second half of the verse, namely a little folding of the hand to rest. Here the first half-line naturally falls into two parallel halves, which in turn are parallel to the second.

Watson, dubbing this level of parallelism what he calls internal parallelism, or half-line parallelism, has produced six pioneering studies of the phenomena that I call semi-linear parallelism, published between 1984 and 1989. According to Watson, a line with internal parallelism behaves like a couplet or a whole verse. And this is well illustrated in examples such as Proverbs 6, 10, and 24, 33.

One of the fascinating questions is whether it can be shown, as seemed to be the case in some verses, that half-line parallelisms of some of their constituents' parts are compressed expressions rephrased from more standard, longer half-lines, or the other way around. And now come to the second level of parallelism, what I call intra-linear parallelism. That is, parallelism intra- within one and the same verse.

And this is really, more or less exactly, what Robert Lowth described with regards to the verses A and B, or first half-line and second half-line, or the various words colon A, colon B, the various ways in which this has been described. In intra-linear parallelism, the standard description of parallelism until now, there are parallels between the partial lines of a normal poetic line. A crucial advantage of recognizing the various levels of parallelism is that the majority of cases where parallelism on the intra-linear level is reduced or lacking altogether, it exists nonetheless on the other levels of parallelism.

And I will show this in a minute. On numerous occasions, this insight resolves problems that have previously been raised due to a perceived lack of parallelism in the analysis of many poetic lines. I now turn to inter-linear parallelism.

Inter, that is, between successive verses in a given poem or sequence of poetic verses or lines. Inter-linear parallelism concerns the correspondence between adjacent poetic lines, as for example in Psalms 27.3 and Psalm 88.12-13. Examples from the Book of Proverbs include, for example, Proverbs 2 verses 1 and 2, chapter 6 verses 16 to 19, and so on. The classic example of inter-linear parallelism in the book is the adjacent verses, Proverbs 26 verses 4 to 5. This is fun.

Watch this. So, inter-linear parallelism, the first verse, and then the second verse. I'll raise my left hand when I read the first verse and I'll raise my right hand when I read the second verse.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you too will become like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he will become wise in his own eyes. Can you see the parallelism? It's the first half of the two successive verses.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly. Answer a fool according to his folly. We have a blatant contradiction in the Bible.

This is a lot of fun. People usually freak out or get worried about. People got inspiration, from the truth of the Bible.

How can both of these statements be true? I will not tackle this right now. However, in one of the later lectures, we will actually look at these two verses in great detail. I will try and explain why these contradictions are there in this blatant form.

I think you will like what we will find there. But for now, I just mention this as an example of inter-linear parallelism. There's little or no parallelism on the intra-linear levels of the two poetic verses.

The parallelism rather exists between the two poetic lines, as I just explained earlier under intra-linear parallelism. Okay, and now come to the final level, the largest level

of parallelism, namely trans-linear parallelism. This is the level of parallelism that extends over the largest stretches of material.

Trans-linear parallelism is my term for the correspondence between poetic lines that are separated by one or more intervening poetic lines, as, for example, in Proverbs 10, verse 6b, which is repeated in Proverbs 10, verse 11b, and also, for example, Proverbs 13, verse 1b, and Proverbs 13, verse 8b. On all of these occasions, and there are many of these throughout the Bible and also in the Book of Proverbs, there are several other verses between the poetic lines or partial lines that are parallel, yet these repetitions are so close together and similar enough for parallelism to be detectable by the attentive reader. So this parallelism of verses or parts of verses in relative proximity is the narrower sense in which I employ the term trans-linear parallelism.

I now will actually turn to the end of my book towards the conclusion, and I will say a little bit more, mainly by way of criticism and correction, about how I believe in the present day we need to take advantage of the beauty of parallelism and how it is best analyzed. And much of what I will be saying is really in critique and in critical dialogue with the traditional understanding of what I now call the theory of precise parallelism. So first of all, poetic parallelism, in my view, consists of repetition and variation, of difference and similarity.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of how I have come to understand poetic parallelism. So let me explain this a little bit further. So, I want to talk now, for the next few minutes, about the difference in parallelism.

