

Worksheet #2

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Interpreting the Old Testament 2: OTEN 5352

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Question 1- From the reading in Fee/Stuart and Hess, discuss Hebrew poetry and address how one can teach and preach from poetic sections. Be sure to include biblical examples of the structural devices you mention.

Hebrew poetry refers to poems composed in the Hebrew language, comprising at least one-third of the Bible. It is predominantly found in Wisdom Literature, the Prophets, and narrative texts like Exodus and Deuteronomy. According to Hess, "Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Literature exhibit great beauty in their form and sound, emphasizing verses of two lines where the second line enhances the first. This holds for both poems and proverbs. The focus is more on the content and its parallelism than on the formal features of the poetry."¹ Fee and Stuart also echo this notion, stating, "A poem possesses a certain rhythm (also known as a Meter), specific balances (also referred to as Parallelism or Stichometry), and a discernible overall structure. It is relatively regular and orderly."² This highlights the structured and deliberate nature of Hebrew poetry, with an emphasis on content and parallel expressions over intricate formal features. Essentially, Hebrew conveys expressions of pain and praise.

There are three features of the repetitive style of Old Testament poetry:

1. Synonymous Parallelism, in which the second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line. For instance, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps 13:1)."
2. Antithetical Parallelism, in which the second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first, often reinforcing the first line by contrast. For instance, "for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish (Ps 1:6)."
3. Synthetic Parallelism, in which the second or subsequent line adds to the first line in any manner that provides further information. For example, "Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Ps 100:3)."³

Furthermore, we can also identify poetry through other features, such as Meter and Acrostic forms. Meter, also known as rhythm, is syllabic, like Syriac, written uniformly in regular trochees. Acrostic poems are perhaps the simplest form of poetry to identify, as they are distinguished by form rather than content. An acrostic is a form of poetry wherein the initial letter of each line, when read downward, constitutes the alphabet, a name, or a phrase.⁴

Poetry comprises metaphors, imagery, parallelisms, repetitions, and more, to express ideas and emotions. While they are not primarily intended for teaching and preaching, they can serve such purposes. However, caution must be exercised when interpreting a poem, as it may

¹ Hess, Richard S. "Psalms." Chapter. In *The Old Testament - a Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction*, 389. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2016.

² Fee, Gordon D, and Douglas Stuart. "Prophets" Chapter. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 205. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.

³ Fee, Gordon D, and Douglas Stuart. "Prophets" Chapter. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 205. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.

⁴ Barry, John D, ed. "Poetry, Biblical." *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

contain parallelism or other poetic elements. Readers should be careful not to read special meanings into specific words or phrases where the poet may not have intended them.

According to Fee and Stuart, “A musical poem cannot be read in the same way as an epistle or a narrative or a section of the law. It is intended to appeal to the emotions, evoke feelings that straight propositional expression seldom does, and thus to stimulate a response on the part of the individual that goes beyond the cognitive understanding of certain facts”⁵

Therefore when preaching and teaching Hebrew poetry, one must understand its basic nature by analyzing parallelism, repetitions, and other features. Additionally, before interpreting and assigning meanings to each metaphor, one must examine the overarching theme of the poem.

Question 2- As a further practice, discuss Psalm 110 as an example of Hebrew poetry.

Psalm 110 is one of the Messianic Psalms in the Bible composed by King David. It contains rich Hebrew Poetry features such as parallelism and repetitions. It consists of 7 verses which can be divided into two units (Strophes), with the second half of the Psalm reinforcing the ideas of the first unit. In verses 1-3, we observe the rise of the king, the master who is installed at the right hand of the LORD, who is mighty and reigns over his people. At this point, we notice synonymous parallelism in the following verses 4-7. The same idea and message are repeated with much stronger emphasis. We can observe in verse 1, ‘The LORD says,’ which parallels with verse 4, ‘The LORD has sworn.’ This is to say that the LORD has spoken and He will not hold back.

Also, in verse 2, ‘rule in the midst,’ which parallels with verse 6, ‘judgment among the nations.’ This suggests that ‘the Lord’ will rule and execute judgment among the nations, displaying this King’s dominion through war.

Finally, we see in verse 3, ‘the dew of your youth will be yours,’ which parallels with verse 7, ‘A drink from the brook.’ This implies that he will be blessed. This repeated pattern reinforces the purpose of the Psalm, indicating that the King will certainly be successful.

Psalm 110 is understood to be about the Messiah. The LORD, Yahweh, says to the Lord, someone superior to David, to sit at the right hand, the position of power and prestige. This future King is given such authority until Yahweh vanquishes the enemies. This Messiah will rule among his enemies. He will be exalted, and His people will offer themselves to His service. This Messiah, Jesus, will reign with God. In the second unit of the Psalm, verses 4-7, it is strongly emphasized that Yahweh has sworn it, and there is no change in the plan. It will come to pass. He is going to raise this Messiah who is going to rule among his enemies and execute his judgment among the nations. Consequently, there is utter ruin for His enemies—those who refuse to surrender will face ruin. This Messiah will establish justice and wield power over the entire world, a reality vividly depicted in the New Testament. Jesus arrives with divine power

⁵ Fee, Gordon D, and Douglas Stuart. “Psalms” Chapter. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 215. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.

and authority, fulfilling the divine plan. We witness people on earth eagerly volunteering to advance His kingdom and overcome the dominion of evil.

