

Lesson 10: Grammatical Interpretation (part 5)

GENRE: NARRATIVE & POETRY

I. Some More Comments on Interpreting Narrative

- A. **Specific Purpose:** Consider the author's overall purpose for the telling the narrative. What is his main purpose in writing it to his original audience?
- B. **Literary Features:** Be on the alert for writing techniques that authors use to convey their story for their purpose.
- 1. Selective Information.** Authors must be selective in the information they share. But sometimes the withholding of information is very strategic. For instance, Moses never mentions the name of the Pharaoh during the exodus. This may be a subtle way of downplaying his self-importance.
 - 2. Rearrangement:** Authors generally tell stories in the sequence of their actual events. But some authors arrange events in a more topical way. For instance, the Gospel of Mark is the most sequential of all the gospels.
 - 3. Suspense:** Sometimes authors may withhold information until later in the story. For instance, we don't learn why Jonah ran from Yahweh's mission until Jonah 4:2.
 - 4. Irony:** The unexpected twists and turns of stories are often heightened in the way the author recounts events.
 - a. Verbal irony is when a character says something unexpected that connects with points in the story. For instance, Jonah says (1:9), "I fear Yahweh God who made the heaven"—but he doesn't act like he does.
 - b. Situational irony is when minor events occur that resonate with the larger story. For instance, the first people in the book of Jonah who pray are the pagan sailors (1:5), not God's prophet.

II. INTERPRETATION OF POETRY

- A. **Introduction:** Most poems in the Bible are found in the OT. This includes the entirety of Psalms and Proverbs, most of Job and Ecclesiastes, and very large parts of the Prophets.
- B. **Key Features of Old Testament Poetry**
- 1. Compacted Phrases.** Poetry employs what is called an "economy of expression."
 - a. This is more apparent in Hebrew than English, but even the English can feel choppy. For instance, most verses in Psalm 119 are no longer than **4-6** Hebrew words.
 - b. This economy of expression can make interpretation more challenging. This is often intentional, forcing the reader to pass through the phrasing again and again.
 - 2. Vivid Imagery.** Poetry often paints word pictures that make the truth more memorable and impactful. Psalm 23 is forever emblazoned in our minds as "the shepherd psalm."
 - 3. Plays on Sound.** Hebrew poetry is not fundamentally about sound rhyme, but it tends to use more plays on sound than narrative does.
 - a. The sounds are not always placed in predictable places, and they are most often not translatable.
 - b. One striking example comes from Nahum 2:10, part of a prophecy about the destruction of Nineveh.
 - NASB, "She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate & waste!"
 - Hebrew: *buqah umebuqah umebullaqah*
 - These three words rhyme with the Hebrew word for *bakbuk* ("**bottle**"), a word which sounds like a large container bubbling out its contents.

4. **Parallelism**. One of the most common features of Hebrew poetry is the construction of parallel lines.

a. Not all poetic verses have it, but the vast majority do. This is often likened to “thought rhyme.”

b. The most common forms of parallelism include:

1. **Synonymous Parallelism**. The first line is echoed by a second line with essentially the same concept.

I will extol You, my God, O King,
And I will bless Your name forever & ever. Ps 145:1

2. **Antithetical Parallelism**. The first line is followed by line that takes the thought in an opposite direction.

Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish. Ps 1:6

3. **Emblematic Parallelism**. The first line depicts an image which they second line explains.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God. Ps 42:1

4. **Climactic Parallelism**. The first couple (or more lines) are basically synonymous with the final line erupting with a concluding thought.

Ascribe to Yahweh, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength;
Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to His name;
Worship Yahweh in holy array. Ps 29:1-2

5. **Synthetic Parallelism**. The second line answers a statement in the first line.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man
Than for one to listen to the song of fools. Eccl. 7:5

EXERCISE FROM PSALM 1

Try to label the kind of poetic parallelism used in this famous first psalm.

1 How blessed is the man
Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other

3 He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other

4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other

6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

1-Synonymous 2-Antithetical 3-Emblematic 4-Climactic 5-Synthetic 6-Other