John Goldingay, a very well-known Old Testament scholar, has claimed in an article he's written about 20 years ago or so, that Hebrew prosody, or his term for poetry, Hebrew poetry, likes to combine repetition with variation. I would now restate and develop his statement, in my own words, with the following. The creative combination of repetition with variation is the very essence of Hebrew poetry.

And I believe this has significant consequences for our understanding of the very nature of proverbial poetry and other poetry as well. Most proverbs are not easy to understand, and they are not meant to be. They demand diligent inquiry and exegesis.

And we will go through many, many examples in the following lectures. Recent professional interpreters and general readers of proverbs have simply not believed that the statements that we discussed in an earlier lecture, in Chapter 1, verses 1 to 6, and in Chapter 2, which we will look at shortly, need to be taken seriously. And I would argue that this needs to change.

We need to be far more sophisticated in our interpretation of these texts because the texts themselves are sophisticated. Just let me remind you of that famous example from Chapter 26. How can there be such a blatant contradiction in subsequent verses? Previously, people have said, well, this is just a contradiction and it's stupid.

These people were not stupid. There was a reason why they did that, and it's our job to find out what that reason is. Parallelism cannot be evaluated and appreciated simply by listing and counting synonymous or antithetical components of the various parts of the poetic line.

Similar things can truly be said in many different ways. And it is the differences between the various options that create the unique identity, meaning, and pragmatic impact of the many possible variations. In proverbial materials in general, and I'm increasingly convinced, in Hebrew poetry in general as well.

Just to remind you, the difference in the repetition from Proverbs 1, verse 7, to Proverbs 9, verse 10, where we discuss the meaning of the *reshit* of knowledge being the fear of the Lord, is one example to support this argument. So differences between parallel components in poetry resulting in what I call imprecise parallelism play a crucial role in the communication process and are evidence of poetic skill and creative potential. Sometimes poetic materials display a daring lack of correspondences of parallelism.

Interesting kinds of parallelism are not the sort that displays perfect or close synonymy or antithesis. Rather, they are those that are close enough for parallelism to remain discernible, yet sufficiently different to say something distinctive in each part of the parallel so that it widens the perspective of what is said in the other parts of the poetic line, each part thus illuminating and enhancing the other. So, it is the differences between variants and between corresponding elements on the various levels of parallelism that are most interesting.

It is here that new meanings and nuances arise that make the reading of the Book of Proverbs such a fascinating adventure of the mind. In parallelism, expressions correspond to one another in ways that may be described as equivalent in the broad sense of the term, but they are distinct enough to be informative and interesting. Often a general sense of balance and the use of imagery such as similes or metaphors can serve as indicators of parallelism to create a sense of correspondence rather than total equivalence.

The natural tendency for readers to attempt a clarification of the way this correspondence functions is what stimulates their imagination. I, therefore, recommend that the three-tier system of synonymous antithetic and synthetic

parallelism be replaced with detailed analyses of specific examples of poetic verses in their own right. These analyses should be flexible, specific, and imaginative.

They should explain how the different parts of poetic lines interrelate. Often the imprecise nature of the parallelism allows a range of complex and highly productive implications and inferences that immensely enrich meaning and significance. So, in my view, the cumulative evidence suggests that we must abandon the classification of parallelism as a hallmark of biblical poetry.

The designation hallmark is used as a guarantee of quality in the assessment of precious metals such as gold and silver. In a figurative sense, as in its use to describe the importance of parallelism in biblical poetry, parallelism has been understood as a distinguishing characteristic and as an indication of excellence. Traditionally, the juxtaposition of terms in poetic lines that create straightforward and precise parallelism has therefore been considered as a better kind of parallelism and, by implication, an example of better poetry.

