

# **BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics**

## Unit 6c Old Testament: Poetry, Prophecy, and Wisdom

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Hello. We are at the final video session here of our study, and I'm excited to work through this with you. The last lesson, we went through Old Testament narrative and law, and we wrap things up today with Old Testament poetry, prophecy, and wisdom. So let's do it. Let's get this done. It's been a lot of fun. I bet you have been working hard and I'm sure you want to wrap things up. So let's see what we can learn here.

All right. Let's talk about Old Testament poetry. Did you know that over one-third of the Bible is comprised of poetry? It's a pretty staggering statistic, actually, if you think about it. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations are almost entirely poetic, but just about every book of the Old Testament contains some kind of poetry, which really does speak to their view of words. They just view them as beautiful. And then many of these poems are also put to music, as we see in the psalms.

And so poetry allowed for free expression of the full range of emotions through life experiences. This was also coupled with worship of God. And so if you're not a poetry person, I get it. I am not a poetry person either, but I'm learning to appreciate it. But with so much of Scripture being poetry, it's important to dig in that and appreciate it a little bit more. And of course, coupled with worshipping God, that's something all of us can enjoy. So the expression of emotions in worship really was a reflection of maturity of faith. Sometimes today, especially in western cultures, that expression of emotion in worship is seen as immature. But done in a way that's pleasing to the Lord, it can be a sign of maturity.

It's important to appreciate the various literary genres of the Scriptures. I mean, think about it. We've talked about so many different genres. And going from Paul's logical presentation of salvation in Romans to David's brokenness over his sin and repentance to God in Psalm 51, each genre really conveys the truth of God in different ways. And that's the beauty of Scripture is that there's going to be a genre that hits someone where they're at, something that every personality is different. And that's the beauty of God's word is that some part of Scripture is going to really reach into the inside of you. And I just love that about God's word.

So let's talk about some of the elements of Old Testament poetry. Poetry is characterized by three things: terseness (which sounds really harsh, but I'll explain what that is); a high degree of structure; and figurative imagery. So it's not just randomness that's taking place. It's a high level of creativity with this. So what is terseness? Poetry uses a minimum number of words. That's it. It's kind of the Twitter, if you will, but much better than 140 characters. They are chosen carefully for their impact and power. So for example, Psalm 25:4. "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths." Now, that's the English translation. But the original Hebrew, the first line has three words and the second line only has two words. So the psalmist there is using minimal words but expressing some pretty neat thoughts and a request really, a prayer to God.

Along with the terseness, there's structure. Again, poetry has a rhythm and a rhyme to it. There's a pattern. So one of the structures that's visible is an acrostic, and that's essentially a poem in which each successive line of poetry starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So if you look at Psalms 25, 34, 111, 112, and 145, these are all Hebrew acrostics. There are 22 verses in each of those. Each of these verses begins with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. And then Psalm 119, very classic example. I mean, just an amazing piece of work, actually. If you look at the total number of verses, you have 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet plus there's eight verses in each section. And so each of these sections of verses, so all eight verses, for example, in Psalm 119:1-8 begins with the Hebrew letter aleph or A. And then verses 9 through 16, every verse begins with the letter bet or B. And that progresses all the way

through Psalm 119. So that's real creative as well, but you don't really catch that in the English translation.

Something else to keep in mind is parallelism. The text and thought units are structured around poetic lines of verse rather than around sentences and paragraphs. So you have to think of the thought units are around these poetic lines rather than the paragraphs. So that's a whole different way of thinking.

