

Biblical Interpretation—Old Testament Poetry

Interpreting the Psalms

I. Stylistic Features of Poetry (cf. Bennie Wolvaardt, *How to Interpret the Bible—A Do-It-Yourself Manual*, pp. 129-136; see also my *Hermeneutics, “Special Literary Methods”*, for a further explanation of parallelism in the psalms.

A. Repetition

Psalm 15 (NIV)

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?

Who may live on your holy hill?

² He whose walk	A
is <u>blameless</u>	B
and who does	A
what is <u>righteous</u> ,	B
who speaks the truth	C
<u>from his heart</u>	D
³ and has no slander	C
<u>on his tongue</u> ,	D
who does no wrong	E
<u>to his neighbor</u>	F
and casts no slur	E
<u>on his fellowman</u> ,	F
⁴ who despises	G
<u>a vile man</u>	H
but honors	G
<u>those who fear the LORD</u> ,	H
who keeps his oath	I
<u>even when it hurts</u> ,	J
⁵ who lends his money	I
<u>without usury</u>	J
and does not accept a bribe	I
<u>against the innocent</u> .	J

He **who** does **these things**
will never be shaken. (Psalm 15:1-5 NIV)

Inclusion: marks off a literary unit by matching the introduction with the conclusion. The material sandwiched between the introduction and conclusion (marked off by brackets) provide the explanation.

[Inclusion]

Who is repeated, as well as the answer to the original question, **Who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?** The answers are found in vv. 2, 3, 4, and 5a which use **who** repetitively. Notice that v. 1 and 5b are parallel and form an **inclusion** bracketing verses 2-5a.

Note the parallel phrases which are the primary characteristic of OT poetry. **Walk** is parallel to **does**. **Speaks the truth** is parallel to **has no slander**. **From his heart** is parallel to **on his tongue**, etc.

The psalms express God’s covenant law. Notice the different references to the law (vv. 2b, 3; cf. Ex. 20: 16; Lev. 19: 16); the case law against charging interest to the poor (v. 5a; cf. Ex. 22: 25); the law against bribery in the courts (v. 5b; cf. Deut. 16: 19; Deut. 27: 25), the keeping of oaths (Num. 30: 2).

How do we reconcile v. 4 with loving one’s enemies (Matt. 5: 44)? The answer lies in the parallel. The parallel is not in **hating** or **loving** but in **despising** or **honoring**. To honor the one who fears God means to attribute to him sufficient weight or respect, no matter what his social status may be. On the other hand we should not honor him who despises God through immorality, even if he is honored by others for his wealth, social status, or worldly achievements. In other words, we should attempt to see men as God sees them. Although we cannot see their hearts (1 Sam. 16: 7), we can see their fruit, which is the whole point of the psalm.

inclusion

In any discourse, the purpose of *repetition* is *emphasis*. The psalmist wishes to emphasize the importance of obedience in receiving the covenant blessings. However, he is not teaching salvation by works (cf. Matt. 7: 21). Charles Spurgeon says of v. 2, “Walking is of far more importance than talking....His faith shows itself by good works, and therefore is no dead faith.”

Spurgeon says of v. 5, “Those who grind poor tradesmen, needy widows, and such like, by charging them interest at intolerable rates, will find that their gold and silver are cankered [corrupted].” (Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*). OT law did not forbid charging interest for the purposes of entrepreneurial activity (business) or purchasing property. It forbade charging interest to poor people who would use the money to buy essentials like food and clothing. Moreover, the law applied to Israelites but not to foreigners (Cf. John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 818). Most loans in agrarian Israel pertained to the poor and not to commercial or property loans. Foreigners were not included in this law since loans to foreigners would be for commercial purposes only (Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 473-481).

"If you lend money to My people, to the **poor** among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. (Exodus 22:25 NASB)

'Now in case a **countryman of yours becomes poor** and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.³⁶ 'Do not take usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you.³⁷ 'You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain. (Leviticus 25:35-37 NASB)

"You shall not charge interest **to your countrymen**: interest on money, food, *or* anything that may be loaned at interest.²⁰ "You may charge interest **to a foreigner**, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess. (Deuteronomy 23:19-20 NASB)

He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to **the poor**. (Proverbs 28:8 NASB)

In the African economy, many poor people remain poor due to having no access to capital. They need loans to establish small businesses, loans with interest rates which will not devour all the profits from their business. Microenterprise loans have become popular on the African continent to provide money for capitalization, but often the people or institutions making the loans are charging the same rates as established banks, 25%, or even 30%, per year on a small loan. I can't interpret this practice as anything but the same usury (excessive interest rates) condemned in the OT.

Psalm 29 (NIV)

¹Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,

ascribe to the LORD **glory and strength**.

²Ascribe to the LORD **the glory due his name**;

worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Glory and strength and **the glory due his name** carries the phrase, **ascribe to the Lord**, further than the first line in v. 1. The **mighty ones** are believers who are addressed in the psalm.

This is an example of *climactic parallelism* or *staircase parallelism* (see p. 134 in Wolvaardt). The parallel “begins with a statement in the first phrase which is partially repeated in the second but carried further than it would be in synonymous parallelism” (Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*, p. 101, who uses this psalm as an example).

³The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,

the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is majestic.

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.

⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;

the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.

And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

¹¹The LORD gives strength to his people;

the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Other psalms with repetition: Psalm 150; Ps. 136; Ps. 135

B. Parallelism

1. Synonymous Parallelism—the thought or expression of the first line is repeated by the second line using different words.

Psalm 8 (NIV) For the director of music. According to *gittith*. A psalm of David.

O LORD, our Lord,

I

how majestic is your name

a

in all the earth!

b

You have set ***your glory***

a

above the heavens.

b

Verse 1a and v. 9 form an *inclusion* which forms a bracket [] around vv. 1b-8. An inclusion sets the mood for the entire poem at the beginning and gives the reader a sense of closure at the end (Tremper Longman, III, *How to Read the Psalms*, p. 107). Thus, the inclusion serves as the *introduction* and the *conclusion* to the psalm. Beginning in 1b and continuing through v. 8, the psalmist gives examples of the majesty of the Lord. The **name** of the Lord is synonymous with His being.

God's **glory** is also synonymous with His **name**. The **earth** and the **heavens** are synonymous with the sphere or location of God's glory—namely, everywhere.

you put everything under his feet: f

⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

These two verses express man's unique **ontological** (being) status as the **crown** of creation as well as his unique role as God's vice-regent (ruling in subordination under God). In ancient times, the footstool of the king would have the names of conquered enemies written on it (the footstool **under his feet** (Ps. 110: 1))

Developing parallelism

⁹ **O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

Inclusion

Verse 9 is a repetition (**inclusion**) of v. 1a. Verse 1b through v. 8 explain the reason that God's name is majestic. From this structure, the preacher can form an outline for a sermon.

Main Idea: We should praise the majestic name of God.

The main idea brings up the **question:** Why should we praise God's majestic name? The rest of the psalm provides the explanation or reason for our praise.

- I. He created us in His own image a little lower than the angels (v. 5a)
- II. He made us the crown (the most important part) of creation (v. 5b)
- III. He made us His vice-regents over creation (vv. 6-8).

The explanation leads to application: What are we doing as believers to reflect God's image and to bring praise to His name? All of life should be lived to the glory of God's name. Everything we do is should be an act of worship (1 Cor. 10: 31).

Psalm 19: 1-13 (NIV)

¹*The heavens* a
declare b
the glory of God; c
the skies a
proclaim b
the work of his hands. c
²Day after day d
they a
pour forth b
speech; c
night after night d
they a
display b
knowledge. c

The **heavens** and **skies (they)** are parallel terms for the personified creation while **declare, proclaim, pour forth, and display** are parallel verbs of the proclamation of God's glory in creation. Moreover, the **work of his hands** demonstrates His **glory**. Notice that the psalmist speaks of creation as the work of God's **hands**. God ordained manual labor to bring praise to himself. We diminish the glory of God by diminishing the importance of manual labor.

³ There is no **SPEECH OR LANGUAGE** e
 where *their voice* is not heard. f
⁴ *Their voice* goes out into all the earth, f
 their **WORDS** to the ends of the world. e

Verse 3 is synonymously parallel to v. 4, but there is a *chiastic* arrangement here with **speech or language** parallel with **words** and **their voice** in v. 3b corresponding to **their voice** in v. 4a. The phrase, **where their voice is not heard** is parallel to **their voice goes out into all the earth**. In other words, there is no place on earth where the glory of God is not displayed in His creation—particularly in the celestial body of the sun (v. 4b). This is why the general revelation of God in creation, although inadequate to lead men to salvation, nevertheless makes all men accountable for their foolish unbelief. When preaching this psalm, one should incorporate Romans 1: 20-21.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:20-21; for a commentary on this passage see my article, “What About Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel”).

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the *sun*, a I
⁵ *which* is like a bridegroom b
coming forth from *his* pavilion, c
like a champion b
rejoicing to run his course. c
⁶ *It* rises at one end of the heavens a I
 and makes *its* circuit to the other;
 nothing is hidden from *its* heat.

Bridegroom and **champion** are synonymously parallel. **Coming forth** and **rejoicing to run** are parallel. **His pavilion** and **his course** as well as **coming forth** and **rejoicing to run** are also parallels. **Like a bridegroom** and **like a champion** are *similes* using **like** or **as** to compare two dissimilar things. Verse 4b and v. 6 form an *inclusion* introducing and concluding this section of the psalm. They are labeled **I**. **Nothing is hidden** recalls the omnipresence (presence everywhere) of the **voice** of creation in vv. 3-4.

From the *general* revelation of God in creation, the psalmist now turns his attention to the *special* revelation of God in His written word.

⁷ The **law** of the LORD is *perfect*, a
reviving the soul. b
 The **statutes** of the LORD are *trustworthy*, a
making wise the simple. b
⁸ The **precepts** of the LORD are *right*, a
giving joy to the heart. b
 The **commands** of the LORD are *radiant*, a
giving light to the eyes. b

These are synonymous parallelisms which are interconnected by subject matter and verb forms. Some *positive characteristic* of the law of God is given in the first line, **a**, followed by a *positive benefit* of the law of God in line **b** in verbal form—**reviving the soul, making wise, giving joy, giving light**.

