

## Literary Genre: Poetry

Literary genre is a category of written works. Recognizing the type of writing prepares one for how to read and observe the text. For example, Hebrew poetry is supposed to be sung. It is worshipful, intensely emotional, and appeals to the imagination.

Hebrew poetry is essentially parallelism, where the words of two or more lines of a passage form a pattern that are directly related, and usually lacks the traditional elements found in poetry like rhyme and rhythm. Much of Hebrew poetry cannot be appreciated because of the loss of its subtleties through translation. Did you know that about 30-40% of the Old Testament is poetic?

Poetry can be found in Bible books such as Job, Psalm, Lamentations, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Understanding Hebrew poetry greatly enhances your ability to observe and understand the passage. By learning about the common forms of Hebrew poetry, you can see their semantics and logical connections between the lines. And the short passage you may be studying might be part of a larger passage with a greater meaning. Here are some of the common forms of Hebrew poetry:

1. Synonymous poetry is when the same subject is used with different but similar words with the same thought. This poetry is easiest to understand, because the idea of each verse is similar and emphasizes or elaborates on the same thought.

take away the wicked from the presence of the king,  
and his throne will be established in righteousness. (Prov 25:5, ESV)

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all the day long. (Ps 25:4-5, ESV)

2. Antithetical poetry is when the same subject is described with contrasting sentiments but with the same thought, and sometimes they may contain synonymous components. The idea of each verse is not the same and their contrast places an emphasis on the same thought.

The proverbs of Solomon.  
A wise son makes a glad father,  
but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. (Prov 10:1, ESV)

The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them. (Prov 11:3, ESV)

for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps 1:6, ESV)

3. Synthetic poetry is when each verse contain two different subjects and ideas but share a logical connection. The second idea elaborates on the first.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1:7, ESV)

How should you read Hebrew poetry?

Read poetry slowly in short sections and enjoy the literary beauty of God's word.

Study the imagery and figures of speech. Carefully observe what do they represent.

Look for literary devices.

Look for a central theme.

What is being said about God?

What is being said of God's people?

## Literary Genre: Poetry

Literary genre is a category of written works. Recognizing the type of writing prepares one for how to read and observe the text. For example, Hebrew poetry is supposed to be sung. It is worshipful, intensely emotional, and appeals to the imagination.

Hebrew poetry is essentially parallelism, where the words of two or more lines of a passage form a pattern that are directly related, and usually lacks the traditional elements found in poetry like rhyme and rhythm. Much of Hebrew poetry cannot be appreciated because of the loss of its subtleties through translation. Did you know that about 30-40% of the Old Testament is poetic?

Poetry can be found in Bible books such as Job, Psalm, Lamentations, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Understanding Hebrew poetry greatly enhances your ability to observe and understand the passage. By learning about the common forms of Hebrew poetry, you can see their semantics and logical connections between the lines. And the short passage you may be studying might be part of a larger passage with a greater meaning. Here are some of the common forms of Hebrew poetry:

1. Synonymous poetry is when the same subject is used with different but similar words with the same thought. This poetry is easiest to understand, because the idea of each verse is similar and emphasizes or elaborates on the same thought.

take away the wicked from the presence of the king,  
and his throne will be established in righteousness. (Prov 25:5, ESV)

Help the student with his observation of the Hebrew poetry.

Both verses share the same subject - the king.

The first verse is about removing wickedness from the king's presence.

The second verse is synonymous and elaborates on the same thought for the king when wickedness is removed - righteousness is established.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all the day long. (Ps 25:4-5, ESV)

Both verses share the same subject – the ways of the Lord.

The first verse expresses a desire to know God's ways.

The second verse is synonymous and expresses the same thought – teach and lead me in your truth.

2. Antithetical poetry is when the same subject is described with contrasting sentiments but with the same thought, and sometimes they may contain synonymous components. The idea of each verse is not the same and their contrast places an emphasis on the same thought.

The proverbs of Solomon.  
A wise son makes a glad father,  
but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. (Prov 10:1, ESV)

Both verses share the same subject – a son.

The first verse speaks of a wise son.

The second verse is antithetical with a foolish son. The contrast places an emphasis on the impact on our parents.

The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them. (Prov 11:3, ESV)

Both verses share the same subject – people.

The first verse is about upright people.

The second verse is antithetical with crooked and deceitful people. The contrast places an emphasis on the impact on people's lives.

for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps 1:6, ESV)

Both verses share the same subject – people.

The first verse is about righteous people.

The second verse is antithetical with wicked people. The contrast places an emphasis on the God's judgment.

3. Synthetic poetry is when each verse contain two different subjects and ideas but share a logical connection. The second idea elaborates on the first.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1:7, ESV)

The subject of the first verse is the fear of the Lord. The subject of the second verse is the fool.

The first verse connects the acquisition of knowledge to one's attitude towards God.

The second verse is synthetic and speaks to the fool's attitude and elaborates on their perspective towards wisdom and instruction.

How should you read Hebrew poetry?

Read poetry slowly in short sections and enjoy the literary beauty of God's word.

Study the imagery and figures of speech. Carefully observe what do they represent.

Look for literary devices.

Look for a central theme.

What is being said about God?

What is being said of God's people?