



The Writings Part 2:

Psalms

An Introduction



The Psalms

- What is your favourite psalm?
- How have you experienced Psalms in worship?
- How have you used them in your own prayer?





Psalmody in the ANE

- Psalms were found in other ANE cultures, long before the ones we have in the HB/OT.
- Best known ones we have are from Syrian town of Ugarit and have been dated around 1400 – 1200BCE.
- Dating suggests Israelites used Canaanite material.
- Similarities exist between the psalms of the two cultures, but there are also some distinct differences....

Similarities ..



- Common way of writing poetry
- Similar mythologies for example:
- God vs creation ... Leviathan etc - God wins!
- God portrayed as a warrior
- Idea of a 'Council of gods' who attend them
- Home of God on a Northern mountain
- Some 'borrowing' from Canaanite psalms ...



Comparison of a Verse

Psalm from Ugarit

- Look, your enemies, O Baal
- look, your enemies you will smash
- look, you will destroy your foes.

Psalm 92:9

- For your enemies, O Lord,
- For your enemies shall perish
- all evildoers will be scattered.

Differences



- All Israelite psalms point to Yahweh
- ‘Monsters’ are God’s creation & God rules over creation
- Yahweh fights for his people
- Mountain ‘home’ for God is Mt Zion in Jerusalem
- The Israelite Psalms are monotheistic

The Book of Psalms

Is in 5 parts or 'collections' echoing the Pentateuch, beginning with Torah (Psalm 1) and ending with praise:

- Part 1: Psalms 1-41
- Part 2: 42 - 72
- Part 3: 73 - 89
- Part 4: 90 - 106
- Part 5: 107 - 150





Theology of the Psalms

- Outline the human situation, especially times of difficulty.
- Proclaim God's greatness and power.
- Affirm the Israelites' belief that monarchs are God's agents.
- Affirm God's nature is to answer prayer – usually describing God as merciful *but* sometimes describing him as just and/or angry.
- Are emotive rather than instructive; are 'cathartic'.
- Brueggemann categorizes the psalms as [a] psalms of orientation; [b] disorientation; and [c] reorientation.

Psalms Express Emotion

- Poetry emphasises what is being said (or sung).
- People sing in jubilation and praise when they are glad, when they are relieved, when they have been rescued – whether it is from drought, war or disaster.
- They cry out in pain when they are despairing and afraid.
- The psalms arise naturally and spiritually from the circumstances of God's people.
- The book of Psalms collects, shapes and provides words to be used in a variety of situations and circumstances ... they are perhaps the first example we have of 'liturgy'...



Hebrew Poetry - Rhythm

- Has a rhythm that English translations cannot reproduce! But c.f. New English Bible
- There are different rhythm patterns, but a common example is 3 stresses per line:

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
Let the bones that you have crushed rejoice*



Other 'Psalms' in the OT

- Law:
 - Exodus 15:1-18 and 20-21
 - Numbers 21:17-18 and 27-30,
 - Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:44 (Song of Moses)
- Prophets
 - Judges 5
 - 1 Samuel 2:1-10,
 - 2 Samuel 1:17-27, 22
 - Isaiah 5
 - Jeremiah 11:18-20, 18:18-23, 20:7-18
 - Jeremiah 16:19-20, 33:10-11
 - Ezekiel 28:11-23, 32:1-16
 - Jonah 2
 - Habakkuk 3
 - Amos 5:8-9
- Histories & Writings
 - 1 Chronicles 16:7-36,
 - 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, 7:3, 20:21
 - Song of Songs
 - Lamentations
 - Daniel 2:19-23, 4:34-37



Hebrew Poetry - Parallelism



- Hebrew poetry often uses a form of repetition called parallelism.
- At its most simple, parallelism consists of two lines of poetry, the second of which says the same thing as the first, but in a different way.

*Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?*

Hebrew Poetry - Parallelism



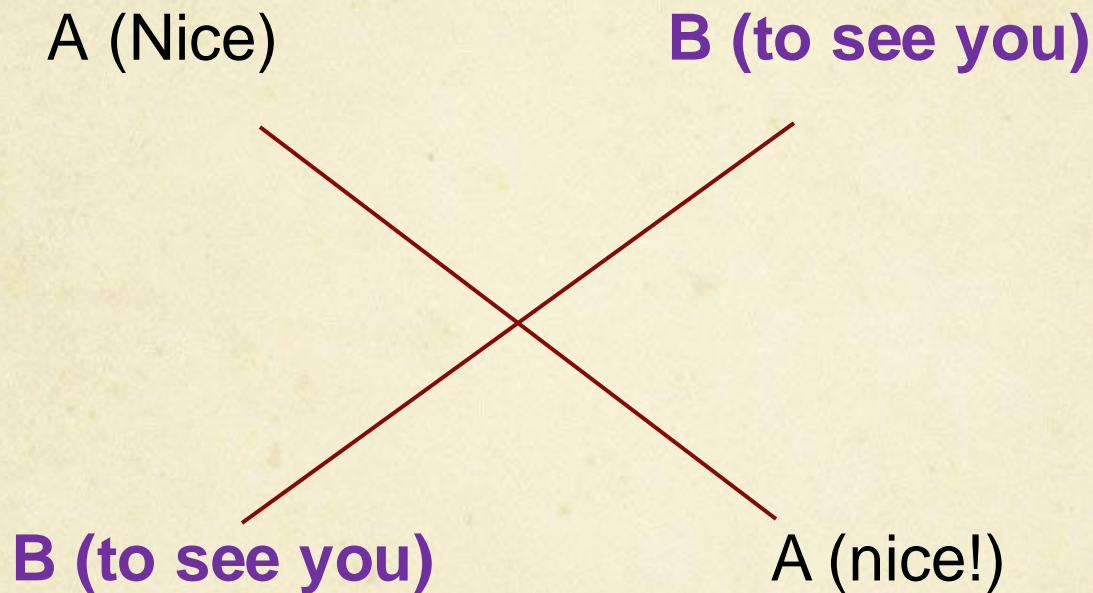
- Sometimes the second line reverses the first:

*in the morning it flourishes and is renewed,
in the evening it fades and withers. Psalm 90:6*

- Sometimes the second line may develop the thought of the first in some way, perhaps with a comparison ...

*As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.”
Psalm 103:13*

Hebrew Poetry - Chiasmus



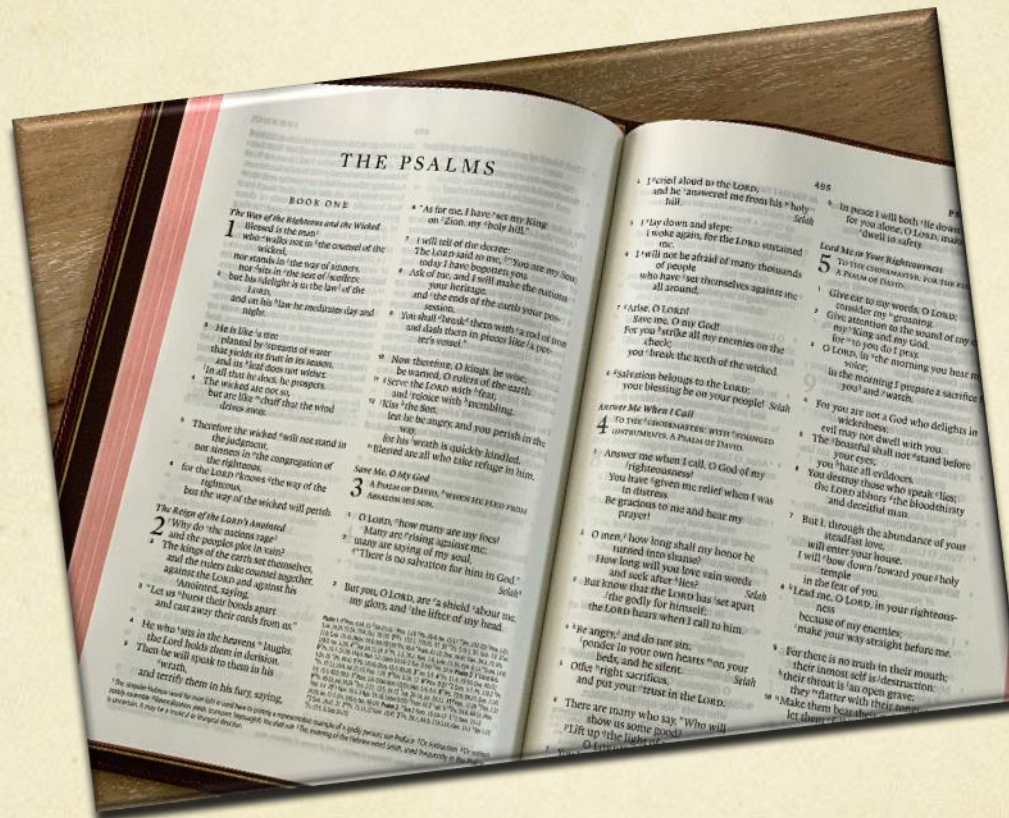
Advanced Chiasmus

Psalm 46



- Vs 1: A - God is refuge
- Vs 2: B - Peace (no fear)
- Vs 3-4: C - God Rules over natural calamities
- Vs 5: D - God is here
- Vs 6a: E - Speaking (Nations)
- Vs 6b: E - Speaking (God)
- Vs 7: D - God is here
- Vs 8-9: C - God rules ove political calamities
- Vs 10: B - Peace (Be Still)
- Vs 11: A - God is refuge

Write A Psalm



Time for Tea!

