

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

## STUDYING BIBLE POETRY

### OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- C Write the Key Verse from memory.
- C Identify various forms of Bible poetry.
- C Identify various types of Bible poetry.
- C Study Bible poetry.

### KEY VERSE:

Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.  
(Psalm 119:164)

### INTRODUCTION

The Bible is a collection of 66 individual books containing history, drama, romance, adventure, and poetry. The Bible is much more than great literature, but it is great literature both in content and form. When you study the content of a book you study the message of the book. You learn the spiritual truths it reveals.

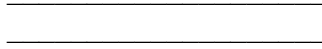
When you study the form of a book you examine the way a book is organized to present the content. Most of the Bible is in narrative form which presents God's truths in stories which are easy to understand. But five books of the Bible--Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon--are organized in poetic form. There are additional sections of poetry in other parts of the Bible even though the books are not part of the poetry division. For example, poetry is found in some of the books of law and prophecy.

The poetic form of presenting God's truths is quite different from the narrative (story) form used in most of the Bible. Biblical poetry is also different from most forms of poetry with which you may be acquainted. For these reasons, special guidelines are necessary to help you study these books. This chapter explains the form and types of Bible poetry. This knowledge will help you understand and apply the great spiritual truths found in the poetic books of the Bible.

### POETIC FORM

The poetry of the Bible probably will not be like any poetry with which you are familiar.

The poetry of the Bible is written in the form of Hebrew poetry since most of the Old Testament was written in this language. The basic principle of Bible poetry is that it contains "parallelism" in thought. The word "parallelism" is from the word "parallel" which means "beside one another or like each other." For example, these two lines are parallel:



When things are parallel to each other, just like these two lines, they are alike. Hebrew poetry is parallel in thought just as these two lines are parallel in appearance. Each line of the poem agrees with other lines of the poem.

There are four common parallel forms used in Hebrew poetry:

#### 1. SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM:

The word "synonymous" means the same. In synonymous parallel poems the second line of the poem repeats the thought of the first line. For example:

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!  
Many are they that rise up against me. (Psalm 3:1)

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:  
The Lord will have them in derision. (Psalm 2:4)

In both of these examples the second line rewords the same thought as the first line. The thought expressed in the second line is synonymous (exactly like) that expressed in the first line.

#### 2. ANTITHETIC PARALLELISM:

"Antithetic" means opposite. In antithetic parallel poems the second line is an opposite thought to the first line. But it is still parallel or like the first line because it is stating a similar truth. It uses an opposite to state a similar truth. This is why it is called antithetic. For example:

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous:  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psalm 1:6)

In this example the second line is antithetic (opposite) of the first line. The first line speaks of the way of the righteous. The second tells of the way of the unrighteous. But the second line is still parallel to the first line because it agrees with what is said in the first line by presenting an opposite truth.

### 3. SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM:

This type of parallelism is like building with blocks. The second line of the poem and all following lines add to or develop the thought of the first line. Study the example below. The second and following lines build on or add to the first line of the poem:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor standeth in the way of sinners,  
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord;  
And in His law doth he meditate day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

In verse 1, the first line states that a man is blessed if he does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. The following lines build on this truth by stating that he also should not stand or sit in their way. In verse two the first line tells us this man delights in the law of the Lord. The second line adds to this thought that he meditates in God's law constantly.

### 4. EMBLEMATIC PARALLELISM:

An "emblem" is something which stands for or illustrates something else. For example, the stars in the flag of the United States of America are emblems of (stand for) the 50 states which are members of the Union. In emblematic parallelism the second and following lines of a poem are an emblem or illustration of the first line. For example:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,  
So panteth my soul after thee, O God. (Psalm 42:1)

The second line of this verse illustrates the first. David pictures his soul desiring God just like a hart (an animal similar to a deer) pants for water when it is thirsty. The illustration of a thirsty deer is an emblem expressing David's spiritual thirst. Although there are several other types of parallel form in Hebrew poetry they are not very common in the Bible so it is not necessary to include them in our study.

## USING FORM TO UNDERSTAND CONTENT

Recognizing these basic poetic forms will help you when you study Bible poetry. You will be able to understand the content as it is expressed in:

1. Identical restatements of truth (synonymous parallelism):

This will help you understand the same truth expressed in similar ways. Such repetition will fix the truth expressed firmly in your mind and heart. It is an important way of meditating on the Word of God. If for some reason you do not understand a certain truth in the way it is presented in the first line of a poem, the following lines which present the same truth will help you understand.

2. Opposite statements of the same truth (antithetic parallelism):

You will learn not only great truths, but the opposite parallels of these truths. In the example of Psalms 1:6 you not only learned something about the way of the righteous but you also learned an opposite truth about the way of the ungodly. As you learn to recognize the antithetic parallel form you will be able not only to apply positive truths in your life but you also will be warned of dangers of the opposite. In the example we used you learned that God knows your way if you are righteous which is a positive truth. You also learned that if you are unrighteous you will perish. This opposite thought provides an important warning.