In my view, these sorts of value judgments are not warranted. Parallelism remains, of course, one of the most frequent features of biblical poetry. But it must content itself with a role alongside other poetical features.

Most poetic lines play a role in a wider literary context and the need for contextual continuity has shaped the parallel makeup of most poetic lines to fulfill this purpose alongside the desire for parallelism. The idea of perfect parallelism needs to be abandoned. The number of precise correlations in poetic lines as a measure of poetic quality also must go.

Parallelism operates alongside other aspects such as context and imagery. I now want to talk a little bit about slightly more unusual, more creative and interesting kinds of parallelism. Here I want to focus particularly on balance and ellipsis and how the very imprecision of parallelism can create further meaning and stimulate the imagination.

So partial lines in Hebrew proverbs are usually of equal or similar length. This helps us to understand many other poetic features such as imprecise parallelism and ellipsis. The poetic technique of ellipsis is more important than previously recognized.

So first of all, ellipsis and new information. In the past, ellipsis has mainly been seen as a space-saving device. By contrast, I would argue that ellipsis frees up space without the loss of meaning and so new and additional materials can be introduced into the parallelism of lines that remain of equal length although more information is being given in the part of the line with the ellipsis.

Because ellipsis does not mean that meaning is lost but space is created for new information to be added into the parallelism. I also want to talk about ellipsis as wordplay. Sometimes ellipsis can function as a wordplay.

When the gap created by an omission can be filled with more than one word or expression then ambiguity arises and a surplus of meaning is generated ironically and ingeniously through precisely through what is not literally expressed. I want to argue that imprecise parallelism has a poetic function and is in fact, it is very imprecision, a very clever poetic technique. Imprecise parallelism violates readers' expectations that parallel lines in Hebrew poetry are similar.

Implicit information can be therefore reconstructed because imprecise parallels stimulate the mental substitution of implicit or elliptical information as we have already discussed. Thus, imprecise parallelism enhances the amount of information that the poetic line can convey because the imprecise contrasts imply their respective contrasts in the opposite half-line. Sometimes, again, several reconstructions are possible and this is the sign of the poetic potential of imprecise parallelism namely multivalence, a surplus of meaning rather than a sign of flaws in its analysis.

Imprecise parallelism also highlights the role of concision in poetry. It maximizes the amount of information without compromising terseness or brevity. Brevity in Hebrew poetry and perhaps in all poetry is not an end in itself but a means to engage readers and listeners in active and imaginative interpretation.

It may function as a poetic technique to create ambiguity, deliberate ambiguity, and thus multiply meaning. So, what we have here in the Book of Proverbs and in its parallelism is an immense stimulus for the imaginative engagement of the readers with the poetic beauty of the content of these wise sayings. So, in this part of the lecture until now we have been talking about poetic parallelism and I know it's gone quite technical, quite detailed but I hope we are going to set the groundwork for an imaginative reading and interpretation of the Proverbs for the rest of this lecture series on the book.

What I now want to talk about, following straight on from our consideration of poetic parallelism is biblical poetry and poetic imagination. What do I mean when I say that what has been written with imagination must be read with imagination? And again, I will largely draw on the summary and the conclusions from my book on poetic parallel imagination. In the book, and we will have some examples of this later on in the lecture series, I have argued and shown I believe, succeeded in showing that most variant repetitions in the Book of Proverbs are the result of skillful poetic creativity.

Often, we were able to reconstruct the editorial and creative poetic process and we could observe what poets did, how they did it, and why they did it. Attention to details has stimulated our own imagination and in turn, we can now see the poetic imagination of the original poets at work. And we will look at some details of this, some examples later on.

A practical application of our findings leads us to refine our approaches to the study of biblical poetry and encourages us to adapt our interpretive methods. And so in the next few minutes, I will first highlight some exegetical fallacies and suggest strategies for their eradication. Then I will propose analytical techniques for the determination of poetic correspondences.