⁹ The **fear** of the LORD is *pure*,
enduring forever.
 The **ordinances** of the LORD are *sure*
 and altogether righteous.

a

b

a

b

Notice the repetitive phrase, **of the Lord**. Also notice that the **fear of the Lord** is parallel to the **law, statutes, precepts, commands, ordinances** of the Lord. Thus, there is no fear of God without a reverence for His law.

¹⁰ **They** are *more precious than gold*,
than much pure gold;
they are *sweeter than honey*,
than honey from the comb.

c

d

c

d

This is a *developing parallel* which extends the thought of the first line. **Much pure gold** extends the thought of **gold**, and **honey from the comb** extends the thought of **honey**. In other words, it is *fresh* honey straight from the comb. The psalmist wishes to emphasize that God's written word is far superior.

¹¹ By **them** is your servant warned;
 in keeping **them** there is great reward.

Warning against the **curse**s of the covenant and a reminder of the **blessings** of the covenant. This is a summary statement of what he has said so far. The lines of the psalm labeled "b" indicate the **great reward** of keeping covenant—being wise, joy, etc.

¹² Who can discern his errors?
 Forgive my hidden faults.-
¹³ Keep your servant also from **willful sins**; **f**
 may **they** not rule over me. **f**
 Then will I be **blameless**,
innocent of great transgression.

e

f

f

f

g

g

Verse 11, I believe, is an introduction to vv. 12-13. The psalmist is making a transition from the material analogies of gold and honey to the spiritual **reward** of being **forgiven**, free from the **rule** of sin, and **innocent**. Each of these lines is parallel to the one below it. All of us have **hidden faults** because we often do not **discern [our] errors**. **Willful sins** often **rule [over] us**. This could be classified as a developing parallel in which the second line extends the thought of the first line: **errors** extended to **hidden faults, etc.**

¹⁴ May the words
 of my mouth
 and the meditation
 of my heart
 be pleasing in your sight,
 O LORD,
 my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:1-14 NIV)

The reader should ask the question: Why does the psalmist move from general to special revelation? Goldingay (*Psalms*, vol. 1, maintains that vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-13 were two separate psalms later collated into one psalm. I disagree. I believe the psalm is a unit.

Main Idea: The witness of God in creation and revelation should bring us to repentance of sin and faith in the true God.

I. God's Glory in Creation (vv. 1-6)

- A. Present Everywhere
- B. Clearly Seen by Every Human Being
- C. Bearing Witness to His Moral Perfection Found in His Word

II. God's Glory in His Word and Its Benefits (vv. 7-11)

- A. Perfect—Reviving Our Souls (v.7a)
- B. Trustworthy—Making Us Wise (v.7b)
- C. Morally Right—Giving Joy to the Heart (v. 8a)
- D. Radiant and Clear—Enhancing Perspective (v. 8b)
- E. Pure and Enduring—Giving Eternal Life (v. 9a)
- F. Sure—Defining Righteousness (v. 9b)
- G. Precious—Defining True Value (v. 10a)
- H. Sweet—Producing Happy Emotions (v. 10b)
- I. Cautious and Promising (v. 11)

III. The Proper Response to God's Glory in Creation and Revelation (vv. 12-14)

- A. Repentance toward Hidden Sins (v. 12)
- B. Repentance toward Willful Sins (v. 13a)
- C. Desire to Be Blameless and Pleasing to the Lord (v. 13b-14)

Psalm 147

Praise the LORD.

- | | | |
|---|----------|----------|
| How good it is to sing praises to our God, | a | |
| how pleasant and fitting to praise him! | | b |
| ² The LORD builds up Jerusalem; | c | |
| he gathers the exiles of Israel. | | d |
| ³ He heals the brokenhearted | e | |
| and binds up their wounds. | | f |
| ⁴ He determines the number of the stars | | |
| and calls them each by name. (Psalm 147:1-4 NIV) | | |

Developing parallelism in which the second line extends the thought of the first line.

2. Contrasting (Antithetic) Parallelism—the opposite thought or meaning occurs in the second line (or verse). Line one (or the first verse) contrasts with line two (or the second verse). The word, **but**, usually occurs at the beginning of line two (or the second verse) as an indication of contrast.

²Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." *Selah*

³**BUT** you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. (Psalm 3:2-3 NIV)

Notice the **but**. This *adversative conjunction* sets up the contrast between v.2 and v. 3.

⁶You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.

⁷**BUT I**, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. (Psalm 5:6-7 NIV)

¹⁰Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹**BUT** let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. (Psalm 5:10-11 NIV)

The LORD examines the righteous,
BUT the wicked and those who love violence **his soul hates.** (Psalm 11:5 NIV)

We have all been taught that although God hates the **sin**, he loves the **sinner**. There is some truth in this in that God loves the sinner as His creation made in His image. Moreover, he has compassion on all sinners who later become saints through His grace. Nevertheless, the wickedness and violence of sinners earns God's just hatred and revulsion. They are opposed to everything that God essentially is: holiness, justice, and truth. Moreover, how can we somehow separate the sin from the sinner? Sin is meaningless without the agent of sin? How can the sin of lying exist without the one who speaks lies? How can there be the sin of murder without the murderer, etc. Speaking under the inspiration of Scripture, and setting the example of holy revulsion against sin, David says, "Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?"²² I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies." (Ps. 139:21-22 NASB)

However, the Christian must also place other passages side by side with these which clearly teach us to love sinners. "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (Matt. 5:43-45 NASB) God's goodness to sinners is the divine example for us to follow in order for us to call ourselves "sons".

It is possible for God to love sinners and hate them at the same time. This is clear from the fact that before Christians were converted to Christ and forgiven of their sins, God hated them as sinners but loved them at the same time as His elect people. "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, even as the rest. (Eph. 2:3 NASB) "Children of wrath" are children **under** wrath, the wrath of God against sinners. Just as love and hate are simultaneously possible with God, so also with Christians. We should love sinners as God's image and desire their conversion; but we are permitted to hate them as enemies of God and dangerous to the proclamation of his kingdom. When we pray imprecatory prayers (see below) against such people, we are not praying for personal vengeance, but for protection from harm, for the ongoing progress of the gospel, and for truth and justice. We should love what God loves and hate what God hates, and this would include people.

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood,¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil,¹⁹ A false witness *who* utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19 NASB)

Five of the things which the Lord hates are synecdoche, a part representing the whole. **Haughty eyes** represent the proud person. A **lying tongue** represents a liar. **Hands** represent a murderer. **Heart** represents a deceiver or anyone who plots evil. **Feet** represent people who are always

getting into evil of some kind or another. The last two mention the actual persons: a **false witness** and **one who spreads strife**. Therefore, all of these **seven things** represent people who sin, not abstract sins. God hates all of them. If we are that kind of person, God hates us; and the only solution to this hatred is to repent of our sins and plead for His mercy. If we do this, we will be abundantly pardoned. But if we fail to repent, we are warned of God's wrath.

God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day. ¹² If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. ¹³ He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts. (Ps. 7:11-13 NASB)

(For a thorough investigation into this subject, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 460-463 and *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pp. 338-343).

Other antithetic parallelism.

You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
BUT the LORD is their refuge. (Psalm 14:6 NIV)

You save the humble
BUT bring low those whose eyes are haughty. (Psalm 18:27 NIV)

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
BUT we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:7 NIV)

The lions may grow weak and hungry,
BUT those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. (Psalm 34:10 NIV)

A righteous man may have many troubles,
BUT the LORD delivers him from them all; (Psalm 34:19 NIV)

For evil men will be cut off,
BUT those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. (Psalm 37:9 NIV)

³⁷ Consider the blameless, observe the upright; there is a future for the man of peace.

³⁸ **BUT all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off.** (Ps. 37:37-38 NIV)

3. Developing (Synthetic) Parallelism—the second line develops and completes the thought of the first line. There is therefore an *extended or expounded thought* in the second line of the parallelism.

Psalm 5 A psalm of David.

Give ear to **my words**, O LORD,
consider **my sighing**.

² Listen to **my cry for help**,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.



A¹

The thought in the second line is an extension or exposition (explanation) of the first line: The addition of the words, **my cry for help and for to you I pray**. Furthermore, the psalmist expands on his address to the Lord with **my king and my God**. There is further extension in v. 3 with **In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation**. Thus, he is *developing* the thought of the first line (v. 1). There is also confidence: **You hear my voice and in expectation**.

³ *In the morning*, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
 and **wait in expectation**.

⁴ You are **not a God who takes pleasure in evil**;
 with you the wicked cannot dwell.

⁵ The arrogant **cannot stand** in your presence;
 you **hate all who do wrong**.

⁶ You **destroy** those who tell lies;
bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD **abhors**.

B¹

Note also the developing parallelism in vv. 4-6. **Not a God who takes pleasure...cannot dwell...cannot stand...you hate...destroy...abhors**. There is quite a step from not taking pleasure in someone and abhorring and destroying someone.

⁷ **But** I, by your great mercy, **will come** into your house;
 in reverence **will I bow down** toward your holy temple.

A²

⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies—
 make straight your way before me.

Returns to the confidence of A¹.
 Notice that this confidence is not in himself, but in God's **great mercy**.

⁹ Not a word from **their mouth** can be trusted;
their heart is filled with destruction.
Their throat is an open grave;
 with **their tongue** they speak deceit.

B²

David uses **synecdoche**, a part for the whole, to indicate that the wicked are thoroughly corrupt in heart and in speech.

¹⁰ **Declare them guilty**, O God!
 Let their intrigues be their downfall.
Banish them for their many sins,
 for they have rebelled against you.

C¹

Meaning block C¹ is a **development** or **synthesis** from B¹ and B². In B¹ and B², he simply states the fact that the wicked cannot stand in God's presence and then gives a further description of them. But in C¹ he calls down the wrath of God upon them. This is known as an **imprecation**.