3. Building blocks of truth (synthetic parallelism):

As each line of a poem builds or adds to what is presented in the first line, that truth will be fully developed in your mind.

4. Emblems which illustrate God's truth (emblematic parallelism):

Such illustrations create a visual picture of God's truths in your mind.

## TYPES OF POETRY

There are three basic types of Hebrew poetry. The division of poetry into types is made on the basis of the content and manner of presentation of the poem. If you learn to recognize the different types of Bible poetry it will help you understand what you are reading. The three main types of Bible poetry include:

1. EPIC POETRY:

This is a narrative poetry. It tells the story of a heroic action. There is quite a bit of narrative poetry scattered throughout the books of history. Read Numbers 22 through 24 which tells the story of Balaam. It contains examples of epic poetry.

2. DRAMATIC POETRY:

Dramatic poetry is acted poetry. The book of Job is the best example of acted poetry. In the opening we are allowed to see behind the scenes and discover the cause of Job's

problems is Satanic. Next we find messengers informing Job of the disaster of the loss of his children and possessions. Then Job is sitting by a lonely ash heap. In following scenes his friends offer a variety of suggestions as to the reason why he is suffering. There is a great climax as Job hears from God and in the end is restored with earthly blessings. The book of Job is a drama presented in poetic form.

### 3. LYRIC POETRY:

Lyric poetry is sung poetry. Two excellent examples are found in Deborah's song of Judges 5 and Miriam's song in Exodus 15. There are also sections of lyric poetry which were used for mourning or expressing sorrow. Examples of these are found in Psalms 137, 74, 80, and II Samuel 1:19-27. The book of Lamentations is also an example of this type of lyric poetry or mournful singing. This book is written in poetic form but it is classified with the historic books because the poetry relates to a tragic event in the history of God's people.

### THE BOOKS OF POETRY: A PROGRESSION

The five books of poetry show a progression of spiritual life. The book of Job describes the death to the old life of self. Psalms shows the new life in God, expressing itself in praise, prayer, adoration, supplication, confession, and intercession. In Proverbs we are in God's school learning heavenly yet practical wisdom for life on earth. Ecclesiastes speaks of the vanity of pursuing life "under the sun" apart from God. The Song of Solomon speaks of the pursuit of life with meaning through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

## SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verse from memory.
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2. Look at List One of the types of Biblical poetry. Read List Two and find the definition which describes each type. Write the letter of the correct definition in front of the type of poetry which it describes.

List One

\_\_\_\_\_ Dramatic poetry

\_\_\_\_\_ Epic poetry

\_\_\_\_\_ Lyric poetry

List Two

a. This type of poetry is sung.

b. This type of poetry is a drama.

c. This type of poetry is narrative or in story form and often tells of heroic action.

3. Look at List One of the different forms of Biblical poetry. Read List Two and find the definition which describes each form. Write the letter of the correct definition in front of the form which it describes.

List One

\_\_\_\_\_ Synonymous parallelism

\_\_\_\_\_ Emblematic parallelism

\_\_\_\_\_ Antithetic parallelism

\_\_\_\_\_ Synthetic parallelism

List Two

a. The second and following lines give an illustration or emblem to express the truth of the first line.

b. The second and following lines opposite truth which relates to the first line of the poem.

c. The second and following lines express a thought identical to the first line.

d. The second and following lines build on the truth expressed in the first line.

4. Look up Psalm 3:1 in your Bible. This verse is written in \_\_\_\_\_ parallelism.  
5. Look up Psalm 1:6 in your Bible. This verse is written in \_\_\_\_\_ parallelism.  
6. Look up Psalm 1:1-2 in your Bible. This verse is written in \_\_\_\_\_ parallelism.  
7. Look up Psalm 42:1 in your Bible. This verse is written in \_\_\_\_\_ parallelism.

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

In addition to the books of poetry there are scattered poetical sections in both the Old and New Testaments. Some of these are listed below. Use these references for further study of Bible poetry:

Genesis 4:23-24	Lamech to his wives
Exodus 15:1-21	Song of Moses/Miriam
Numbers 21:27-30	Song of ballad singers
Numbers 23:7-10	Song of Balaam
Deuteronomy 33:1-47	Song of Moses
Joshua 10:12-14	Song of Joshua
Judges 5:1-31	Song of Deborah and Barak
Ruth 1:16-17	Song of Ruth
I Samuel 2:1-10	Song of Hannah
II Samuel 3:33-34	David's lament for Abner
II Samuel 1:17-27	Song for Saul and Jonathan
II Samuel 22:2-51	David's song of victory
II Samuel 23:1-7	David's last words
I Chronicles 16:8-36	David's thanksgiving
Jeremiah 9:17-22	Mourning over the fallen nation
Lamentations 1,2,3,4,5	Mourning over the fallen nation
Ezekiel 27:25-28:23	Prophecies against Tyre, poetic form
Ezekiel 19:1-14	Lamentation for Israel's princes
Hosea 2:1-15	Song of the chastisement of Israel
Habakkuk 3:1-19	Habakkuk's prayer
Luke 1:46-55	Mary's song
Luke 1:68-79	Song of Zacharias
Luke 2:29-32	Simeon's blessing