So let's look at parallelism a little bit more closely. We mentioned this briefly in a previous lesson, but I want to get into it in a little more detail. So one of the ways is synonymous parallelism. The second line repeats much the same idea as the first. So for example, Psalm 2:4 says, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them." So saying essentially the same thing, just in a different way. Another means of parallelism is developmental. The second line develops further the idea of the first. So in Psalm 121:3, we see that "He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber." So again, God looking over you, keeping your feet steady and sure, just adding to that idea. The illustrative parallelism is where the first line conveys the idea and the second line illustrates it with an example or a symbol. So again, go back to the psalms, Psalm 140:7. "Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head in the day of battle." So that bigger umbrella of being a strong deliverer, but then specifically looking at how he protects my head in the day of battle." Contrastive parallelism employs the use of contrast (surprise, surprise) in that Line B is contrasted with Line A. Example is Psalm 1:6. "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction." So you see that contrast of the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. And then formal parallelism really is just kind of the miscellaneous category to catch the remaining types of parallelism, and there aren't many.

Parallelism, just to put a stamp on this, is the dominant structural characteristic in the poetic books, but it is not the exclusive means. There's other forms as well. But parallelism is very common when you're going through the poetry in Hebrew.

There's some figurative imagery also used in Old Testament poetry. Old Testament poets do not write essays. They paint pictures. And so the authors are conveying real thoughts, events, and emotions to us, and literal truth, but they express this truth figuratively. So let's look at a couple of ways that this figurative imagery occurs.

So, figures of speech involving analogy. So we have similes which we've looked at those exhaustively at different aspects, using the word "like" or "as." Metaphors, of course. Analogy between items by direct statement without using "like" or "as." And indirect analogy is using the analogous item without directly stating the comparison. So what is that? Let's look at Jeremiah 30:23. "The storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked." So you see that it's not directly stated as a simile. "The Lord is like a storm," or "The Lord is a storm." It just lumps it together. "The storm of the Lord." So kind of a creative way of doing it. Hyperbole is another one. Conscious exaggeration for the sake of effect. Jesus used hyperbole often.

And then this one is really interesting. Personification, anthropomorphism, and zoomorphism. So you have some huge words here. If you're a big Scrabble fan, this will pretty much win the game for you. So what are these three figures of speech? And essentially, they attribute to one entity, characteristics of a totally different kind of entity. So let's analyze those three a little more closely. Personification is attributing human features to nonhuman entities. So Psalm 24:7 says, "Lift up your heads, you gates."

Well, of course, you know gates to a city don't have heads as a human does. And so that's an example of personification.

Anthropomorphism is representation of God with human features and characteristics. So Psalm 27:8. "Your face, Lord, I will seek." Now, we know that the Lord is spirit and he has chosen to take the form of man in Christ. But in his essence, he is spirit. So this is anthropomorphism, representing God with human features. And we see that throughout with the hand of God, the arm of God. That's seen throughout the Old Testament. And then zoomorphism is using animal imagery for God. And so there are a few of those instances as well. Psalm 91:4 says, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge." So kind of likening God to a bird or an eagle here protecting us. But again, the imagery is clear of just God's protection and his care.

So continuing on with figures of speech, figures of speech also involve substitution. This one is kind of an interesting one. Effects and causes, which you're thinking "Well, isn't it cause and effect?" Well, it's the opposite and it kind of gets flipped here. So look at Jeremiah 14:7. He says, "Let my eyes overflow with tears." Well, instead of talking about the impending Babylonian invasion and how it's really going to be difficult for him to go through and it's going to be a horrible experience, he goes straight to the effect. So the impending Babylonian invasion is the cause, but he goes right to the effect because this is the impact that it's going to have on him emotionally. And so he's just like, "Let my eyes overflow with tears. I already know that's where I'm going to go."

Some other figures of speech involving substitution. We have representation. A poet will substitute a representative part of an entity instead of the entity itself. So what does that mean? Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but I will trust in the name of the Lord our God." So instead of talking about all the aspects of the army and the military there in Israel, he just uses two aspects of it to kind of represent the entire entity of the military.

And then some miscellaneous figures of speech. We've got apostrophe, which is addressing a person or entity but not actually present. Psalm 114:5 says, "Why was it, sea, that you fled? Why, Jordan, did you turn back?" So he's addressing the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea or the Red Sea, but clearly he's not talking to them. But it's proving the point about those miracles that happened with the nation of Israel in their past.