¹¹ **BUT** let all who take refuge in you be glad;
 let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
 that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

A³

¹² For **surely**, O LORD, you bless the righteous;
 you surround them with your favor as with a shield. (Psalm 5:1-12 NIV)

A³ is a return to the positive expectation of the righteous man who takes refuge in God. It is also a continuing contrast. He calls for God's blessing rather than His wrath.

The psalm as a whole unit shows **Contrasting (Antithetic) Parallelism**. The parallelism consists of blocks of meaning, not lines. Meaning block A¹ (confident **expectation of being heard**) contrasts with Meaning block B¹ (the **expectation of God's judgment** on the wicked). Meaning block A² returns to the positive confidence of A¹ in contrast with B¹ (note the word, **but**). B² returns to the negative description of the wicked. Thus, there is an ABAB parallelism followed by another A³ at the end.

One more thing must be pointed out. Notice how Psalm 5 contributes to the overall *theme* of the Psalms found in Psalm 1. There is striking similarity.

Psalm 1—A psalm which establishes the primary theme for the whole psalter, the antithesis between the righteous and the wicked. The following is a suggested analysis of the NASB translation.

	How blessed	A	
	is <u>the man</u>	B	
Antithesis	who does not walk		C
	<u>in</u> the counsel of the wicked,		D
	Nor stand		C
	<u>in</u> the path of sinners,		D
	Nor sit		C
	<u>in</u> the seat of scoffers!		D
	² But his delight is		C
	<u>in</u> the law of the LORD,		D
	And <u>in</u> His law		D
	he meditates day and night.		C
	³ <u>He</u>	B	
	will be like a tree		
	<i>firmly</i> planted by streams of water,	A	
Blessings	<i>Which yields its fruit in its season</i>		E
	<i>And its leaf does not wither;</i>		E
	<i>And in whatever he does, he prospers.</i>		E
	⁴ <u>The wicked</u>	B	
	are not so,	A	
	But <u>they</u>	B	
	<i>are like chaff</i>		
	<i>which the wind drives away.</i>		E
			Curses
	⁵ Therefore <u>the wicked</u>	B	
	<i>will not stand in the judgment,</i>		E
	Nor <u>sinner</u> s	B	
	<i>in the assembly of the righteous.</i>		E
	⁶ For the LORD knows	A	
	the way of the righteous,		D
	But the way of the wicked		D
	will perish.		

Psalm 7 A *shiggaion* of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.

O LORD my God, I take refuge in you;
save and deliver me from all who **pursue me**,
² or they **will tear me like a lion**
and **rip me to pieces** with no one to rescue me.

Save and deliver me...is an extension from **I take refuge in you**. Furthermore, **they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces** is a development or extension from **all who pursue me**. It is one thing to be chased, but another to be chased by people who want to rip you to pieces!

³ O LORD my God, if I have done this
and *[if implied]* there is guilt on my hands—

⁴ if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me

If I have done evil to him who is at peace with me is a development from **if I have done this** and *[if]...there is guilt on my hands*. Also, **let my enemy pursue and overtake me** is developed with **let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust**.

or without cause have robbed my foe—

⁵ then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;

let him trample my life to the ground
and make me sleep in the dust. *Selah*

⁶ Arise, O LORD, in your anger;
rise up against the rage of my enemies.
Awake, my God; decree justice.

Rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice develops the first line, **Arise, O Lord, in your anger**.

⁷ Let the assembled peoples gather around you.

Rule over them from on high;

⁸ let the LORD judge the peoples.

Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness,
according to my integrity, O Most High.

The last four lines of vv. 7-8 develop the thought of the first line of v. 7. They are not mere repetitions, but expositions or explanations of the first line. Let God judge those who are assembled around Him, including me!

⁹ O righteous God,
who searches minds and hearts,
bring to an end the violence of the wicked
and make the righteous secure.

¹⁰ My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart.

¹¹ God is a righteous judge,
a God who expresses his wrath every day.

¹² If he does not relent,
he will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.

¹³ He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he makes ready his flaming arrows.

Note the development in vv. 11-13. God is not only a righteous judge who daily expresses His anger against sin, but He does not cease doing so nor does He ever soften toward unrepented sin. Rather, He prepares His weapons which will be used against the wicked. He is sharpening His sword, stringing His bow, and dipping His arrows in flammable liquids to shoot flaming arrows at the wicked. Upon hearing the prayer of the righteous, God goes into action—preparing to do battle against the wicked on behalf of the righteous. Verses 11-13 are also an extension of vv. 9-10 in which the psalmist prays for God to **bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure**. He has confidence that God **saves the upright in heart**. Now, in vv. 11-13, the psalmist describes God's answer to his prayer.

4. Climactic Parallelism (also known as Repetitive or Staircase Parallelism)—One or more elements from the first line are repeated in the second (or third) line and the **main emphasis** or

climax comes at the **end** of the second line. Climactic parallelism most often comes at the end of a strophe or a grouping of lines which form a unit within the poem.

Psalm 24 (NIV)

⁷Lift up your heads, O you gates; A
be lifted up, you ancient doors, B A
that the **King of glory** may come in. C

⁸Who is this **King of glory**? D
The LORD strong and mighty, E B
the LORD mighty in battle. F

²Lift up your heads, O you gates; A
lift them up, you ancient doors, B A
that the **King of glory** may come in. C

¹⁰Who is he, this **King of glory**? D
The LORD Almighty— E B The climax
he is the King of glory. *Selah* F

Verse 7 begins a *strophe* (a grouping of lines forming a unit). The climactic parallelism will come at the end of this strophe.

Notice the repetition of words, **King of glory** and **the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle**. Then there is the repetition of the question, **Who is this king of glory?** which reaches a climax in v. 10, **Who is he, this king of glory?** followed by the answer every worshiper is waiting for, **The Lord Almighty, he is the King of glory.**

II. The Classification of Psalms (p. 230, Wolvaardt; cf. McNeill, *Hermeneutics*; p. 86).

A. Laments

The psalmist may be troubled by (1) his own thoughts and actions, (2) the actions of others against him (the “enemies”), or (3) he may be frustrated by God himself. It is possible for a psalm to contain all three of the elements listed above. Psalm 42 and 43 very likely are a single psalm. Evidence for this is found in the common refrain found in both psalms (42: 5, 11; 43: 5). The psalmist is troubled by his own thoughts and actions in the three verses just mentioned. He complains about his enemies in 42: 3, 10; 43: 1, 2b; and he feels abandoned by God in 42: 9; 43: 2a (Longman, pp. 26-27).

Elements of a Lament

Seven elements may be found in laments although seldom will all seven be found in the same one (Longman, p. 27). These may not occur in the order they are listed here.

1. Invocation
2. Plea to God for help [1. and 2. may be considered together]
3. Complaints
4. Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
5. Curse of enemies (imprecation)
6. Confidence in God’s response
7. Hymn or blessing

1. Individual laments (Psalm 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71)

Psalm 22 (NIV)

For the director of music. To *the tune of* "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.

My God, my God,

[first invocation]

*why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?*

[first lament against God]

² **O my God,**

[second invocation]

*I cry out by day,
BUT you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.
³ YET you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel.
⁴ In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
⁵ They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*

[second lament against God]

Break or space between the strophes in most translations

I once viewed vv. 3-5 as an *expression of confidence*. However another possibility (offered by Silas McNeill and Santulinus Ekada) is that David is *still* complaining. He essentially says, "You have delivered our fathers in the past; therefore, why don't you deliver me now in the present?" In light of God's willingness to deliver in the past, David is now confused at God's apparent absence. Notice the word **yet**—relationship between syntactical parts—which presents a contrast between what God did for the **fathers** and what He seems to be doing now. All the major translations use a **yet** or a **but** to indicate this contrast.

⁶ **BUT** I am a worm and not a man, [a]
 scorned by men [b]
 and despised by the people. [c]
⁷ All who see me mock me; [d]
 they hurl insults, shaking their heads: [e]

Stairstep or climactic parallelism. A type of what happens to Christ on the cross.

⁸ "**He** trusts in the **LORD**; [a]
 let the **LORD** rescue *him*. [b]
 Let **HIM** deliver *him*, [b]
 since *he* delights in **HIM**." [a]

<p>Chiastic structure in which the middle lines are synonymous and the first and last lines are synonymous.</p>
--

[first lament against the actions of others]

<p>Break between strophes.</p>

The quotation of Matthew's gospel inclines me to interpret v. 8 differently from that above.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, ⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:41-43 NASB)

From this quotation, the chief priests are interpreting **If He delights in him** as God delighting in Christ, not Christ delighting in God. They are saying, "If God delights so much in Jesus, then let Him rescue Jesus." Obviously, they thought that God **did not** delight in Jesus and would allow him to perish. And God did allow Jesus to perish. But when Jesus rose from the dead, the chief priests went to great lengths to cover it up. They could not believe it despite the overwhelming evidence.

Therefore, a different structure is necessary. The NASB 1995 is used which may indicate a climactic parallelism.

"Commit *yourself* to the LORD;
 let Him deliver him;
 Let Him rescue him,
 because He delights in him." (Ps. 22:8 NASB)

⁹ **YET YOU BROUGHT ME OUT OF THE WOMB;** [a]
YOU MADE ME TRUST IN YOU [a]
 even at my mother's breast [b]
¹⁰ From birth I was cast upon you; [b]
 from my mother's womb [b]
YOU HAVE BEEN MY GOD. [a]

[second lament against God]

The *chiastic* structure and repetition of vv. 9b-10 emphasizes the close relationship David has had with God since the time he was born. Like vv. 3-5 above, this is also a continuation of the *lament*. Paraphrased, "I have never consciously known a day when I did not trust in you; therefore, why won't you help me?" David was a covenant child whose father and mother taught him about the covenant Lord from birth. This does not, however, insulate the child of God from trouble and persecution—contrary to the "health and wealth gospel".

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

[first supplication]

Break between strophes.