# ANSWERS TO SELF-TESTS

## CHAPTER ONE:

1. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
2. The word "Bible" means "the books."
3. The word "Scripture" means "sacred writings."
4. Old Testament and New Testament.
5. 66.
6. Law, history, poetry, prophecy.
7. Gospels, history, letters, prophecy.
8. The word "testament" means "covenant."
9. For doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
10. The Bible contains no contradictions and it is united in its major theme.
11. The Bible has variety.
12. a. T; b. T; c. F; d. F; e. F
13. Jesus. Luke 24:44-48.

## CHAPTER TWO:

1. Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord; give me understanding according to thy Word. (Psalm 119:169)
2. 39



3. 27
4. If you just read a chapter here and there you fail to understand how the Bible fits together. You must read the Bible in an orderly way if you are to understand its content.
5.
  - Read daily.
  - Read selectively.
  - Read prayerfully.
  - Read systematically.

#### CHAPTER THREE:

1. The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it. (Psalm 68:11)
2. A version is a Bible written in a language different from the languages in which God's Word was originally written.
3. A translation is a word by word translation of the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramic words. A paraphrase does not translate word for word. It is translated thought by thought.
4. The King James version.
5. Because no two languages are exactly alike so differences occur when translation is done.
6. Hebrew, Aramic, and Greek.

#### CHAPTER FOUR:

1. He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. (John 8:47)
2. Because they try to read it the same way they do any other book.
3. Something you must do before you can do something else.
4. Knowing God and accepting Jesus Christ as Savior.
5. Believers who are called as teachers. The Holy Spirit.

6. The Holy Spirit.
7. The milk is the simple truths of the Word of God.
8. The meat is the deeper spiritual truths of the Bible which are not so easily understood.
9. -Desire the milk.  
-Be obedient to God's Word.  
-Search for the meat.
10. -Set a special time each day to study.  
-Select a special place to study.  
-Start each study session with prayer.

#### CHAPTER FIVE:

1. Thou through thy commandments has made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. (Psalm 119:98-100)
2. -To locate all the Bible references to a word.  
-To locate a specific Bible text.  
-To find the meaning of a word.
3. 4, 2, 6, 1, 3, 5

#### CHAPTER SIX:

1. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)
2. It means you must understand what is being said to whom. You must also interpret and apply the meaning correctly.
3. The verbal inspiration of the Bible means every word in the original manuscripts was inspired by God.
4. The plenary inspiration of the Bible means the full inspiration of all Scripture as opposed to partial inspiration. Every portion of the Bible is inspired.
5. The rules and explanations are as follows:

1. The rule of divine authority. We accept the Bible as the final authority because it is inspired by God.
2. The rule of literal interpretation. The Bible means exactly what it says.
3. The rule of contextual consideration. Each verse must be studied in relation to its context.
4. The rule of first mention. The first time a word, phrase, object, or incident is mentioned in the Bible, it gives the key to its meaning anywhere else it is used in the Bible.
5. The rule of repetition. When something is repeated in the Bible it deserves special attention as it is very important.
6. The rule of cumulative revelation. The full truth of God's Word on any subject must not be gathered from an isolated passage. The cumulative (total) revelation of all the Bible says regarding a truth must be considered.

#### CHAPTER SEVEN:

1. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. (Psalm 119:152)
2. k, l, c, d, e, g, f, j, h, i, b, a
3. When.
4. Biblical archaeology is the study of remains found in Bible lands. It is a science which gains knowledge of Bible times from the study of existing remains of their civilizations.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT:

1. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live. (Psalm 119:144)
2. The second main point should not come under point I. It should be a separate point and indicated by the Roman numerals II. Review the instructions for outlining given in this chapter.

3. Horizontally and vertically.
4. Marking is a way to emphasize key Bible passages. You underline selected verses or use symbols in the margins.

#### CHAPTER NINE:

1. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous thing out of thy law. (Psalm 119:18)
2. See the symbols listed in Chapter Nine.
3. See the purposes listed in Chapter Nine.
4. Everyone who claims to speak God's Word is not really doing so. There are false teachers.
5. God will add to them the plagues written in the Word. Revelation 22:18-19
6. Their part will be taken out of God's book of life and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in the Word. Revelation 22:18-19.
7. God.
8. God's words.
9. Milk and the meat.
10. Moses.

