

Hebrew Poetry



“Only five books of the Hebrew Bible are written without poetry; Leviticus, Ruth, Ezra, Haggai, and Malachi.”¹

“Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyme, rhythm, or meter. It has some rhythm which is based on tonal stress but even that is not prominent. The real key to Hebrew poetry is parallelism, which involves (rhyming) ideas through careful arrangement of parallel thought.”²

There are **six kinds of parallelism**:

1. **Synonymous** – line two reinforces line one with similar words of concepts. **Examples: Job 38:7; Psalm 3:1; Proverbs 11:7, 12:28.**
2. **Synthetic** – line two adds to or completes line one. Examples: **Psalm 1:1-2, 23:1-5; Proverbs 4:23.**
3. **Antithetic** – line one is contrasted with line two. **Examples: Proverbs 10:1, 14:34, 15:1.**
4. **Emblematic** – line one uses a figure of speech to make clear the point made in line two. **Examples - Psalm 42:1; Proverbs 11:22, 25:25, 27:17.**
5. **Climatic** – the second line repeats the first line with the exception of the last word
Examples – **Psalm 29:1; Proverbs 31:4.**
6. **Formal** – the lines are joined together solely by metric consideration; this is the least used type of Hebrew poetry. **Example – Psalm 2:6**
7. Any of the above devices may be found in couplets (twos), triplets (threes), quatrains (fours), or whole stanzas. **Example – Psalm 150.**

In the book Psalms, there are actually five individual books or groupings, each with their own doxology (praise or glory) ending. (Psalm 41:13 – Book I [Genesis Psalms, Psalm 1-41], Psalm 72:18-20 – Book II [Exodus Psalms, Psalm 42-72], Psalm 89:52 – Book III [Leviticus Psalms, Psalm 73-89], Psalm 106:48 – Book IV [Numbers Psalms, Psalm 90-106], Psalm 150 – Book V [Deuteronomy Psalms, 107-150].

Known Penman:

David – 73

Asaph – 12

Sons of Korah – 10

Solomon – 2

Moses – 1

Heman – 1

Ethan – 1

The Rest - Anonymous

¹ Sourced from West Coast Baptist College, Old Testament Survey Course.

² Ibid.