

Hebrew Poetry & Terms of Praise

In English, the most common elements of poetry are rhyming sounds and meter.

In Hebrew poetry, the most common element is rhyming ideas, called parallelism.

Synonymous parallelism expresses the same thought in different words.

Example: Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Antithetical parallelism expresses contrasting thoughts.

Example: Proverbs 10:4

*A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.*

Synthetic parallelism is a broad category for parallelism that isn't synonymous or antithetical. Each line completes, adds to, elaborates on, or explains the first.

Example: Proverbs 6:16-19 (each line adds to the list)

*There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.*

Example: Ecclesiastes 11:1 (second line states the reason or outcome)

*Cast your bread upon the waters,
for you will find it after many days.*

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Chiasms are sets of lines which mirror each other. Some have a singular line in the middle containing the main point. Chiasms range from simple (just a few verses) to complex (very large sections). They are found throughout the Bible.

Example (ABC/CBA pattern): Genesis 9:6

- A *Whoever sheds*
- B *the blood*
- C *of man,*
- C *by man*
- B *shall his blood*
- A *be shed*

Example with a central point (ABCBA pattern): John 4:23-24

- A *...worship the Father in spirit and truth,*
- B *for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*
- C *God is spirit,*
- B *and those who worship him*
- A *must worship in spirit and truth.*

Wordplay, or **pun**, is two words spelled or pronounced similarly— used to draw attention or foreshadow. Wordplay is often lost in translation, although footnotes sometimes point it out. It's extremely common in both Biblical poetry and prose.

Example: Ecclesiastes 7:1

A good name [shem] is better than good oil [shemen]...

Example: Isaiah 5:7

*... He looked for justice [mishpat], but behold, bloodshed [mishpach];
For righteousness [tsadaqah], but behold, a cry of distress [tsa'aqah].*

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Acrostics start each line or section with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

This is helpful for memorization. Unfortunately, acrostics are lost in translation.

Example: Psalm 119

¹ *Blessed are those whose ...* (begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet)

⁹ *How can a young ...* (begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet)

¹⁷ *Deal bountifully with ...* (begins with the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet)

Lamentations, Proverbs 31, and a few psalms also use acrostics.

Personification ascribes human traits to inanimate objects metaphorically.

Anthropomorphism ascribes human traits or actions to something non-human literally. **Anthropopathism** ascribes human emotions to something non-human literally. The primary Biblical use of the latter two describes God with human (*anthropos*) traits, actions, or feelings.

Example of personification: Isaiah 55:12

...the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Example of personification: Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Example of anthropomorphism: Psalm 145:16

You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Example of anthropopathism: Genesis 6:6

The LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Recognizing the basic components of Hebrew poetry helps to interpret it correctly.

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TERMS OF PRAISE & WORSHIP

Hallelujah – halal (praise) + Yah (shortened form of Yahweh, God's name in Hebrew). An imperative, instructing people to praise Yahweh (or Jehovah). The Greek transliteration is Alleluia (Rev. 19:1, 3, 4, 6). Also translated "Praise the LORD."

Psa. 146:1 – Hallelujah! Praise Yahweh, O my soul!

Tehillah – Praise, song of praise. Tehillim ("Praises") is the Hebrew name of Psalms. A noun form of the verb halal (to praise).

Psa. 106:12 – They believed His words; They sang His praise.

Shabach – Shout praise, laud, extol.

Psa. 117:1 – Praise Yahweh, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples!

Yadah / Nasah Yadayim / Nasah Kapayim – Raise hands in thanksgiving or worship. The name "Judah" (Praise) is derived from Yadah (Gen. 29:35).

Psa. 63:4 – I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

Todah – Give thanks loudly.

Psa. 69:30 – I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving.

Barak – Bless; kneel. "Blessing" God recognizes him as the supreme Blesser.

Psa. 89:52 – Blessed be Yahweh forever! Amen and Amen.

Psa. 95:6 – Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before Yahweh our Maker.

Zamar – Play a stringed instrument, make music, sing.

Psa. 98:5 – Sing praises to Yahweh with the harp, with the harp and the voice of melody.

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Shachah – Bow down, worship.

Psa. 86:9 – *All the nations you have made will come and bow down before you, Lord, and will honor your name.*

Shiyr – Sing. **shiyr chadash** means sing a new song.

Psa. 96:1 – *Sing to Yahweh a new song; Sing to Yahweh, all the earth.*

Ruwm – Exalt, lift up, extol.

Psa. 99:5 – *Exalt Yahweh our God And worship at the footstool of His feet; Holy is He.*

Gadal – Magnify, grow, make great. Think of it as putting a magnifying glass to God's attributes and works through singing or teaching about them.

Psa. 34:3 – *O magnify Yahweh with me, And let us exalt His name together.*

Kabad – Glorify, honor, (make heavy).

Psa. 86:12 – *I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And will glorify Your name forever.*

Guwr – Stand in awe. Normally meaning to sojourn or dwell with as a stranger, this conveys dependence and recognition that we live in God's world, which is an awe-inspiring and humbling thought. **Yare** – Fear, awe.

Psa. 33:8 – *Let all the earth fear Yahweh; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*

Hosanna – **yasha** (save) + **anna** (please; pray). "Save us, we pray!" Both a plea and a praise, it acknowledges God as our savior. Joshua/Jesus means Yahweh Saves.

Psa. 118:25 – *Save us, we pray, O Yahweh! O Yahweh, we pray, give us success!*