And then, of course, irony and word plays. Word plays are a lot more difficult to discover in Hebrew. They're definitely there. To put it in an English example, here in American U.S. history, Ben Franklin, when they were getting ready to sign the Declaration of Independence, were like, "We shall hang together or we shall be hanging separately." Just that idea, that play on words of "Hey, if we don't stick together and do this, then we're not going to win. We're going to lose and that will be the death of us all." And so there's definitely word plays like that in Hebrew. We kind of miss that with the English translations. The translators did the best they could to try to reflect that, but you really don't get to see it unless you dig into the Hebrew a bit.

So let's get into prophecy, the nature of Old Testament prophetic literature. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. How many of you are singing a song to help remember the books of the Bible? But this has nothing to do with importance but simply the size of the books. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are, by far, the larger of the prophetic books, so they're

called the Major Prophets. So only a small percentage of Old Testament prophetic literature deals with events still future to us today. So most of it has already occurred in the past, so that's an interesting thing about Old Testament prophecy. You have to keep that in mind.

Prophets express God's deep love for his people, but his intense pain and their rejection of him. We see that time and time again, especially with the nation of Israel and how God is calling them, begging them, imploring them to repent. And you just see the pain that he experiences when they reject him, or the joy and the restoration if they repent. Anthologies is a collection of shorter units. And so a number of these prophetic books are anthologies, if you will, like an individual prophecy sometimes toward different nations or different regions. And sometimes it's not necessarily in chronological order and bounces around, so putting a thematic order or even trying to outline one of the prophetic books is really difficult sometimes. And so that's why if you look at a commentary, each commentator could have a very different outline in their attempt to try to organize these ideas in these prophetic books.

Some of the historical, cultural contexts that we see. I have a nice chart here for you. You see I'll try to highlight a couple of things here. So this is around 950 BC. Obviously, 1000 to 950 was the time of David and Solomon. So that gives you a little time reference there. And these were the other kingdoms that were prominent outside of Israel. So the Egyptians up to about 800. Then you had the Assyrian Empire. And it was during the Assyrian Empire that the northern kingdom of Israel fell. And you see some of the prophets here that were around just the time leading up to that. And then you had the Babylonians rise to power around 600. Obviously, that will be the time of Daniel and Jeremiah. And Lamentations is Jeremiah's efforts to try to turn Israel back before the impending Babylonian invasion, but that didn't happen due to the fall. Then they go into captivity, which is what some of these are. Daniel, of course, was in captivity when he had some of those amazing prophecies about all different kinds of things. And then the Persians take over here as we start to work our way closer to the time of Christ. And Malachi chronologically is one of the last prophets. And then you have some of the other books which were more narratives of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which was that time the Jews that did come back from exile in their attempt to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

So there's a basic prophetic message. There's some things that are pretty consistent with each of the prophets, whether major or minor. And so it kind of goes like this. The first one is some kind of declaration that the people have broken God's covenant and they need to repent. And this reason was varied throughout the northern and southern kingdoms at different times. Idolatry was one of the more common ones. That devotion and relationship with God is divided and broken. We know that during Solomon's day, the influence of his many wives. A lot of those gods and goddesses were brought into Israel and given their own high place within the country. And that happened over the next several hundred years with the different kings. And then some good kings would come and destroy all the high places and the pagan deities. And then it would go back and forth.

Social injustice is another one that we have the relationship with God with idolatry, but then God also cares about how we treat society. And when that relationship with other people is broken, God cares about that too. Jeremiah 5:28-29. Some of the indictments toward Israel was that they were not taking up the cause of the fatherless and the poor. They were just passing by those in need and not caring for them. And so that was one of the judgments from God on them, or at least one of the accusations against them.

