

“It is now generally conceded that **parallelism** is the fundamental law, not only of the poetical, but even of the rhetorical and therefore of higher style in general in the Old Testament” (Jewish Encyclopaedia).

“The identification of **parallelism** as a central defining feature of biblical poetry traces back to the *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of The Hebrews* delivered by the English cleric Robert Lowth in 1753”.

Hebrew Poetry



Simeon Guntrip

Hebrew Poetry

Reasons for considering Poetry



- **Supplies greater depth of meaning**
- **Contributes to a correct understanding of some passages**
- **Provides emphasis / focus**
- **Consolidates first principles**
- **Enlivens Bible reading**

Hebrew Poetry

Thoughts or Words?



English – Often a rhyme of words

Hebrew – Rhyme of thoughts

***“A reduplication of a piece of meaning
using synonymous or contrasting terms”***

***“Parallelism has more to do with the thought expressed
than with the rhythm and metre of the lines. It is
doubtless due to this feature that Hebrew poetry can be
translated so well without loss”***

John Carter

Hebrew Poetry

Synonymous Parallelism

Psalm 6:5

***“For in death there is no remembrance of thee:
In the grave who shall give thee thanks”***

Hebrew Poetry

Contrasting Parallelism

Psalm 20:7

“Some trust in chariots, some in horses:

But we will remember the name of the LORD our God

They are brought down and fallen:

But we are risen, and upright”

Hebrew Poetry

Constructive Parallelism

Psalm 2:2

*“The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take council together,
Against the LORD and against his anointed”.*

The symmetrical arrangement of parallel lines of about the same length (called “**cola**” or “stichs”) in which meaning, grammar, syntax, form, and stress balance and reinforce one another constitute parallelism.

Usually two parallel lines appear together, forming a “**bicolon**” or a “dystich:”

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place? 24:3

Less frequently three lines comprise a “**tricolon**” or a “tristich:”

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false. 24:4

“**Vertical Grammar** of Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry”,
David Toshio Tsumura, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 128,
No. 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 167-181.

In **Hebrew poetic parallelism**, two lines often constitute a compound sentence, with the syntactical images of two lines being perfectly superimposed.

For example, Ps 24:3:

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

The syntactical structure of the first colon and that of the second are exactly same ... In this **synonymous parallelistic structure**, two colons of the same syntactical image are superimposed on each other and express the meaning, "Who shall ascend the hill of Yahweh and stand in his holy place?"

in Ps 47:6, **the lack of a verb** in the second line is stylistically balanced by a "ballast variant" in the first line.

God has gone up with shouts of joy,
Yahweh, with the sound of a trumpet.

... Thus, the parallelism as a whole means,

"God Yahweh has gone up with shouts of joy and the sound of a trumpet,"

not,

"God has gone up with shouts of joy, [while] Yahweh has gone up with the sound of a trumpet."

Here too, therefore, it is evident that **parallelism is the device of expressing one thought through two lines ...**

One of the typical examples of the vertical grammatical relation between two parallel lines is the breakup of a construct chain into two parallel lines.

Isaiah 64:9b:

Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem, a desolation.

In this text, the construct chain "desolate wilderness" (lit. "wilderness of desolation"; Jer 12:10, Joel 2:3; 3:19) is split into two parts, one in the first line, the other in the second. Thus, these two words are vertically related grammatically.

Hence, the meaning is, "Zion Jerusalem has become a desolate wilderness,"

not

"Zion has become a wilderness, while Jerusalem [has become] a desolation."

Proverbs 1:23

“Turn you at my reproof:

behold, **I will** pour out my spirit unto you,
 I will make known my words unto you”.

In this verse the parallel is signalled clearly by the repetition of the form of the statement -

“I will ... unto you”

so

“pour out my spirit”
“make known my words”.

Let love be without dissimulation.

Abhor that which is evil;
cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;
in honour preferring one another;

Romans 12

Not slothful in business;
fervent in spirit;
serving the Lord;

Rejoicing in hope;
patient in tribulation;
continuing instant in prayer;

Distributing to the necessity of saints;
given to hospitality.

Bless them which persecute you:
bless, and curse not.

Mind not high things,
but condescend to men of low estate.

Be not wise in your own conceits.
Be of the same mind one toward another.

Recompense to no man evil for evil.
Provide things honest in the sight of all men.
If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves,
but rather give place unto wrath:

for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him;
if he thirst, give him drink:

for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil,
but overcome evil with good