I will highlight the role of various interpretive skills and I will draw attention to the importance of the interpreter's imagination. So first of all then, some prominent exegetical fallacies. I have divided common fallacies in exegetical procedures into four groups.

But they are related mainly because of their common grounding in the theory of strict parallelism or precise parallelism. The first of these fallacies is references to other verses to settle ambiguities. And we see that example from Proverbs 1.7 and 9.10 as a clear illustration of that.

An accepted method of settling ambiguities in poetry for a long time has been to refer to similar constructions elsewhere. One of the important and perhaps controversial results of my way of reading poetry is the conclusion that this procedure needs to be employed more cautiously in the future. Or perhaps not at all.

Comparison between variants and similar poetic expressions, of course, can tell us much about the meaning of the verses, but not with the goal of assimilating their meanings to one another. The compulsion of many modern Western interpreters to remove ambiguity has frequently resulted in the appearance of totalizing truth claims in the Proverbs of the Book of Proverbs when it was, in fact, the interpreters themselves who had robbed those Proverbs of their nuances through their strict application of precise parallelism. Proverbs with rich ambiguity were then accused of being unrealistic or banal or dogmatic.

Ironically, these accusations then often came from the same scholars who had just robbed the Proverbs of their subtleties and multivalence. It's quite funny, really. In reality, however, subtle nuances often signal significant changes in meaning and comparisons should focus on these in order to discover the unique aspects of each poetic utterance and then interpret it on its own terms.

If comparisons utterly cannot reduce ambiguity, so be it. Ambiguity is very frequently the point of the poetic statement. A second fallacy is what I would call poetic parallelism lexicography and textual criticism.

Bishop Lowth, as we have seen, saw precise parallelism as a sure-proof passage to the meaning of obscure words and as an aid to contextual emendations. Subsequent generations of interpreters have used it in lexicography and textual criticism. However, I would argue that ambiguities in Hebrew poetry should not be resolved with reference to similar constructions in other verses.

The same is true for the identification of the precise meaning of rare words. The determination of word meanings on the basis of parallelism with unknown words being identified as synonyms of their parallel counterparts in the case of synonymous parallelism and as antonyms of their parallel counterparts in the case of antithetic parallelism needs to be reconsidered. Textual emendations and precise lexicographical indications based on an ideal or precise parallelism are problematic.

The success and longevity of Lowth's method based on parallelism owed much to its apparent usefulness for these very approaches for lexicography and textual criticism. Unfortunately, we need to abandon this hope for easy access to the meaning of many unknown or obscure Hebrew words. The procedure can at best give general indications about a range of meanings of obscure and or unknown Hebrew words.

All word meanings in Hebrew dictionaries that have been reconstructed on the basis of precise parallelism need to be reexamined and many will need to be abandoned. This does not mean that all textual emendations or lexicographical proposals based on parallelism are wrong, but our findings certainly call for caution. These proposals need to be tested again in the light of recent developments.

Thirdly, I want to talk about the exegetical fallacy of what I call better parallelism. We have seen an example proposed by Richard Clifford a little bit earlier in the lecture. The widely practiced procedure of improving the text of actual poetic lines on the basis of an apparently better parallelism is, in my view, an exegetical fallacy.

Admittedly, interpretations based on better parallelism can sometimes be used with benefit, as long as they are used heuristically and with due caution, rather than as a methodological fix-all. Proposals of textual emendations or conjectures on the basis that they produce better parallelism should be abandoned altogether in the future study of biblical poetry. I now turn to insights, values, virtues, skills, and techniques for reading biblical poetry with imagination.

I've divided these insights, characteristics and methods into three groups, but again, of course, they are closely related. Mainly, you have guessed it, through their common grounding in the embrace of difference in parallelism and on the emphasis

on imagination in interpretation. And I believe, to be honest, much in this section, what I'm going to share with you now, applies also to extra-biblical poetry of all languages and all ages.

