**COR@9**

**Focusing on Poetry, Psalms, and Parallelism**

## **I. Figures of Speech**

**A. Figures of Speech Involving Analogy or Comparison**

**Simile** - *an explicit comparison using words such as "like" and "as"*

Psalm 1:3 - the righteous will be like a tree planted by streams of water

**Metaphor** - *an implicit comparison by direct association using a the verb "to be"*

Psalm 119:105 - God’s word is a lamp

**Hyperbole** - *deliberate exaggeration for sake of effect*; *not trying to be factual*

Psalm 119:136 - My eyes shed streams of water.

2 Samuel 1:23 - swifter than eagles and stronger than lions

# Personification/anthropomorphism/zoomorphism

**Personification** – *Entities represented with human features*

Genesis 4:6 - his blood cries out

Proverbs 1:20 - wisdom shouts in the streets

**Anthropomorphism** - *God represented with human features*

Psalm 139:16 - God’s eyes see

Isaiah 7:18 - God whistles

**Zoomorphism** - *God represented with nonhuman features*

Psalm 91:4 - God shelters with his wings

**B. Figures of Speech Involving Substitution**

**Metonymy** - *using the name of one thing for another, often because the two are closely related or one suggests the other*

Psalm 5:9- tongue/mouth for speech

Psalm 23:5 - a table for a banquet

**Synecdoche** - *part used for whole, or whole used for part*

Micah 4:3 - They will hammer their swords into plowshares.

**Merism** - *a form of synecdoche in which* *two opposites indicate a whole*

Genesis 1:1 - heavens and earth – e.g., everything

Psalm 113:3 From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets

the name of the Lord is to be praised.

**C. Other Types of Figurative Language**

**Wordplays and Puns** - *double meanings that are often hard to translate*

Jeremiah 3:22 - “Turn, you sons of turning; I will cure your turning.”

**Symbols** - a visible sign of something invisible or spiritual; *e.g., a Mercedes - symbol of wealth*

Psalm 74:13 - a dragon as a symbol of opposition to God’s saving activity

Isaiah 42:6 - light as a symbol of moral illumination/means of salvation

### II. Parallelism

* The basic feature of Hebrew poems is **parallelism**.
* Hebrew poetry usually consists of a pair of two short lines, or verses; one short line is followed by another short line. There are at least five types of parallelism.

**Synonymous** - *the second line emphasizes the first line*.

Psalm 18:2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;

God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.

Isaiah 1:3 Israel does not know

My people do not understand.

**Incomplete Synonymous** - *the second line omits something from the first line.*

Psalm 24:1 The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains,

The world, and those who dwell in it.

1 Samuel 18:7 Saul has slain his thousands

and David his ten thousands

**Antithetical** - *the second line contrasts the first line*.

Psalm 1:6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath,

But a harsh word stirs up anger.

**Synthetic** - *the second line develops the first line*. (This differs from synonymous parallelism because some new element is introduced in the second line.)

Psalm 95:3 For the Lord is a great God,

and a great king above the gods.

**Emblematic** - *one line states a truth and the other line illustrates it*.

Psalm 23:1, 2 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing; (truth)

He makes me lie down in green pastures. (illustration)

He leads me beside still waters; (illustration)

He restores my soul. (truth)

### III. Other Literary Devices

### Chiasm

The word *chiasm* comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which is written c. This term is used to describe an inversion of parallel terms. The notation A B C C’ B’ A’ is often used to show the inverse parallelism. (If you draw lines from A to A’ and C to C’ it would look like a large X!)

Psalm 76:1 In Judah God is known

A B

his name is great in Israel

B’ A’

Isaiah 11:13 Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah

A B C

And Judah will not harass Ephraim

C’ B’ A’

**Acrostic psalms**

An acrostic begins each verse or stanza of a poem with a letter of the alphabet. There are many examples of acrostic poems in the OT: Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145. Lamentations 1-4 are all acrostics. Proverbs 31:10–31 is also an acrostic poem. Probably the most well-known acrostic poem is Psalm 119.

**IV. Types of Psalms**

## **A. Didactic** - “Teaching” or wisdom psalms; e.g., Psalms 1, 37, 119

*Example: Psalm 1*

Psalm 1 was deliberately placed at the beginning of the Psalter. It contrasts those who follow the Lord with those who do not. It describes the “blessed” and some of their characteristics. Using many figures of speech, this psalm teaches us how and why we should follow the Lord.

## **B. Lament -** Lament psalms say “Help!” These psalms show us that even lament is faith (trust). In fact, many lament psalms often end up in praise, but lament psalms begin by being very honest; e.g., Psalms 3, 44. These psalms give us the language for our own laments.