¹² **Many bulls** [a]
surround me; [b]
strong bulls of Bashan [a]
encircle me. [b]
¹³ **Roaring lions** tearing their prey [a]
open their mouths wide against me. [b]
[second lament against the actions of others]

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted away within me.*
¹⁵ *My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
YOU lay me in the dust of death.*

[third lament against God]

¹⁶ **Dogs** [a]
have surrounded me; [b]
a band of evil men [a]
has encircled me, [b]
they [a]
have pierced my hands and my feet. [b]
¹⁷ I can count all my bones;
people [a]
stare and gloat over me. [b]
¹⁸ **They** [a]
divide my garments among them [b]
and cast lots for my clothing. [b]

[third lament against the actions of others]

¹⁹ **BUT you, O LORD,** a
do not forsake me. b
Break between strophes.
O my Strength, a
come quickly to help me. b
²⁰ Deliver my life b

Continuing lament (complaint) concerning men's actions against him (vv. 12-13). (Note the **ababab** parallel.)

Lament against God continues in vv. 14-15 concluding with **You** [not they] **lay me in the dust of death**. David recognizes that what men do to him is the result of God's **providence and permission**. If God could not control men, why should David pray to God for deliverance? This recognition refers us back to the initial complaint against **God**, "Why have **you** forsaken me?"

Note the *simile*, "like water", in v. 14. Verses 14-15 are also a **developing parallel** with a possible **climax** in v. 15b, **you lay me in the dust of death**. David feels that his life is ebbing away (slowly being extinguished), and his despair is climaxed in the conclusion that God has forsaken him.

"Dogs" is a reference to pagan Gentiles. The reader will readily recognize this psalm as a type of the crucifixion of Christ during which he was surrounded by mocking Jews and Gentile Roman soldiers.

Note the **but** which helps the reader relate the parts of the lament to one another. This is the second **supplication** (plea for help) which is a **developing parallel** from the first supplication in v. 11. (Notice the different fonts or lettering.

Further, vv. 20-21 is a development or extension of v. 19, **come quickly to help me**. That is, **help me escape from the sword, from the power of the dogs...from the mouth of lions...from the horns of the wild oxen**.

Notice that the last three dangers are metaphors. He is not talking about animals, but

→

from the sword, c
 [deliver] my precious life b

→

from the power of the dogs. c
²¹ Rescue me b

→

from the mouth of the lions; c
 save me b

→

from the horns of the wild oxen. c

[second supplication]

²² I will declare your name [a]
 to my brothers, [b]
 in the congregation [b]
I will praise you. [a]

Notice the subject “I”, verb forms (**will declare; will praise you**), prepositional phrases and the objects of prepositions (**to my brothers, in the congregation**). All of these grammatical elements help us see the stylistic features and structure of poetry.

²³ You who fear the LORD, [c]
 praise him! [d]

All you descendants of Jacob, [c]
 honor him! [d]

Revere him, [d]
all you descendants of Israel ! [c]

[first call to praise]

The **conclusion** of the lament, in this case, is a hymn of thanksgiving or praise. Verses 22-24 might also be interpreted as another **confession of trust**. David is praising the Lord ahead of time for what he interprets as sure deliverance based upon God’s actions in the past (vv. 3-5; note the past tense verbs). But I believe the section is actually the beginning of the conclusion—a *hymn of praise*.
 The structure for this *hymn of praise* is the following: (1) a call to praise; vv. 22-23 (2) reasons for praise; v. 24 (3) further call to praise; vv. 25-27. The second call to praise is followed by (4) another reason for praise; v. 28.

²⁴ **FOR** he has not despised or disdained [a]
 the suffering of the afflicted one; [b]

he has not hidden his face [a]
 from him [b]
BUT has listened [a]
 to his cry for help. [b]

[first reason for praise]

Notice the **For** of v. 24 indicating a syntactical relationship—in this case, a reason for praise. **For** occurs again in v. 28 introducing a second reason for praise. **For** indicates reason or explanation. Backward arrows indicate past tense verbs.

Break between strophes.

²⁵ From you comes the theme of my **praise** in the great assembly;
before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows.

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
they who seek the LORD will **praise** him—
may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember and **turn** to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations will **bow down** before him,

[second call to praise]

²⁸ **FOR** dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before
him—those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—
for he has done it.

Note the **for**, a
reason indicator.

[second reason for praise]

Psalm 42 (NIV)

For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

¹As the deer [a]
pants [b]
for streams of water, [c]
so my soul [a]
pants [b]
for you, O God. [c]
²My soul [a]
thirsts [b]
for God,
for the living God. [c]

Note the *simile* in v. 1 using **as--As the deer pants...**Panting means breathing heavily and rapidly. Here, it is used figuratively of the psalmist's strong desire for God. Another metaphor is used in v. 2, **thirsts**. Verse 2 is a *developing parallel* from v. 1 that further extends and develops the thought of desiring God. **For the living God** [d] develops **for God** just before it.

When can I go and meet with God? is *not* a rhetorical question. The psalmist seriously questions God's presence in his situation. **Theology**—This is the purpose of laments. They are inspired expressions of the sense of forsakenness which God's people often experience.

[invocation—calling upon God]

WHEN can I go and meet with **God?** [a]
³ My tears have been my food
day and night, [b]
WHILE men say to me [c]
all day long, [b]
“**WHERE** is your **God?**” [a]

[first lament concerning men's actions]

The **when** and the **while** are syntactic indicators showing the *temporal* (time) relationship between **My tears have been my food** and **men say to me**. The psalmist is suffering severe emotional pain while his enemy taunts him, **Where is your God?** In other words, “Because of your bad circumstances, God must not be here. He must have abandoned you!” The questions: **When?** and **where?** and the temporal markers **day and night** and **all day long** provide the parallels.

⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I **USED TO GO** with the multitude,

LEADING the procession to the house of **God**,
WITH SHOUTS of joy and thanksgiving
AMONG the festive throng.

[second lament concerning his own thoughts]

Break between strophes

⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in **God**, for I will yet praise **him**,
my **Savior** and⁶ my **God**.

[first confession of trust and first hymn of praise]

Inclusion

My soul is downcast within me;

[third lament concerning his own thoughts]

THEREFORE I will remember **you**

from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—
from Mount Mizar.

[second confession of trust]

⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of **your** waterfalls;
all **your** waves and breakers have swept over me.

[fourth lament concerning God's actions]

⁸ By day the **LORD** directs **his** love,
at night **his** song is with me—a prayer to the **God** of my life.

[third confession of trust and second hymn of praise]

Used to go is another *temporal indicator* showing that the events of v. 4 are no longer true.

Note the *stair-step, climactic parallelism* emphasizing the anguish of his soul as he remembers better times.

Rhetorical questions demanding a certain answer. The psalmist already knows the answer to these questions. They are found in v.5b—He is not putting his trust where it belongs, in God.

Verse 5 forms the introduction of an *inclusion* which includes vv. 6-10

Verses 5-7 contains *lament, confession of trust*, and a *hymn of praise*. The psalmist is beginning to “preach the gospel to himself” the moment he asks, **Why are you downcast, O my soul?...** He then discerns the answer to his despair—not to run *from* God but to run *to* Him. Note also the syntactic relationship indicator, **therefore**. He says to himself, “I am downcast, **therefore**, the only remedy for my despair is to remember God’s lovingkindness in spite of His severe providence (vv. 5-7).

Note the *metaphor* in v. 7. The psalmist likens the severe providences of God to wave after wave of rapid waters rolling over him and threatening to drown him. Therefore, he complains to God that His providence may prove to be his undoing. He may not be able to survive any more calamities. God’s providence is often like this—severe rather than pleasant—and sometimes we don’t know how much more we can endure (cf. Job 23: 14).

Break between strophes

⁹ I say to **God my Rock**, “Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”
¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long, “**WHERE is your God?**”

Notice the repetitive refrains, **all day long** and **Where is your God?** (vv. 3, 9)

[fourth lament concerning God’s actions and men’s actions]

Inclusion

Break between strophes

¹¹ Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in **God**,
for I will yet praise **him**, my **Savior** and my **God**.

[fourth confession of trust and third hymn of praise]

Notice the repetitive strophe that forms an **inclusion** with v. 5. The inclusion places a bracket around vv. 6-10. This inclusion is the **emphasis of the whole psalm**. Whenever we feel abandoned by God, we must preach to ourselves, assuring ourselves that external circumstances do not indicate that we are abandoned. Each psalm of lament will vary in organization but will have some or all the elements listed above.

Originally, Pss. 42 and 43 were one psalm. Examine Ps. 43 for many repetitions from Ps. 42.

2. Corporate Laments (Psalms 12, 44, 80, 94, 137; Wolvaardt, p. 231; also Ps. 60, McNeill, *Hermeneutics*).

Psalm 22 is an **individual** lament dealing with David’s personal feelings of forsakenness. Some laments, however, are concerned with God’s dealings with the **corporate nation** of Israel; therefore, the interpreter must determine which elements of Israel’s situation would apply to the corporate congregation, the church. Psalm 60 concerns defeat in battle which David interprets as the judgment of God and the rejection of Israel. You will notice the historical heading at the beginning of the Psalm. Read **2 Sam. 8** and **1 Chr. 18** for the incidents which may have given rise to this Psalm. The difference is that these narratives give no hint of any defeat. For a discussion of this difference, see Leupold, cited below. **Although the headings of the Psalms are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, we do well to pay attention to them and trust them as historically accurate.** H.C. Leupold, one of the greatest expositors of the Psalms, makes the following remark concerning the heading of the Psalm 60 which is applicable to other headings:

The heading of the psalm, which consists of two verses, is a very helpful guide in the interpretation of this prayer. It again deserves to be accepted as being correct as the headings of *all* the psalms are (H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 447; emphasis mine).

He also makes this remark about headings at the beginning of his book.

We arrive at the conclusion that, when a heading claims that the psalm in question is associated with some such event, that possibility *dare not be lightly thrust aside but may be accepted as long as there is no conflict between the claim and the contents of the psalm*. By way of illustration we may refer to the following psalms as involving such situations: 3, 46-48, 51, etc.” (Leupold, p. 8; emphasis mine).