So, I turn first to analytical techniques for the determination of poetic correspondence. And I want to talk here about heuristic norms combined with the indispensable value of flexibility. Analyzers of parallelism need to identify the precise parts of the partial lines that correspond.

The move from a largely intuitive perception of parallelism to more detailed descriptions of the way that supposedly parallel elements relate brings tangible benefits. Sometimes, elements that appeared to correspond turn out to be unrelated. Sometimes, apparently, unrelated elements can be paired with fitting counterparts.

Frequently, the poetic or contextual functions of apparently isolated elements can be identified. The heuristic assumption that partial lines in biblical poetry are of equal or similar length plays an important role in the analysis of parallelism. On occasion, the heuristic norm prompts an inquiry into the reason that a given poetic line deviates from that putative norm and expectation.

Why is this not parallel? That's a really good question to ask. We have seen throughout that precise parallelism actually is rare in the book of Proverbs, and I will show you more and more examples as we go through the lecture series. Nonetheless, the concept of precise parallelism as an explanatory or exploratory foil can be a helpful tool in interpretation as long as we employ it imaginatively and flexibly.

It is not a fix-all to suit every interpretive task, but it can be useful as a self-educating, inductively employed technique. This, I believe, will be the lasting significance of Robert Lauth's contribution to the study of Hebrew parallelism. Common poetic patterns, as long as they are considered to be exemplary norms, can serve a twofold and only seemingly contradictory purpose.

They can explain certain unusual features of given poetic lines by showing how and why the material has been shaped to conform to different poetic conventions. Often, several poetic conventions or linguistic norms may pull the particular shape of a given poetic line into different directions. And it is ultimately the poet who decided which of the various poetic norms he or she wanted to follow when they composed the parallelism.

Consequently, our analytical methods and procedures need to change from case to case, aiming to find the approach that is best suited to that particular poetic material that is under consideration at any given time. Poetry needs flexible methods of

analysis, specifically tailored to each poetic unit as a unique manifestation of the poetic imagination. I now turn to interpretive skill and imagination.

And here I want to focus on heuristic norms and what I call the embrace of the truly unusual. What do I mean by that? The analysis of parallelism depends on the diligent exploration of corresponding elements, however imprecise or incomplete their similarities may be. Accurately analyzing Hebrew poetry is, however, not a hard and fast science with simple rules.

There are no exegetical shortcuts. The road to success lies in the diligent, attentive, and imaginative analysis of each instance of parallelism on its own terms and for its own sake. This can be time-consuming, but reading slowly is precisely what poetry is all about.

Slotting instances of parallelism into predefined categories may in fact prevent attention to detail because the categories are considered self-explanatory. By contrast, I have argued and I am arguing that poetic statements are not straightforward and they are not supposed to be. They are deliberately designed to slow down the reading process and force the reader or listener to engage deeply with the poetic imagination.

Mention of the listener raises the question, however, whether or not reading slowly is really an appropriate method for the analysis of poetry. This question pertains especially and even more so to proverbs which were originally meant to be spoken, heard, not seen. Most, if not all, poetry through the ages was composed for oral performance, intended for a mode of encounter that appears ephemeral and fleeting, and thus in the oral performance of poetry, there may not be such a thing as slow hearing.

I think I might have painted myself into a corner there. Or did I? In response, I would say that most, if not all, poetry through the ages has been recorded in some form or other, whether in writing or, perhaps even more importantly, in memory, in order to be performed again and again. The equivalent of slow reading in the oral performance of poetry is therefore hearing again.

The repeated performance and hearing of the poetic piece, either through frequent quotation of, let us say, a proverb, or through the repetition and perhaps discussion of the proverb in the communicative event through dialogue between the interlocutors or through dialogue between several listeners. Skillful analysis of Hebrew poetry, then, needs to go beyond neat categorizations or the tagging, the mere tagging of poetic devices. Rather, it relies on intuition and flexibility, on paying attention to all aspects of the poetic language at the same time, and, perhaps most importantly, on embracing the unusual.