*Example: Psalm 3*

Psalm 3 begins by crying out, “HELP!” When David wrote this, he was in real trouble. He was fleeing his son, Absalom, and was being taunted by one of Saul’s relatives. David was afraid!—yet, in verse 3, the tone shifts from fear to trust. This psalm shows how much David recognized that the Lord alone sustained him.

Imprecatory psalms invoke God’s wrath against those who oppose God and his purposes e.g.: Psalms 7; 35; 40; 55; 58; 59; 69; 79; 109; 137; 139; 144.

## C. **Thanksgiving Psalm** – These psalms can be both individual and communal. Thanksgiving psalms **praise** God for something he has done: deliverance, mercy, etc.; e.g., Psalms 18, 30, 65.

*Example: Psalm 30*

In verse 1, the psalmist exalts God for lifting him up (the superscription gives background information). In verse 5, strong contrasts show that God’s anger is fleeting, but his favor is forever. In verse 9, rhetorical questions heighten the psalmist’s gratitude for life. In verses 11 and 12, we see the transition from wailing to dancing. The psalm ends with praise, which is the only proper response when he has acted on our behalf

**D. Hymns –** Hymns **praise** God for who he is and what he is like. These psalms are less about something specific that God has done and are more about he is eternally and unchangeably.

*Example: Psalm 8*

The same verse is used to frame the psalm in v. 1 and v. 9; this technique is called *inclusio* and it often shows that everything in between is related to this statement. In verse 3, we find the idea of the universe’s expanse to indicate that we can go in any direction, and yet God is still there. With all of this immensity, why does God care about any of us? In verse 4, we find that God is interested in us because we are his image-bearers. We were created so that we could have fellowship with him and, although he is eternal, he can have an intimate relationship with each one of us. The great privilege given to humanity is revealed in verses 6 and 7.

Hymns can also be either of the following:

A. Royal psalms; often messianic in tone; e.g.: Psalm 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144.

B. Enthronement psalms; praising God’s rule. E.g.: Psalm 47; 93; 96–99.

**Focusing on Wisdom Literature**

**I. Background**

* Wisdom literature asks the big questions, such as “what’s the meaning of life?”
* But this is not esoteric philosophy! Wisdom literature assumes that if you think correctly you will then act correctly—right thinking leads to a life well-lived.
* Instead of telling us what to do, wisdom literature offers pictures of what it looks like to follow God or to reject him.
* Frequently wisdom literature talks about the (often little) choices that lead to godly character or to serious character flaws.

**II. What Is Wisdom?**

**A. Wisdom is a worldview.**

* This goes well beyond skills for living, but rather is a way of looking at life.
* The outcome of wisdom is a life that pleases God and others and a life that brings fullness of life to those around us.

Wisdom includes at least three things:

1. **A proper perspective** – summed up in “the fear of the Lord”

* Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”
* This begins with recognizing who God is and who we are.
* This includes awe, reverence, and a “healthy respect” for God.
* This perspective centers on the recognition that he is the creator (we owe our very existence to him), he is the redeemer (we are saved by him), and he is perfectly just (he sees and knows all that happens).

2. **Character focus** – who we are before what we do

3. **Godly action** – proper perspective leads to proper action

**B. Types of wisdom**

1. Instructional, reflective passages

* the path metaphor in Proverbs 2
* personification: adulteress or lady wisdom in Proverbs 9, 31
* extended dialogues in Job
* reflections on life in Ecclesiastes

2. Proverbial sentences (e.g., Proverbs 10–22)

**III. Wisdom literature in the Bible**

* Proverbs (proverbial wisdom; a basic approach to life and to wisdom)
* Job (speculative wisdom; helps to understand the suffering of the righteous)
* Ecclesiastes (speculative wisdom; shows the limitations of a purely intellectual approach to finding meaning in life)
* Song of Songs (lyric wisdom; shows the beauty of human love in marriage)
* Wisdom Psalms (1, 4, 10, 14, 18, 19, 37, 49, 73, 90, 112, 119; echo many of the above themes)

**IV. Applying Wisdom Literature**

**Proverbs**

1. Proverbs are worded to be memorable. They are practical more than they are theological. They often point to truth rather than state it directly.

2. Proverbs often employ figures of speech, parallelism, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and other figurative language.

# Job

1. God is sovereign and we are not.

2. God knows all and we know a little.

3. God is always just, but he does not always explain his purposes to us.

4. God expects us to trust in his character and his sovereignty when (often unexplained) tragedy occurs.

5. When we are with people who are suffering in this way, we may be called to hurt and grieve with them. We should not try to have all the answers.

# Ecclesiastes

1. Apart from God life is meaningless.

2. Life cannot always be explained, we can trust God.

3. Life may not be understood, but it can be enjoyed.