Psalm 60 (NIV)

For the director of music. To *the tune of* "The Lily of the Covenant." A *miktam* of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

*You have rejected us, O God,
AND burst forth upon us;
you have been angry—*

Lament

NOW *restore us!*

Supplication

² *You have shaken the land
and torn it open;*

Lament

*mend its fractures,
for it is quaking.*

Supplication

³ *You have shown your people desperate times;
you have given us wine that makes us stagger.*

Lament

Break between strophes

⁴ **BUT** for those who fear *you*,
you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow. *Selah*

Confession of trust

⁵ *Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.*



Supplication

The *invocation* is subtle and is included in the first part of the *lament*. The corporate lament begins in the first verse with David's *complaint* followed immediately by *supplication*. Remember that he is in the heat of battle (see heading for historical context), and his urgency is reflected here. In contrast to the repetitive *me* in Ps. 22, notice the repetitive *us* in this psalm. Not David personally, but Israel, has been rejected. **Theology**—Notice that David's complaint is not about Satan, but about God. It is not Satan, but God, who is in control of the battle; and if things are going poorly, God is the one who must be sought. Notice the number of times *you, my, mine* occurs in the psalm.

A **banner** was a long pole with an emblem on top. Roman banners were metal, but the word **unfurled** in this psalm indicates a flag representing the nation. It was used to rally the troops during battle. When the troops saw that the banner was visible, there was still hope for victory.

⁶ **God** has spoken from his sanctuary:
 “In triumph **I** will parcel out Shechem
 and measure off the Valley of Succoth.
⁷ Gilead is **mine**, and Manasseh is **mine**,
 Ephraim is **my** helmet, Judah **my** scepter.
⁸ Moab is **my** washbasin,
 upon Edom **I** toss my sandal;
 over Philistia **I** shout in triumph.”
⁹ Who will bring me to the fortified city?
 Who will lead me to Edom?
¹⁰ Is it not **you, O God**,
you who have rejected us
 and no longer go out with our armies?

Confession
of Trust

David now perceives that God has answered his supplication favorably and will now trounce (utterly defeat) the enemies of Israel. Tossing the **sandal** upon Edom is symbolic of gaining Edom as Israel’s possession (Leupold). Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, Judah, etc. were tribes and territories of Israel which belonged to God, and He was not willing to give them up.

Notice the *rhetorical question* in v. 9-10. David is convinced that God will once again go out with the armies of Israel.

**¹¹ Give us aid against the enemy,
 for the help of man is worthless.** Supplication

¹² With **God** we will gain the victory,
 and **he** will trample down our enemies. Confession of Trust

David petitions God for help, or else all is lost. He does not imply that God will miraculously destroy the enemy without Israel fighting; but rather, that no human effort will be adequate unless God is fighting **for** Israel (cf. Ps. 20: 7; Isa. 31: 1). God’s word does not encourage passivity against evil, but active faith (Eph. 6).

B. Thanksgiving Psalms (Wolvaardt, p. 231; McNeill, *Hermeneutics*)

In many laments, the psalmist makes a promise to God that he will give thanks to Him if God will hear his prayer and deliver him from the present distress (Ps. 6, 13). This should not be interpreted as bargaining with God, as if to say, “God, give me this, and then I will praise you, but not before” (cf. 1 Thes. 5: 18). Rather, the psalmist promises to acknowledge the specific answers to prayer: “Lord, grant my request; and I will remember to praise you for it.” The thanksgiving psalm is the psalmist’s response to answered prayer, so there is a close connection between the lament and the psalm of thanksgiving. In the thanksgiving of Ps. 18, there is a restatement of the lament found in vv. 4-5 along with the acknowledgement that his lament was heard and his prayer answered (vv.6-19) (Longman, pp. 30-31).

Other examples of thanksgiving psalms are Pss. 32 and 34 which have the following structure (Harman, p.29):

1. Praise of the Lord, or Blessing
2. Testimony to God’s goodness in his life
3. Often there is a lament
4. Description of God’s salvation

Psalm 32 (NIV)

Of David. A *maskil*.

- (1) ¹*Blessed* [a]
 is he [b]
 (2) *whose transgressions* [c]
ARE FORGIVEN. [d]
 (3) *whose sins* [c]
are covered. [d]
 (4) ²*Blessed* [a]
 is the man [b]
 (5) *whose sin* [c]
THE LORD DOES NOT
COUNT AGAINST HIM [d]
 (6) AND in *whose* spirit [c]
IS NO DECEIT. ³ [d]

David begins with a pronouncement of blessing. **Theology**—The man who is *truly* forgiven is not the man who merely *asks* for forgiveness, but the one who is *sincere and honest* in his repentance and who demonstrates the fruit of repentance (cf. Lk. 3: 7-14).

Note the parallels: **transgressions** and **sins; forgiven, covered, the Lord does not count against. In whose spirit is no deceit** is parallel because it is the fruit of genuine repentance. One can see how the psalms are the *popular theology* of the common people.

[1. blessing and 4. description of God's salvation]

Break between strophes

- (7) ³*When I kept silent,* [a]
 (8) my bones wasted away through my groaning [b]
 (9) all day long. [c]
 (10) ⁴For day and night [c]
 (11) your hand was heavy upon me; [b]
 (12) my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah*

[3. lament]

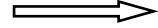
L 7-12 is a *lament*. Line 7 is antithetically parallel to L13—*keeping silent* about my sin rather than *acknowledging my sin*. L14-15 develop the parallel begun in L13. Further, the severe discipline in L8-12 is antithetically parallel to the forgiveness in L16. **Theology**—It is much better to acknowledge our sin; otherwise, we will surely receive discipline from the Lord who will not allow His children to depart from the truth

- (13) ⁵*Then I acknowledged my sin to you* [a]
 (14) AND did not cover up my iniquity. [a]
 (15) I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— [a]
 (16) and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah* [b]

[2. testimony to God's goodness in his life; L13-16]

Break between strophes

⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you



while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.

⁷You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

[2. testimony to God's goodness in his life]

Break between strophes

(24) ⁸I will instruct you and teach you
(25) in the way you should go;
(26) I will counsel you and watch over you.

(27) ⁹Do not be **like** the horse or the mule,
(28) which have no understanding
(29) **BUT** must be controlled by bit and bridle
(30) **OR** they will not come to you.

(31) ¹⁰Many are the woes [a]
of the wicked. [b]
(32) **BUT** the LORD's unfailing love surrounds [a]
the man who trusts in him. [b]

[4. description of God's salvation]

Break between strophes

¹¹Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!
Let's attempt a sermon outline from Psalm 32.

Verse 5 is a **climactic parallel**. **Acknowledged my sin=did not cover up my iniquity=I will confess my transgressions**. L14-15 develop the thought of L13. However, there is a progression of thought from L13 to L15: A, what's more, B.

Therefore refers back to David's previous experience: (1) agony while he kept silent and refused to repent, and (2) forgiveness from God when he finally repented. **Let everyone who is godly pray** is equivalent to "Let everyone who is godly pray the prayer of repentance". The **mighty waters** is a **metaphor** for God's discipline (cf. Ps. 18: 16; 69: 1, 2; 144: 7; cited by Leupold, p. 268). If he repents early, he can avoid unnecessary discipline from the Lord: **they will not reach him**.

In vv. 8-9, David—using the first person pronoun, "I"—is speaking words that he knows God wishes men to hear in the light of his experience. Unlike David—who had to experience severe pain—God wishes men to repent earlier, not later (cf. Leupold, p. 269). Note the **simile of the horse or the mule** which must be **controlled by bit and bridle** because they **have no understanding** of their owner's purpose. If they would obey their masters, painful bits in their mouths would be unnecessary. Likewise, if men had better understanding of God's benevolent purposes, they would obey Him more readily without unnecessary pain and suffering.

Verse 10 is an antithetic parallel which warns the covenant community not to go the way of the wicked which leads to many hardships (**woes**), but to trust God and experience His love and protection.

A call to thanksgiving. Coming at the end of the psalm, it gives the psalm a structure similar to that of the hymn. David's rejoicing is the consequence of his repentance just as his sorrow was the consequence of his refusal to confess his sin

What is the **Main Idea? Genuine repentance is a wonderful experience**. (This indicative—a statement of fact—is proven in the following ways in this psalm.)

I. Blessedness (joy and happiness) comes to the man who truly repents (vv. 1-2).

A. The sins of a truly repentant man will not be held against him.

- B. However, genuine repentance must be honest, or else it is not true repentance.
- II. Repentance requires confession of sin (vv. 3-5).
- A. Confession of sin involves full disclosure of the offense (v. 5—“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.)
 - B. Lack of confession (silence) causes physical and spiritual misery (vv. 3-4).
 - C. But, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 NASB) (v. 5b).
 - D. Forgiveness will not remove the consequences of sin (cf. 2 Sam. 12: 10; 2 Sam. 13—19), but it will remove the guilt of sin and will restore us to fellowship with God (v. 5). (We may assume from the parallels in the text that the physical and spiritual misery of guilt are removed with repentance.)
- III. Repenting sooner is better than repenting later. Do not be a “Christian mule” (vv. 6-10).
- A. Genuine repentance must be through humble prayer (v. 6a).
 - B. God may hide himself from those who persist in unrepented sin (v. 6a, “while you may be found”).
 - C. God’s discipline will be restrained toward those who repent early but may be severe for those who persist in sin (vv. 6b-7; “mighty waters” is a metaphor for discipline). For example, what would have happened in David’s case if he had repented of adultery before having Uriah murdered? Would Amnon have raped Tamar? Would Absalom have murdered Amnon? Would Absalom have rebelled against David and been murdered by Joab? All these curses are predicted by Nathan the prophet in 2 Sam. 12: 10. Such questions raise the issue of God’s foreordination and man’s responsibility. God has foreordained all things that come to pass, but we can never sweep man’s responsibility out the door at the service of God’s sovereignty. Both are taught in Scripture.
- IV. Genuine repentance brings rejoicing and the joy of salvation (v. 11).