Question 3- In class, we discussed the division of the Psalter into five books. Summarize your understanding of the division (i.e., what are the overarching themes of Book 1, etc.) and what is being expressed theologically by the entire collection in its canonical form (the way we have it). Hess discusses these divisions as well as The Bible Project videos on Psalms, so start with these sources and then go from there.

The book of Psalms contains prayers offered to God by His people. There are 150 collections of Psalms in the Old Testament, divided into five books. David composed 73 Psalms, while Asaph contributed 12, the Sons of Korah authored 12 as well, and Heman and Ethan each composed 2. Additionally, Solomon and Moses contributed 2 Psalms, with the remaining 49 being anonymous. The first book consists of Psalms 1-41, the second book consists of Psalms 42-72, the third book consists of Psalms 73-89, the fourth book consists of Psalms 90-106, and the fifth book consists of Psalms 107-150.

In the first book, comprising Psalms 1-41, the initial two Psalms serve as an introduction to the entire collection. They prepare the readers by admonishing and exhorting the significance of reading them (Ps. 1:3). The characteristics of the one who is blessed and happy are that they meditate on the Lord's word continually (Ps. 1:1-2). Likewise, the second Psalm is a promise to David that the Messiah will come from his throne, a reminder to the nations that the Lord's anointed one will vanquish the enemy and establish his throne perpetually. Essentially, these two Psalms provide instructions for reading the entire Psalms. Psalms 3-41 are attributed to David, except for Psalms 10 and 33. They explore themes of distress and confidence in God (e.g., Ps. 9, 11, 16, 18). Additionally, David is depicted as a model of faithfulness to God throughout these Psalms. Furthermore, a recurring theme is the call to covenant faithfulness to God.⁶

Book two (Psalms 42-72) introduces the first group of Psalms by the Sons of Korah. Despite the dominance of lament Psalms in this group, we also observe the overarching theme of hope for the Messianic Kingdom. The book begins with the Psalms expressing hope for the return to the future temple and ends with the Messianic king reigning over all the kingdoms.⁷

Book three (Psalms 73-89) explores the struggle against evil and the apparent prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73). The Psalmist questions the justice of God and the injustice of rulers (Ps. 88). In the midst of this, the Psalmist also reflects on God's promise that He will never abandon them. The book concludes with a poem contemplating the covenant of God with David (Ps. 89).

⁶ BibleProject. "Book of Psalms: Guide with Key Information and Resources." BibleProject. Last modified September 15, 2023. Accessed March 18, 2024. <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-psalms/>.

⁷ BibleProject. "Book of Psalms: Guide with Key Information and Resources." BibleProject. Last modified September 15, 2023. Accessed March 18, 2024. <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-psalms/>.

Book four (Psalms 90-106) opens with a poem reflecting on the might and faithfulness of God. It serves as a response to the bleak situation described in Book Three. This book is a stark reminder that the God of Israel reigns (Ps. 93-100). He is the king greater than David, and His love and faithfulness endure forever. The overarching theme of this book is that the Lord reigns and He is faithful.

Book five (Psalms 107-150) contains the theme of praise and thankfulness. It includes Psalms of creation, wisdom, ascent, and exaltation of the law. This book affirms that the God of heaven hears the cry of His people. Psalm 119, the longest Psalm, describes the beauty and eternity of God's Word. The book concludes with five Hallelujah Psalms (Ps 146-150). In conclusion, all these Psalms point to the future King and Messiah who will relieve the distress of His people.

Psalms evoke emotions of adoration and worship, liberating us from the confines of rigidity to explore all types of emotions and lay them at the feet of God. They permit us to express how we truly feel, transcending doctrinal and theological boundaries to reflect the human condition. However, the collection of Psalms is not limited to mere expressions of emotions; they also propose sound theological propositions. For instance, in the Psalms, we discover various types of compositions: Lament Psalms, Thanksgiving Psalms, Hymns of Praise, Salvation-history Psalms, Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation, Wisdom Psalms, Songs of Trust, Royal Psalms, Communal Lament Psalms, and more.⁸ All of these Psalms are composed to express emotions, yet ultimately, they lead to trust in God. The Psalmists may express distress, but they also affirm their belief that God is their deliverer.

Additionally, the Psalms elevate scriptural truth above their circumstances (Ps. 19; 119). They value the Word of God and find beauty in meditating on and cherishing it (Ps. 1). Moreover, Psalmists find the meaning of life in God (Ps. 139). The Psalms express that true happiness and satisfaction can only be found in God. He is the ultimate source of life, fulfillment, happiness, and salvation.

In the end, Hess puts it aptly, "The theology of the Psalms looks to the close and continuing relationship between God and his people. It has been and always will be a key path for entering into and continuing a vital spiritual relationship with Yahweh and, for Christians, with Christ through prayer and reflection."⁹

⁸ Fee, Gordon D, and Douglas Stuart. "Psalms" Chapter. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 221-222. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.

⁹ Hess, Richard S. "Psalms." Chapter. In *The Old Testament - a Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction*, 450. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2016.