

Inverted parallelism across Psalms 15–24

Texts from antiquity (both biblical and extra-biblical) may exhibit use of “chiasm” or “inverted parallelism,” a literary device in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are presented in a symmetrical or mirrored form in order to establish parallelism between certain elements, to frame a central element, or to do both. Although such chiasm or inverted parallelism is most readily discernable within a shorter span of text (e.g., across several lines), its use can also be discovered within larger textual units (e.g., across a chapter or series of chapters). One instance of a larger, intertextual “macro chiasm” can be found across Psalms 15–24, which are arranged with a consistent balance of psalm-category, focus, and even terminology between the various corresponding psalms.

- A Ps. 15: a didactic psalm, instructing about the righteous who may sojourn in the LORD’s tent and dwell on his holy hill
- B Ps. 16: a psalm of confidence, expressing trust and the expectation of dwelling in God’s presence “for evermore”
- C Ps. 17: a lament psalm, expressing longing for deliverance and the hope of beholding God’s face
- D Ps. 18: a royal psalm, praising the LORD’s *hesed* to the Davidic messiah and his headship over the nations
- E Ps. 19: a wisdom/torah psalm, extolling both the created order and the law of the LORD
- D’ Ps. 20–21: royal psalms, praising the LORD’s help to the Davidic messiah and his trust in the LORD’s *hesed*
- C’ Ps. 22: a lament psalm, expressing longing for deliverance and the hope of vindication and international blessing
- B’ Ps. 23: a psalm of confidence, expressing trust and the desire of dwelling in the LORD’s house “for ever”
- A’ Ps. 24: a didactic psalm, instructing about the righteous who may ascend the hill of the LORD’s tent and stand in his holy place

Beyond providing potential assistance in mapping the structure and flow of these psalms, certain features of the above arrangement are worthy of additional comment. A first observation concerns the parallelism itself, i.e., that this balancing of elements invites us to read each psalm in light of its paired counterpart (e.g., Ps. 15 with Ps. 24, etc.), with an expectation that their comparison and contrast may be mutually illuminating. A second observation concerns the themes here foregrounded, which include 1) an end goal of the righteous dwelling with the LORD, which is highlighted at both the beginning and the end (Ps. 15–16; 23–24); 2) an acknowledgement of the unwarranted affliction presently undergone by the righteous, from which he seeks deliverance (Ps. 17; 22); 3) praise of the LORD for his support of his anointed one, the Davidic king, and praise of the king for his reliance upon the LORD (Ps. 18; 20–21); and 4) praise for the testimony to God given by the created order and for the law of the LORD (Ps. 19). Of note, in light of the introductory Ps. 1–2, is the renewed foregrounding of the centrality of the law and of the LORD’s anointed, here presented in close connection with the more recently introduced themes of the affliction of the righteous, divine *hesed*, and dwelling with God “for ever.”