#### CHAPTER TEN:

1. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy Word. (Psalm 119:148)
2. This method emphasizes application of knowledge to life and ministry. It results in increased devotion to God.
3.
 

-Record passage information -Identify the key verse -Meditate	-Identify the subject -Summarize -Make application
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4. It is not enough just to hear the Word. You must also apply the Word in your life.  
James 1:22-25
5. Satan fights the use of this method because he is concerned when Bible study results in application which brings positive change in spiritual life.

#### CHAPTER ELEVEN:

1. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. (Psalm 119:9)
2. 2, 1
3.
  - Do an initial survey
  - Create a book study chart
  - Create an outline
4.
  - Title of the book
  - Theme
  - Author
  - To whom the book was written
  - Purpose
  - Basic life and ministry principle

#### CHAPTER TWELVE:

1. Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (Psalm 119:11)
2. Study of the Bible by chapters.
3.
  - Select a chapter title.
  - Mark paragraph divisions.
  - Create a chapter study chart.
  - Create a chapter outline.

#### CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

1. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. (Psalm 119:130)
2.
  - Do a chapter study
  - Observe details of the paragraph

- Create a paragraph study chart
- Create a paragraph study outline

3. 3, 2, 4, 1
4. 4, 5, 1, 2, 3
5. 3, 2, 4, 1

#### CHAPTER FOURTEEN:

1. My tongue shall speak of thy Word: for all thy commandments are righteousness. (Psalm 119:172)
2. Context.
3.
  - Study the verse within its context
  - Study related verses
  - Create a verse study chart
  - Create a verse study outline

#### CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

1. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18)
2.
  - Select the word.
  - Study the word within its context.
  - Determine the meaning.
  - Summarize your study.
3. A key word is one which is basic to the meaning of the verse. It is an important word. Sometimes it is a word difficult to understand or it is repeated for special emphasis.
4. The word "temperance" would be a good subject for word study. The other words are not key words.
5. A concordance and Bible word study book.

#### CHAPTER SIXTEEN:

1. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I

esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.  
(Psalm 119:127-128)

2. The topical method focuses on a selected subject. The goal of the study is to discover all the Bible teaches on the subject.
3.
  - Select a topic.
  - Select the portion of Scripture.
  - Gather the information.
  - Summarize the information.

#### CHAPTER SEVENTEEN :

1. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition . . .(I Corinthians 10:11)
2. The biographical method focuses on the lives of Bible personalities. By studying their lives we learn from their experiences.
3.
  - Select the person to be studied.
  - Gather the information.
  - Analyze The Information.
  - Apply What You Have Learned.

#### CHAPTER EIGHTEEN:

1. 7, 8, 5, 3, 4, 2, 1, 6, 9, 10
2. Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them. (Psalm 119:129)
3. The theological method is the study of basic Bible doctrines about God. The method includes collecting, comparing, and organizing doctrinal statements.
4.
  - Select the topic of study.
  - Define the doctrine selected.
  - Select the Bible portion to be studied.
  - Gather information on the doctrine.
  - Summarize the information you gather.
5. A "doctrine" is a group of teachings about a certain subject. It contains all the Bible teaches on a selected subject.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN:

1. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments. (Psalm 119:164)
2. b, c, a
3. c, a, b, d
4. Synonymous.
5. Antithetic.
6. Synthetic.
7. Emblematic.

## CHAPTER TWENTY:

1. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me. (Luke 24:44)
2.
  - To authenticate God's message.
  - To confirm God's messenger.
  - To instruct believers.
3. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for study. Prophecy presents a proper perspective of past, present, and future events in the plan of God. Understanding God's future plan prevents deception by Satan. A special blessing is pronounced on those who study it.
4.
  - Recognize Jesus is the basic theme of prophecy.
  - Realize that in many cases the Bible interprets itself.
  - Understand the rule of double reference.
  - Understand prophetic perspective.
  - Realize that prophecy is conditional in nature.
5. God.
6. Prophecy means to speak forth under the inspiration of God.



7.     -A message of inspiration from God.  
       -Prediction of future events in God's plan.  
       -An interpretation for man of the acts of God.
8.     The spoken word and acted prophecy.
9.     Genesis 3:15. It is the promise of a Messiah.
10.    See the ways of identifying false prophets discussed in Chapter Twenty.

#### CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE:

1.     For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. (Hebrews 10:1)
2.     The typological method is the study of a person, place, event, or thing as a type of something else. Types give an advance view of what is to come in God's future plan. Although the type is important in itself, it has an even greater significance in the future person or event which it represents.
3.     Shadow, figure, pattern.
4.     -Persons  
       -Places  
       -Events  
       -Material things
5.     Joseph.
6.     Jesus Christ.