Excursus: The importance of getting the main idea from any text or genre of Scripture (Psalms, Epistles, Narratives, etc.) cannot be underestimated. Its importance has been argued for centuries by skillful preachers and speakers; therefore, it is not a western gimmick or trick that has nothing to do with preaching in the African context. African or American, we are all simply human beings with the same brain cells who only process ideas when they are made understandable by the communicator. Haddon W. Robinson says,

A novice may dismiss the importance of a central idea as the ploy of homiletics professors determined to press young preachers into their mold. It should be noted, therefore, that this basic fact of communication also claims sturdy biblical support. In the Old Testament, the sermons of the prophets are called “the burden of the Lord.” These proclamations were not a few “appropriate remarks” delivered because the man of God was expected to say something. Instead the prophet addressed his countrymen because he had something to say. He preached a message, complete and entire, to persuade his hearers to return to God. As a result the sermons of the prophets possessed both form and purpose. Each embodied a single theme directed toward a particular audience in order to elicit a specific response (Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, pp. 35-36).

Robinson’s book on preaching is the most important book you could ever read on the art of sermon preparation. It is the primary homiletics textbook in many US seminaries.

But the importance of getting the main idea is not simply Robinson's emphasis. Earlier (p. 35) Robinson quotes J.H. Jowett who says,

I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study. To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon (*The Preacher: His Life and Work*, p. 133).

Every sermon should also have an outline. On the importance of an outline, Robinsons says,

While content may exist without form, structure provides a sermon with a sense of order, unity, and progress. Certainly no sermon ever failed because it possessed a strong outline.

An outline therefore serves at least four purposes. First, it clarifies in the speaker's eye and mind the relationships between the parts of a sermon. Second, the speaker views his sermon as a whole and thereby heightens his sense of unity. An outline also crystallizes the order of ideas so that the listener will be given them in the appropriate sequence. Finally, the preacher recognizes the places in the outline requiring additional supporting material to develop his points (*Biblical Preaching*, p. 128).

After hearing eleven years of African preaching, my opinion is that African preachers often fail at these two important tasks: (1) finding the **main idea** of the chosen text, and (2) **outlining** the preaching text to reveal its structure. Consequently, sermons often lack structure, coherence, and unity.

Now, back to OT poetry. **B. Thanksgiving Psalms** (continued)

Psalm 65 (NIV)

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

¹**Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled.**

²**O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.**

³When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.

⁴**Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!**

We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

⁵**You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness,**

O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas,

⁶*who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength,*

⁷*who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.*

⁸*Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.*

⁹You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly.

The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.

¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.

¹² The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.

¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

The reader will recognize **three** of the following elements which are typical of a thanksgiving psalm.

1. **Praise of the Lord or a blessing**
2. Testimony to God's goodness in his life
3. Lament (absent in this psalm)
4. *Description of God's salvation*

As you can see, it is very difficult to distinguish between the three of the categories (**1, 2, and 4**). Don't worry too much about this. Just look for these things in order to identify a psalm of thanksgiving. Generally speaking, **2** pertains to God's temporal benefits and blessings while **4** pertains to salvation from sin (v. 3) or from one's enemies (vv. 5b-8).

Psalm 18 For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

I love you, O LORD, my strength. ² *The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.* ³ *I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.*

⁴ The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. ⁵ The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. ⁶ In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

Verses 4-5 contain a lament followed by God's answer to his prayer in v. 6. The entire psalm is thanksgiving for his deliverance. Furthermore, the description of God's salvation is especially evident in vv. 1-3. In the following verses (vv. 19-27), David makes a strong assertion of innocence which is sometimes included in laments (see elements of laments above).

¹⁹ He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me. ²⁰ The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. ²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. ²² All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. ²³ I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. ²⁴ The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. ²⁵ To the **faithful** you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, ²⁶ to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the **crooked** you show yourself shrewd. ²⁷ You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

Theology: Such statements should not be interpreted as evidence of David’s self-righteousness. Notice that the superscription dates this psalm when God delivered David from Saul. David was innocent of any misdealing with Saul, and on two occasions spared his life. Therefore, he is speaking of his righteousness and innocence only in a **relative** sense and in context with his relationship to Saul. He is not claiming sinless perfection any more than Job claims sinless perfection (Job 23: 12). Although only Jesus Christ is perfectly innocent and righteous, the Bible makes distinctions between those who are called “righteous” (**faithful**) and those who are called “wicked” (**crooked**). If such distinctions did not exist, then these biblical terms would be meaningless. Moreover, “the righteous” in the OT does not refer to those who possess the righteousness of Christ, a NT concept which is presented in the OT in types and shadows. The terms refer to those who possess experiential, practical righteousness as evidence of genuine faith. In the OT as well as the NT, “faith without works is dead”.

Psalm 107 (NIV)

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

[1. Praise of the Lord]

²Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, ³ those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

[4. description of God’s salvation]

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. ⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.

[3. Lament]

⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

[4. description of God’s salvation]

⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men,

[1. Praise of the Lord]

⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

[2. Testimony to God’s goodness in his life]

¹⁰ Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, ¹¹ for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. ¹² So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.

[3. Lament]

¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. ¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains.

[4. Description of God’s salvation]

¹⁵ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men,

[1. Praise of the Lord]

¹⁶ for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.

[4. Description of God's salvation]

¹⁷ Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. ¹⁸ They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

[3. Lament]

¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. ²⁰ He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

[4. Description of God's salvation]

²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. ²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.

[1. Praise of the Lord]

²³ Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. ²⁴ They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. ²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. ²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. ²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end.

[3. Lament]

²⁸ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. ²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.

[4. Description of God's salvation]

³¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.

³² Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.

[1. Praise of the Lord]

³³ He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, ³⁴ and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. ³⁵ He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; ³⁶ there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. ³⁷ They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; ³⁸ he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish.

[2. Testimony to God's goodness in his life]

³⁹ Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; ⁴⁰ he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste.

[3. Lament]

⁴¹ But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. ⁴² The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.

[4. Description of God's salvation]

⁴³ Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.

[1. Praise of the Lord]

C. Hymns of Praise (Wolvaardt, p. 147; *Hermeneutics*, p. 85).

We have discussed hymns earlier under **laments** since laments commonly have **hymns of praise** in response to God's answer to prayer. They are characterized by joyful praise of the Lord. The basic structure of the hymn includes the following:

1. Call to praise
2. Reasons why God should be praised
3. Further (final) calls to praise

Psalm 111 (NIV)

Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

[1. Call to praise]

² Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. ³ Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴ He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate. ⁵ He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. ⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. ⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. ⁸ They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness. ⁹ He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name.

[2. Reasons for praise]

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

[3. Final call to praise]

Psalm 148 (NIV)

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. ² Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. ³ Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,

[1. Call to praise]

for he commanded and they were created. ⁶ He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.

[2. Reasons for praise]—notice the “for”, a reason indicator

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, ⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, ⁹ you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, ¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, ¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, ¹² young men and maidens, old men and children. ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,

[1. Call to praise]

for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. ¹⁴ He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart.

[2. Reasons for praise]—notice the “for”

Praise the LORD.

[3. Final call to praise]

Psalm 149 (NIV)

Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. ² Let Israel rejoice in their

Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. ³ Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.

[1. Call to praise]

⁴ **For** the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. ⁵ Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. ⁶ May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, ⁷ to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, ⁸ to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, ⁹ to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints.

[2. Reasons for praise]—notice the “for”

Praise the LORD.

[3. Final call to praise]

Psalm 104 (NIV)

^{1a} Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God,

[1. Call to praise]

^{1b} you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. ² He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent ³ and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. ⁴ He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. ⁵ He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. ⁶ You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. ⁷ But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; ⁸ they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. ⁹ You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.

¹⁰ He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. ¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. ¹² The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. ¹³ He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. ¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: ¹⁵ wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. ¹⁶ The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. ¹⁷ There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. ¹⁸ The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney [rock badgers]. ¹⁹ The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. ²⁰ You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. ²¹ The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. ²² The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. ²³ Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. ²⁴ How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. ²⁶ There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. ²⁷ These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. ³⁰ When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. ³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

[2. Reasons for praise]—the works of God in creation and providence

³³ I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.

[3. Further call to praise]

³⁵ But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.

[Imprecation—not usually part of a hymn; therefore, I have not given the imprecation a letter.]

Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.

[3. Final call to praise]

D. Salvation History Psalms—(also known as Psalms of Remembrance)

(Wolvaardt, p. 231; *Hermeneutics*, p. 87; note, the revised list of elements from p. 87 is found below)

1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history
2. Focusing attention particularly on the Exodus from Egypt
3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises
4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites
5. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant curse for Israel's disobedience
6. Doing this to call forth praise or to encourage future generations to trust in the Lord

Psalm 105

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.² Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.⁴ Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

[Notice that this psalm resembles the psalm of thanksgiving. Were it not for the specific emphasis on Israel's history and God's covenant faithfulness, it could be classified as such.]

⁵ Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, ⁶ O descendants of Abraham his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones. ⁷ He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history]

⁸ He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, ⁹ the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. ¹⁰ He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: ¹¹ "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."

[3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises]

¹² When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, ¹³ they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. ¹⁴ He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: ¹⁵ "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." ¹⁶ He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; ¹⁷ and he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave. ¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, ¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true. ²⁰ The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. ²¹ He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, ²² to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom. ²³ Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham. ²⁴ The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, ²⁵ whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants. ²⁶ He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen. ²⁷ They performed his miraculous signs among them, his wonders in the land of Ham. ²⁸ He sent darkness and made the land dark—for had they not rebelled against his words? ²⁹ He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die. ³⁰ Their land teemed with frogs, which went up into the bedrooms of their rulers. ³¹ He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country. ³² He turned their rain into hail, with lightning throughout their land; ³³ he struck down their vines and fig trees and shattered the trees of their country. ³⁴ He spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number; ³⁵ they ate up every green thing in their land, ate up the produce of their soil. ³⁶ Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their manhood. ³⁷ He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered. ³⁸ Egypt was glad when they left, because dread of Israel had fallen on them. ³⁹ He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night. ⁴⁰ They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. ⁴¹ He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history 2. Focusing attention particularly on the Exodus from Egypt]

⁴² For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham.