While poetry as such, of course, is unusual, when judged from the perspective of prose as the norm, the very notion of poetry breaking the norm surely is misguided. Many of the earliest pieces of writing across a wide spectrum of cultures were poetic. Poetry has always been at the center of human thought and communication.

Consequently, poetry is as much the norm of human communication as prose. The key question, then, is this. What is the nature of the unusual in poetry? If poetry revels in what is unusual in prose, then such unusual features are the norm in poetry.

Thus, knowing and understanding the pattern of these unusual features is important, and this is what traditional manuals of poetics teach well. What these manuals do not convey as well is what I want to call the truly unusual. The truly unusual in poetry is not the unusual features that conform to our expectations of unusual features of poetry, which is the pattern, but those features that surprise even the readers and hearers who know the poetic genre well.

Ironically, in much of biblical interpretation and criticism over the last 200 years or so, it is these very truly unusual features, which are probably the real treasures of biblical poetry, and any poetry for that matter were the ones that were often declared improper and ignored or explained away or normalized. And we have stopped ourselves from perceiving the imaginative genius of the original poets. These sorts of truly creative features of poetry are, of course, hard to pin down, and this is where, again, I want to say intuition and imagination become crucial.

Imaginative and skillful interpretation of poetry recognizes poetry as a normal form of human communication. It values the unusual features of poetry as normal features of the poetic language. And it also, and even more so, celebrates the truly unusual as the supreme expression of the poetic imagination.

In other words, it values the normal features of poetic expression and celebrates the truly unusual. Truly unusual features of poetry surprise, delight, and invite the readers and listeners to engage deeply with the poetic imagination. And these statements that I've just shared about what I consider to be truly unusual, I would say, have probably been the most rewarding and most exciting discovery for me in my engagement with the Book of Proverbs.

And I think, if nothing else, this can make a real impact and difference in the way in which we read biblical poetry, and any poetry for that matter. I finally want to say something about ambiguity, word plays, and interpretive skills. Ambiguity is prominent and valuable in biblical poetry.

This simple but profound insight will enrich the modern interpretation of poetry. More wordplays will be discovered. More examples of the types of word plays that have been considered rare will surface.

The pressure on interpreters to arrive at definitive, single meanings will ease. Many so-called interpretive cruces, difficulties in text that have been declared as unsolvable, as insolvable, will actually be resolved because we will discover that they were in the first place prompted by deliberate ambiguity intended to create multivalence. Apparent cruces will be celebrated as what they are, instances of poetic ingenuity.

So, good practice in the academic training of biblical scholars should prepare us to read the texts with imagination and openness to subtleties such as the sort we have encountered and will encounter in this lecture series on the Book of Proverbs. Interpreters of biblical poetry and of proverbial poetry in particular need the technical skill necessary to recognize word plays when they see them. They need interpretive virtues such as diligence, imagination, courage, and wisdom.

Diligence will enable them to discover poetic subtleties. Imagination will help them to discover and value multiple meanings. Courage will empower them to live with open questions regarding the various possible meanings of poetic utterances.

Wisdom will open their eyes to the modern relevance of proverbial materials and guide them in the appropriate application of biblical proverbs. So, in the remainder of Lecture 4, I now want to discuss the design of the various lectures that make up most of Proverbs chapters 1 to 9. And in doing so, I will also talk a little bit more broadly about the structure of Proverbs 1 to 9 as a whole. Now, there are 223 verses in the Book of Proverbs, that is 223 out of the 915, that appear more than once.

A large number of these variant repetitions, where they appear in Proverbs 1 to 9, are in the so-called introductory sections to what has variously been called either ten instructions, for example, *vibre*, or ten lectures, for example, by Waltke and Fox in their commentaries, with various expansions. The existence of these instructions was first noted by *Vibre* and has been widely accepted. Three matters, however, remain controversial.