And then religious ritualism. It had gotten to the point where Israel became enamored with this formalized ritual and just completely lost the relationship with the Lord. They were just going through the motions of the sacrifices and ceremonies, and God is like, "I hear the bleating of sheep and I see all these oxen, but it means nothing to me because I'm not connected to it. You're not even thinking of me in the whole process." And of course, one of the main issues here is there was no repentance. Of course, if Israel had repented of their sin, a lot of these judgments would be avoided. But they didn't repent and that was the problem, and so there were consequences for that. And then yet, God, in his grace and his mercy, gives hope beyond the judgment, especially for a glorious and future restoration, which is pretty amazing.

Just one example. Well, there were many examples, but the prophecies about the coming messiah and his kingdom was particularly hopeful for the Israelites, especially those who were faithful like Nehemiah, for example. It wasn't his fault that Israel went into Babylonian exile. He wasn't even alive at the time. But he still saw it as his responsibility and so he still trusted in those promises that God made. And that was part of that process of rebuilding. And so they had a number of individuals that felt the pain of others' sin, but they still trusted in the Lord and took responsibility for themselves.

Getting into the wisdom literature. We're getting so close. Hang in there. Ecclesiastes 12:12. "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." And I'm sure that with all the study, you're wearied. But it's worth it, and so hang in there. So let's just work through just a few details of the wisdom literature. First of all, the purpose of the wisdom books. Where the narrative and law books stress believing and obeying, the wisdom books encourage us to think. That's kind of a different perspective. Still, the end result is to obviously believe and obey, but using our minds and thinking through our actions and why we do what we do. So much of the wisdom books present a practical theology for living day to day godly lives in a complicated world. I mean, our world is complicated and the decisions that we face every day can be difficult, but the wisdom literature was designed to just give us small nuggets that help us stay on the right track throughout our day.

Just some big picture ideas of each of the books. Consider wisdom literature the Proverbs. Love the Proverbs. Just a basic approach to life. Real simple principles. These are not universal truths that are true 100% all the time. They are generally true. An example of that would be "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Well, that in general is true, but no parent has a guarantee that if they do things right, their child is going to stay faithful to the Lord the rest of their days. Generally, that works, but not always because ultimately that child grows up to be an adult and an adult has to make decisions and choose to serve themselves or serve God. So that's just an example that these are principles that are generally true but they're not 100% true all the time.

The Book of Job just shows that "Hey, the righteous do suffer," and sometimes God does not disclose the reason for tragedies in our life, so we're forced to rely on him. And that's tough. We want to know. We want to know why we're going through what we're experiencing. And we know that Job never had an answer. We see that reading his story years later, the commentary that was added as to what was going on in the heavenly realm, but Job wasn't privy to that. And so he went for all those things and God wanted him to trust him. And so God does that to us sometimes and that's real tough. And if you're not familiar with Job, I really encourage you to read it. It's just very humbling, very encouraging, when you get to the end especially to process those. It's not very light and fluffy in the very beginning at least.

The Book of Ecclesiastes written by Solomon pretty much shows the failure of humanistic approaches to provide ultimate meaning in life. The only way to find this ultimate meaning is through relationship and obedience to God. You can do the same things, but if one of them is in the context of enjoying life out of relationship with God and what he's blessed you with, the end result is much different.

And then Song of Solomon. There's great wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as it relates to finding your mates and just some other things you need to be looking for. Song of Solomon just celebrates the irrational side of romantic love between a husband and wife and just some of the corny things that they say to each other and the things that they do. But it's that beautiful picture and it just gets you back to just the early love. Those of you that are married, you know those early days in that relationship and just how beautiful it is and just a good reminder of that.

Congratulations. You have survived all of these presentations. And hopefully, I was able to keep your attention and give you some things to use and hopefully you learned in this process. I learned a lot through this process and I've really enjoyed it, and so I hope you have as well. I just want to close, just to wrap things up as far as the presentations part. Just kind of a prayer for you as you move on from here. And I really do pray that these things that you learned you'll apply in your life and that you'll not only be a better student for your own relationship with the Lord, but that you'll pass this information along to others so this will benefit them too. So it comes from Jude 1:24-25. I just want to read this as a closing prayer for our course here. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." God bless you.