

Introduction

“Hymns to the gods of Greece have been preserved, but how vast is their difference from the Psalms! Let the reader compare one of those...with any song out of the Psalter. Pretty compliments and well-turned flatteries intended to propitiate he will find, set, indeed, in melodious verse that celebrates the birth of gods and demi-gods; but no wrestling in prayer with tearful eyes and downcast head, and the full assurance of faith, such as has made the Psalms for all time the expression of the devotional feelings of men.”

Charles J. Ellicott, the 19th century Anglican theologian

“The book of Psalms is a limpid lake which reflects every mood of man’s changeful sky. It is a river of consolation which, though swollen with many tears, never fails to gladden the fainting. It is a garden of flowers which never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear, and unites them all in the full multi-chord of human experience.”

J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: Volume 3, page 83*

“This book I am won’t to style an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for no one will discover in himself a single feeling

whereof the image is not reflected in this mirror. Nay, all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, anxieties—in short, all those tumultuous agitations wherewith the minds of men are won't to be tossed—the Holy Ghost hath here represented to the life.”

John Calvin, 16th century French theologian

So much can be said about the book of Psalms, the depths of beauty and value can be argued as second to none. There are multiple elements found in the Psalms.

Poetical element

This element will be found in the remainder of this lesson.

Historical element

You can read the Psalms and be able to outline much of ancient history. Consider the following:

The Fall of Man - Psalm 51:5

The Flood - Psalm 29:10

Israel's Egyptian bondage - Psalm 105:25

Samuel, the man of prayer - 99:6

Moral element

Psalms can help you think about what is right and wrong, holy and unholy, etc. Consider that the words found in Psalms:

righteous - 59 times

righteousness - 70 times

sin(s) - 24 times

iniquity(ies) - 60 times

good - 59 times

evil - 39 times

judgement(s) - 61 times

Prophetical element

There are 16 Psalms that can be classified as Messianic and help lay out prophecies of Christ. They are Psalm 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 89, 91, 102, 109, 110 and 118. There are other portions in the Psalms that give glimpses to prophecy and deserve their own personal study.

Theological element

W. G. Scroggie in his book, *The Psalms*, lays out a three-fold break down of God in the Psalms.

1. The Psalmists firmly believed in the personality of God
- this is seen in all the names used for God found in the Psalms

2. The Psalmists firmly believed in the unity of God

For who is God (Elohim) save the Lord (Yahweh)?
Psalm 18:31

3. The Psalmists firmly believed in the eternity of God

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all
generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.
For a thousand years in thy sight
Are but as yesterday when it is past,
And as a watch in the night.

Psalm 90:1-2, 4

Devotional element

This is probably the most sought after element of the Psalms. It is commonly read for its devotional qualities whether from the individual or congregational side. The Psalms speak to the soul in a matter which is unparalleled. It can calm or challenge the mind, bring joy or conviction.

A Brief Treatise on Hebrew Poetry

THE CHARACTER OF HEBREW POETRY

Hebrew poetry is considered lyrical. (accompanied by music on the lyre)

Compared to epic poetry (Beowulf, The Iliad and Odyssey, The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost, etc.), which is objective, story-telling, in nature; lyrical poetry is subjective, or dealing with the thoughts and emotions of the author.

THE STRUCTURE OF HEBREW POETRY

Hebrew poetry is parallelistic in structure. This follows the rhythm of thought and not rhyme or meter like English poetry.

Hebrew Parallelism

1. Synonymous Parallelism

Definition: The second line enforces the first line by saying the same thing in different words.

Psalm 24:1-3

1 The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the floods.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who shall stand in his holy place?

2. Antithetic Parallelism

Definition: The second line is adding emphasis to the first line by contrasting it

Psalm 1:6

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous:
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

3. Synthetic Parallelism

Definition: The second line helps explain the first line

Psalm 19:7-9

- 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
- 8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart:
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever:
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

4. Inverted Parallelism

Definition: the lines are placed in inverse order
(A,B,B,A)

Psalm 5:7

- (A) As for me, I will come into Thy house
(B) In the multitude of Thy mercy:
(B) And in Thy fear
(A) Will I worship toward Thy holy temple.

5. **Iterative** Parallelism

Definition: The thought is repeated

Psalm 93:3

The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods lift up their waves.

6. **Responsive** Parallelism

Definition: The lines appeal and answer alternately

Psalm 115:9-11

9 O Israel, trust thou in the Lord:
He is their help and their shield.
10 O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord:
He is their help and their shield.
11 Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord:
He is their help and their shield.

7. **Climactic** Parallelism

Definition: The second line completes the first

Psalm 29:1

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.

8. **Alternate Parallelism**

Definition: The lines follow one another in turn
(A,B,A,B)

Psalm 103:11-12

- (A) 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth,
- (B) So great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
- (A) 12 As far as the east is from the west.
- (B) So far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

9. **Alphabetic Acrostic**

Definition: verses or groups of verses begin with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet

There are nine instances of this in the Psalms (9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145) Lamentations follows this system as well.

Note:

It is important to note that you can have multiple styles of parallelism in the same Psalm or verses. For example Psalm 5 utilizes **Alternate** and **Introverted** parallelism:

(A)- verse 1-2 shows **prayers** and **pleas**

(B) - verse 3 shows the promise of **prayer (private)**

(C) - verses 4-5 shows **negative** claims

(C) - verses 5-6 shows **positive** claims

(B) - verse 7 shows promise of **worship (public)**

(A)- verses - 8-12 shows **prayers** and **pleas**