First, where do the various instructions end? *Vibre* himself noted that this is more difficult to determine, especially if one reckons with later expansions to originally independent materials. Secondly, how do the supposed expansions relate to the actual lectures? *Murphy*, in his commentary in particular, pointed out that one cannot separate the original from the expansion without actually using fairly arbitrary criteria. And the third problem is related to this, namely, were the identified ten lectures really originally independent poems? Certainly, in whatever shape the lectures or instructions may have existed before the collection reached its final form, they would have had introductory materials.

And these introductory materials seem to have intricate links with each other, as we shall see when we consider many of the variant repetitions that appear in the book. And if the introductions are related, we would either have to posit that these two were later expansions, or we have to conclude that the lectures were not originally independent. At whatever time the original state was dated.

Characteristic of Michael Fox's approach to the structure of Proverbs 1-9 is the recognition that the ten lectures have a typical form made up of three parts. What he calls an exordium, a lesson, and a conclusion. Fox here followed Otto Plöger's suggestion, who saw an analogy with classical Greek rhetoric in which the main parts of a Greek oration were actually called exordium, proposition, and peroration.

Or you could say introduction, main part, and conclusion. Waltke, Bruce Waltke in his commentary, concurred with this, speaking of what he called the typical form of the lecture consisting of an introduction and a lesson with a conclusion. But he has not applied this insight as consistently as Fox.

Fox described these three parts as follows. Exordium, the introduction to the lectures typically consists of A, an address to a son or sons. B, an exhortation to hear and remember the teachings presented in the lecture.

And C, a motivation that supports the exhortation by pointing out the value of the teaching. The main part, the lesson, is the main part of the teaching which presents a coherent message, usually based on one particular specific theme. And then the conclusion.

The conclusion typically consists of a summary statement that generalizes the message of the main part of the lesson. Sometimes this conclusion ends on a capstone or consists entirely of a capstone, that is an apothecum or proverb that reinforces the teaching and provides a memorable climax, such for example as in chapter 1, verse 19. Now, both Plöger and Fox emphasized correctly that there is much variety both in the overall structure, for example, the conclusion is missing from several lectures, and in the makeup of the constituent parts.

For example, sometimes the transition from the exordium to the lesson is marked by a renewed address. So, in order to provide a point of orientation, if you have the chance, I would recommend that you compare the list of lectures or instructions proposed by both Bruce Waltke in his commentary and by Michael Fox in his commentary. And although they differ in detail, overall they are remarkably similar.

The overall structure proposed by both probably has more to do with a slight emphasis or difference in emphasis rather than a completely different structural interpretation. I want to conclude now with perhaps just some comments on where

repeated proverbs appear, and variant repetitions appear, in the first nine chapters. Altogether, 46 verses in Proverbs 1 to 9 are involved in variant repetition.

That is 18% of the total number of 256 verses in the chapters 1 to 9. On most occasions, all the variants in a given set reappear within chapters 1 to 9. On some occasions, the same verse is repeated in more than one verse. Of the 25 variant sets of repetitions, the same verse is repeated, sorry, of the 25 variant sets, no less than 13, that is 48.1%, have members in introductions to the lectures or in introductions to other identifiable sections, such as the so-called wisdom interludes and so forth. What this suggests then is that whoever composed chapters 1 to 9 as we now have them was quite deliberately repeating introduction sentences from the introductions in the 10 lectures in subsequent introductions of a following lecture.

Now, this suggests to me a deliberate editorial activity and suggests to me that these lectures were not as such originally independent, but were created to be read and taught, and heard together. In Lesson Chapter 5, we will be turning to some of the highlights both of variant repetition verses in chapters 1 to 9, but also some of the more exciting and interesting sections in these particular materials. This is Dr. Knute Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs.

This is session number 4, Variant Repetitions, Parallelism, Lectures in Proverbs chapters 1 through 9.