

PARALLELISM AND THE PSALMS

OPENING POEM |

“PRAYER”

-C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963)

Master, they say that when I seem
To be in speech with you,
Since you make no replies, it's all a dream
—One talker aping two.

They are half right, but not as they
Imagine; rather, I
Seek in myself the things I meant to say,
And lo! The wells are dry.

Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The Listener's role, and through
My dead lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.

And thus you neither need reply
Nor can; thus, while we seem
Two talking, thou art One forever, and I
No dreamer, but thy dream.

PSALMS

GENERAL INFO:

תְּהִלִּים “*Tehillim*”

- Means “praises”
- “Psalm” is from Greek “ψαλμοί,” which means instrumental music.

5 Books

- Each ends in a Doxology
- 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150
- Psalms 145-150 are all doxology!

GENERAL INFO:

Types of Psalms?

- Lament, Praise, Wisdom

Watch for Parallelism and Imagery

- We'll talk more about imagery in the class on the Song of Songs.

NT authors love to quote the psalms!

The Psalms are quoted more than any other book!

JEWISH TRADITION

There are seemingly countless Jewish traditions for everything in the OT, but a couple notable ones about the psalms:

The books of the psalms reflect the five books of the Pentateuch

The psalms thematic history of Israel:

- Book 1 = David's Conflict with Saul
- Book 2 = David's Kingship
- Book 3 = Assyrian Crisis
- Book 4 = Destruction of the Temple & the Exile
- Book 5 = Praise and Reflection on the Return from Exile

These fit—and are really neat!—but can't be proven.

SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD

The Psalms are corrupt and often missing pieces.

The book of Psalms is a heavily-edited collection of materials.

We don't know who wrote any of the psalms.

ACROSTIC PSALMS

9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145

9-10, 25, 34, 37, and 145 are missing letters!

Let's look at Psalms 9 & 10

HEADINGS

Many:

“A Psalm of David.” “To the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David.”

Psalm 8:

“To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.”

Psalm 9:

“To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David. “

Psalm 12:

“To the choirmaster: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.”

HEADINGS

Psalm 16:

“A Miktam of David.”

Psalm 17:

“A Prayer of David.”

Psalm 18:

“To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:”

Psalm 22:

“To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.”

HEADINGS

We don't know what many of them mean.

We don't know who put them there.

Take what you can get from the headings and move on.

CAUTION FOR READING INDIVIDUAL PSALMS

“The reader dare not interpret individual statements like the all-encompassing promise of prosperity to the righteous in Psalm 1 apart from the larger context of Psalms as a whole. Some psalms (such as Ps 1) stress the positive side of the life of faith; others (such as Ps 39) center on the negative side, the transitoriness of existence.”

Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 238.

PARALLELISM

A B
A' B'
& More

PARALELLISM OR NEARNESS AND LIKENESS

One of the biggest aspects of Hebrew Poetry,
and the one that's easiest to recognize in translation.

Let's look back at some of our examples from last week.

-MUHAMMAD ALI (1942-2016)

Me

We

NEARNESS AND LIKENESS

Roses are Red,

Violets are Blue,

Sugar is sweet,

And so are you.

NEARNESS AND LIKENESS

/ - - /

Roses are Red,

/ - - /

Violets are Blue,

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Sugar is sweet,

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And so are you.

NEARNESS & LIKENESS: ISAIAH 1:2-3

Hear, O heavens,
Give ear, O earth;
for the Lord has spoken:
Children have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.”

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LOWTH'S PARALLELISM

Synonymous Parallelism : The same thought in both lines

Antithetic Parallelism : Contrasting thoughts in the lines

Synthetic Parallelism : Development in thought between lines

But most scholars today find this description lacking.

SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM

Psalm 24:1-3

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,

for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

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ANTITHETICAL PARALLELISM

Psalm 37:16-17

Better is the little that the righteous has
than the abundance of many wicked.

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.

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SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM

Psalm 38:13-15

But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.

I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

But for you, O LORD, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

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PRACTICE LOWTH'S PARALLELISM: PSALM 95

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."
Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

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SO WHY PARALLELISM?

ALTER: PARALLELISM

Many scholars try to save parallelism from irregularity. This is misguided. Parallelism is not formulaic.

Parallelism is not a state of stasis, but of dynamic movement between versets.

ALTER: PARALLELISM (CONT.)

The typical effect of the second verset in parallelism:
the **realization** of the first verset.

Parallelism does not only occur at the level of the line.

CLOSING POEM |

“LEGION”

-C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963)

Lord, hear my voice, my present voice I mean,
Not that which may be speaking an hour hence
(For I am Legion) in an opposite sense,
And not by show of hands decide between
The multiple factions which my state has seen
Or will see. Condescend to the pretence
That what speaks now is I; in its defence
Dissolve my parliament and intervene.

Thou wilt not, though we asked it, quite recall
Free will once given. Yet to this moment's choice
Give unfair weight. Hold me to this. Oh strain
A point—use legal fictions; for if all
My quarreling selves must bear an equal voice,
Farewell, thou hast created me in vain.