[3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises]

⁴³ He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy; ⁴⁴ he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for—

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history]

⁴⁵ that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws.

[6. Doing this to call forth praise or to encourage future generations to trust in the Lord]

Praise the LORD.

[Again, an element of a thanksgiving psalm and the hymn. Do not let this confuse you. Not every psalm that has the admonition to “praise the Lord” should be classified as a hymn or thanksgiving psalm. Clearly, the *main emphasis* of this psalm is the *remembrance* of God's mighty deeds of the past as confirmation of his covenant promises to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.]

Psalm 78 (NIV)

A *maskil* of Asaph.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—³ what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history]

⁴ We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. ⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, ⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. ⁷ Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history 6. Doing this to call forth praise or to encourage future generations to trust in the Lord.]

[Immediately we recognize the direction in which the psalmist is heading. The history lessons of past (notice the past-tense verb, “has done”) must not be forgotten by the future generations of Israel lest they drift into idolatry. Sadly, this is exactly what happened except for a small remnant of the nation (see below). The same can happen to individual churches and denominations. Forgetfulness can ruin a church or denomination.]

⁸ They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him. ⁹ The men of Ephraim, **though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle;** ¹⁰ they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. ¹¹ They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.

[4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites—In vv. 9-11, the psalmist begins to present specific examples of covenant unfaithfulness.]

[If I were preaching from this text, I would bridge the gap between Israel and the church by drawing attention to the church's covenantal unfaithfulness in spreading the gospel by word and deed. The conquest of Canaan by the twelve tribes is an OT *type* of the missionary expanse of the church and the recapturing of the earth from the wicked through the dominion of God's people. This process will not be complete until the return of Christ, but the church is commanded in the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations which is essentially Christ's "war-cry" to conquer the world in the triune name of God. Now that Christ has shed His own blood for the nations, there is no need to shed any more blood. What *is* needed are Christ's ambassadors proclaiming peace by means of repentance and faith. Although the church has succeeded in its missionary task in many ways, it has failed to do all it *could have done* in foreign and domestic missions. **Though armed with bows**—namely, the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit, the great commission and the promise of his presence and authority in **Matthew 28: 18-20**, plus material and human resources—the church in many ways **has turned back on the day of battle**, choosing instead a comfortable lifestyle (cf. *Haggai*) and the cultural status quo (the way things are) in its respective cultures. May we be faithful in finishing the task of "conquering Canaan" with the gospel of righteousness in Christ and good deeds.]

¹² He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. ¹³ He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. ¹⁴ He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. ¹⁵ He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; ¹⁶ he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history 2. Focusing attention particularly on the Exodus from Egypt]

¹⁷ But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. ¹⁸ They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. ¹⁹ They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert?" ²⁰ When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?" ²¹

[4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites]

When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, ²² for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

[5. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant curse for disobedience.]

[This may sound strange to the modern evangelical, but habitual disobedience is a sign of unbelief. Unbelief, in turn, calls forth the judgment of God—a judgment which He "promises" in Deut. 27—28. For a NT example of this concept, refer to my commentary on 2 Tim. 2: 13 in which I follow the interpretation of William Hendriksen, *2 Timothy*, who says that the phrase, "He remains faithful" means that God must remain faithful to His covenant curse against those who are persistently faithless. This is borne out by the parallelism in the text and the context of the whole letter to Timothy. Paul repeatedly warns Timothy of apostasy and encourages him to endure in the faith.]

It is a trustworthy statement:

In the text, **He also will deny us** is a synonymous parallel to **He remains faithful**. The text certainly cannot mean that if we are persistently faithless (i.e. if we fail to **endure**), He will give us eternal life. Paul is speaking of persistent faithlessness, not an occasional

For if we died with Him,	A	
we will also live with Him;		B
¹² If we endure,	A	
we will also reign with Him;		B
If we deny Him,	A	
He also will deny us;		B
¹³ If we are faithless,	A	
He remains faithful,		B
for He cannot deny Himself.		

²³ **Yet** he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; ²⁴ he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. ²⁵ Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. ²⁶ He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. ²⁷ He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. ²⁸ He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. ²⁹

[3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises.]

[God is a God of grace, and even when we are unfaithful, He often blesses us anyway. Such kindness should lead us to repentance (Rom. 2: 4), not license. In this case, His kindness to the Israelites did not result in repentance, and the very thing they craved became a curse to them (see below).]

They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved. ³⁰ But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, ³¹ God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel. ³² In spite of all this, they **kept on sinning**; in spite of his wonders, **they did not believe**. ³³ So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror.

[5. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant curse for disobedience]

[Notice: God did not curse Israel because they occasionally sinned, but because sinning was their primary way of life. They were characteristically sinful and disobedient. John Murray says, "There is a difference between sin living in the believer and the believer living in sin." Believers still have remaining sin in their lives, but they do not live persistently in sin. Sin has no dominion over the believer.]

³⁴ Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. ³⁵ They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.

[6. Doing this to call forth praise or to encourage future generations to trust in the Lord]

³⁶ But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; ³⁷ their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.

[4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites]

³⁸ Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. ³⁹ He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

[3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises]

⁴⁰ How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! ⁴¹ Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.

[4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites]

⁴² They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, ⁴³ the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan. ⁴⁴ He turned their rivers to blood; they could not drink from their streams. ⁴⁵ He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them. ⁴⁶ He gave their crops to the grasshopper, their produce to the locust. ⁴⁷ He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet. ⁴⁸ He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning. ⁴⁹ He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility—a band of destroying angels. ⁵⁰ He prepared a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague. ⁵¹ He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham. ⁵² But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert. ⁵³ He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. ⁵⁴ Thus he brought them to the border of his holy land, to the hill country his right hand had taken. ⁵⁵ He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes.

[1. Retelling the great events in Israel's history 2. Focusing attention particularly on the Exodus from Egypt]

⁵⁶ But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes. ⁵⁷ Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow. ⁵⁸ They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.

[4. Stressing covenantal unfaithfulness of the Israelites]

⁵⁹ When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. ⁶⁰ He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. ⁶¹ He sent *the ark of his might* into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. ⁶² He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. ⁶³ Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; ⁶⁴ their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep.

[5. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant curse for disobedience]

⁶⁵ Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. ⁶⁶ He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame. ⁶⁷ Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; ⁶⁸ but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. ⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. ⁷⁰ He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; ⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. ⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

[3. Stressing the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises]

E. Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation (Wolvaardt, p. 231; *Hermeneutics*, p. 89)

1. Royal Psalms (Kingship Psalms) (*Hermeneutics*, p. 89)

The characteristics of kingship psalms are the following (but not all of them will be present in every psalm):

- a. Assertion that the Lord ('Yahweh') reigns
- b. God's rule was from of old
- c. God's rule is not only over Israel but the whole world
- d. In Zion the God of Israel is extolled as universal king

Psalm 2 (NIV)

¹Why do the **nations** conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
²The **kings of the earth** take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the **LORD**
and against his Anointed One.
³"Let us break their chains," they say,
"and throw off their fetters."
⁴The One **enthroned in heaven** laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
⁵Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶"I have installed my King on **Zion**, my holy hill."

c. God's rule is not only over Israel but the whole world. This is not plainly stated here but is implied. The kings of the earth are uniting together to rebel against God's rule over them. Rebellion implies a sovereign God against whom men rebel.

c. God's rule is not only over Israel but the whole world (note: **enthroned in heaven**)
d. In Zion the God of Israel is extolled as universal king

⁷I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:

He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

⁸Ask of me, and I will make the **nations** your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

¹⁰Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you **rulers of the earth**.

¹¹Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.

¹²Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry
and you be destroyed in your way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

c. God's rule is not only over Israel but the whole world

Based on my observations, I would add the following to the list of characteristics of kingship psalms (but again, not all of them are present in every kingship psalm):

e. God's rule is a rule of justice and righteousness, the kind of rule which should characterize any earthly kingdom, especially the kingdom of Israel (Note the analysis below of Psalm 72)

Psalm 72 (NIV)

Of Solomon.

¹Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. ² He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. ³ The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. ⁴ He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. ⁵ He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. ⁶ He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. ⁷ In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. ⁸ **He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.** ⁹ **The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust.** ¹⁰ **The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts.** ¹¹ **All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.** ¹² For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. ¹³ He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. ¹⁴ He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. ¹⁵ Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. ¹⁶ Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. ¹⁷ May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. **All nations will be blessed through him**, and they will call him blessed. ¹⁸ Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. ¹⁹ Praise be to his glorious name forever; **may the whole earth be filled with his glory.** Amen and Amen. ²⁰ This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

Suggestions for preaching this psalm:

God's universal reign of justice, righteousness, and kindness to the helpless is the primary theme of Psalm 72; and this kind of reign should be imitated by Solomon of whom David writes. In the end, Solomon failed to be the kind of king described in this psalm, but the psalm typifies the righteous reign of Jesus Christ, the perfect king who is concerned for the needy and brings justice for the oppressed. Unlike human kings, presidents, and prime ministers, He is incorruptible. You would need to preach this psalm as the prophetic description of the messianic king, Jesus Christ, whose reign is in contrast to all other human kings. Passages such as Daniel 2 would be helpful in filling out this contrast—the universal and eternal reign of Christ in contrast to the temporary reign of men. Daniel 7 and the Revelation of John describe the kingdoms of men as beasts which devour others rather than bringing justice.

Psalm 45: 1-7 (NIV)

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*. A wedding song.

¹My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer. ²You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. ³Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. ⁴In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. ⁵Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; **let the nations fall beneath your feet.** ⁶Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; **a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.** ⁷You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy

[There is an emphasis here on justice, righteousness, and truth. Another emphasis is the universal reign of God over the nations.]

Psalm 97 (NIV)

The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. ²Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. ³Fire goes before him and **consumes his foes on every side.** ⁴His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. ⁵The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, **before the Lord of all the earth.** ⁶The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. ⁷All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols—worship him, all you gods! ⁸Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O LORD. ⁹For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. ¹⁰Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. ¹¹Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. ¹²Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.

[Again, there is an emphasis upon the righteous reign of the Lord whose judgments are welcomed and whose reign provides protection from the wicked (v. 10). Further, notice how many times the name, Lord (Yahweh), occurs in the psalm—(a) the assertion that the Lord ('Yahweh') reigns.]

Psalm 98 (NIV)

¹Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. ²The LORD has made his salvation known and **revealed his righteousness to the nations.** ³He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; **all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.** ⁴Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; ⁵make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, ⁶with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the LORD, the **King.** ⁷Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. ⁸Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; ⁹let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 101

Of David. A psalm.

I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing praise.² I will be careful to lead a blameless life—when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart.³ I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.⁴ Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil.⁵ Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure.⁶ My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.⁷ No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.⁸ Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.

[The emphasis in this psalm is the righteous rule of David as a **type** of the perfect rule of Christ. Notice that in v. 4 there is the implication that David's counselors and advisors would be righteous men. **I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the Lord** implies the authority of a king, as well as the phrase, **No one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence**—that is, stand in the presence of the king. As all earthly kings, David failed to live up to this psalm. He surrounded himself with godless men like Joab, who did not obey him, and Ahithophel, who betrayed him. But even Christ, the perfect antitype of David, placed a traitor in his midst, Judas Iscariot, the antitype of Ahithophel. The psalm points us to the consummation of Christ's kingdom, not its inauguration, when no **men of perverse heart** will be present in the kingdom of God. The **faithful in the land will dwell** with Christ and all who are faithless and evil will be banished from the city (cf. Rev. 21: 23-27; 22: 14-15).

Only **he whose walk is blameless will minister** to King Jesus in the consummate kingdom of God on earth. Therefore, the kingship psalms must be studied in relation to their **typological value**. *What do they say concerning the kingdom of Christ on earth at the consummation?* On a practical level, what do they say about the kind of leadership which should exist in the church and in nations?]

2. Covenant renewal liturgies (Wolvaardt, p. 231) (cf. Ps. 50, 81, 132)**Psalm 89 (NASB)**

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

¹ <u>I will sing</u>	[a]	
of the <i>lovingkindness of the LORD</i>		[b]
forever;		[c]
<i>To all generations</i>		[d]
<u>I will make known</u>	[a]	
<i>Your faithfulness</i>		[b]

with my mouth. [a]
² For **I have said.** [a]
 “Lovingkindness **will be built up** [b]
 forever; [c]
In the heavens [d]
 You will establish [a]
 Your faithfulness.” [b]

Note the underlined words, **I will sing; I will make known; with my mouth; For I have said; You will establish [a]**. These are the subjects and verbs. **Lovingkindness** and **faithfulness** although different, are parallel to one another [b]. **To all generations** and **In the heavens** are both the sphere or location—on earth and in heaven—in which God’s lovingkindness and faithfulness will be sung, made known, built up, established. **Forever** indicates the time in which the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord will be made known and established. In the first part of the psalm, Ethan (the psalmist) is singing of the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord; but in the last part, God Himself is sovereignly establishing His lovingkindness and faithfulness in the heavens. Ethan’s song, therefore, is not wishful thinking; it is based on the sovereign and immutable activity of God which cannot be overturned.

This is one possibility, but only one among many ways of seeing this psalm. Discerning the structure of a psalm is not an exact science, and you will frustrate yourself by attempting to find the “perfect” interpretation of structure. Nevertheless, by attempting to discern the structure and parallelism in the psalm, you are forced to study it carefully, noting every word, phrase, and how each word and phrase fits with every other word and phrase in the psalm. Below is another possibility which is based purely on the parallel between **lovingkindness** and **faithfulness**.

- (1) I will sing of the **lovingkindness** of the LORD forever; a
 (2) To all generations I will make known Your **faithfulness** with my mouth. b
 (3) ² For I have said, “**Lovingkindness** will be built up forever; a
 (4) In the heavens You will establish Your **faithfulness**.” b

³ “I have made a covenant [a]
 with **My chosen;** [b]
I have sworn [a]
 to **David My servant,** [b]
⁴ I will establish [a]
 your seed [b]
 forever [c]
And build up [a]
 your throne [b]
 to all generations.” [c]

Verse 3 is a reference to the everlasting covenant made with David and his dynasty in 2 Samuel 7, particularly vv. 13-16. Thus, in context with vv. 1-2, the **lovingkindness** and **faithfulness** of the Lord refers to the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord to **David and his dynasty** (his extended kingdom).

Selah. Selah may mean, “pause”.

In these two verses, I have indicated a parallel between **forever** and **to all generations**. This change from [d] to [c] may beg the question of whether the meaning indicators of vv. 1-2 should be changed. Once again, this is not an exact science. The important thing is the final interpretation. The psalmist is praising God for his covenantal faithfulness to David by establishing his dynasty **forever** both **in the heavens** and on earth **to all generations**. Since David died, then how could his kingdom be extended to all generations *in heaven and on earth*. Obviously, the psalm is typologically fulfilled in the descendent of David who was both God and man (Acts 13: 32-38). Furthermore, while Christ is now reigning in heaven, He will one day return to reign on earth (Rev. 11: 15).

⁵ *The heavens*

will praise Your wonders, O LORD;
 Your faithfulness also [will be praised—implied]
 in the assembly of the holy ones.

[a]

[b]

[b]

[a]

Heavens is synonymous with (similar to) **the assembly of the holy ones**. **Wonders** and **faithfulness** are attributes of God and are therefore parallel [b].

The third line demonstrates an *ellipsis* in which a word or phrase is left out in order to bind two thoughts more closely together. In this case, **will be praised** is left out. The thought can be supplied as follows: “The heavens will praise your wonders, O LORD; your faithfulness also *will be praised* in the assembly of the holy ones.” Verse 5 can be broken down further. Note the following arrangement:

⁵ *The heavens*

will praise
 Your wonders,
 O LORD;
 Your faithfulness
also [will be praised—implied]
 in the assembly of the holy ones.

[a]

[b]

[c]

[d]

[c]

[b]

[a]

By doing it this way, you can see more clearly the *chiastic* arrangement which contains the *middle element* [d].

⁶ *For who in the skies*

is comparable to the LORD?
 Who among the sons of the mighty
 is like the LORD,

[a]

[b]

[a]

[b]

⁷ A God greatly feared
 in the council of the holy ones,

[a]

[b]

And awesome
 above all those who are around Him?

[a]

[b]

⁸ O LORD God
 of hosts,

[a]

[b]

Verses 6-8 complement v. 5. The script (lettering) shows the similarity between **the heavens** and **the assembly of the holy ones** (v. 5) with **the sons of the mighty** and **the council of the holy ones** (vv. 6-7) and the heavenly **hosts** (v. 8). Note the reason (**For**) why God is praised in the heavens among the **holy ones**. Even the mighty angelic **hosts** cannot be compared with God.

Note also the connection between **your faithfulness** in v. 8 and in v. 5. God’s faithfulness **surrounds** God much like the angelic hosts surround Him.

Take note of the series of *chiastic* arrangements in vv. 5-8, which are

who [a]
is like You, O mighty LORD? [b]
Your faithfulness also [b]
surrounds You. [a]

⁹*You rule* [b]
the swelling of the sea; [a]
When its waves rise, [a]
You still them. [b]

In v. 9, the psalmist has left the dwelling of God *in heaven* and directs his attention to the dwelling of God *on earth*.

Theology—God is *omnipresent*—He is everywhere at once, governing heaven and earth. Jesus reveals that He is one with the God of the OT by stilling the sea (Mk. 4: 39).

¹⁰ You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain; You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. ¹¹ The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it contains, You have founded them. ¹² The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name. ¹³ You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted. ¹⁴ **Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You.** ¹⁵ How blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! O LORD, they walk in the light of Your countenance. ¹⁶ **In Your name they rejoice all the day,** And by Your righteousness they are exalted. ¹⁷ For You are the glory of their strength, And by Your favor our horn is exalted.

[Notice again that the kingdom of God is characterized by **righteousness and justice**, the same things that should characterize the kingdom of men, but seldom do. The kingdom of God is also a kingdom of **lovingkindness** (including mercy to the oppressed) and **truth**.]

¹⁸ For our shield [a]
 belongs to the LORD, [b]
 And our king [a]
 to the Holy One of Israel. [b]

[**Shield** is a *metaphor* for protection. It is also a *metonymy*—the use of the name of one thing for that of another—in this case, the shield is used as another name for the king’s army. The **king** was the protector of the nation. Both army and king belong to the Lord.

Theology—God is sovereign Lord over heaven and earth, including earthly kings (v. 11). If earthly rulers bow to His sovereignty, their nations will be blessed; but if not, they will suffer injustice. In this particular case, the king of Israel **belonged** to God in a special way as the descendent of David and one who inherited the Davidic covenant (See explanation below).]

¹⁹ Once You spoke in **vision** to Your godly ones, And said, “I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.” ²⁰ “I have found David My servant; With My holy oil I have anointed him, ²¹ With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will

strengthen him.²² “The enemy will not deceive him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him.²³ “But I shall crush his adversaries before him, And strike those who hate him.²⁴ “My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, And in My name his horn will be exalted.²⁵ “I shall also set his hand on the sea And his right hand on the rivers.²⁶ “He will cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’²⁷ “I also shall make him *My* firstborn, **The highest of the kings of the earth.**²⁸ “My lovingkindness I will keep for him **forever**, And **My covenant shall be confirmed to him.**²⁹ “So I will establish **his descendants forever** And his throne **as the days of heaven.**

[This strophe is another reference to the everlasting covenant made with David and his dynasty (note the word, **vision** in v. 19 compared with 2 Sam. 7: 17). This is why Bekker refers to this psalm as a “covenant renewal liturgy” (from Wolvaardt, *HTIB*, p. 231). The covenant is ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ who said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent [*in other words, “surrender”*] and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15 NASB). Jesus came to fulfill the promise of the Davidic kingdom. There has been no other Davidic descendent upon the throne of Israel since the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC; therefore, the **covenant** with David is **confirmed** through the everlasting kingdom of Christ. Moreover, the word, **descendants**, has multiple fulfillment. **Descendants** refers not only to the kings of the Davidic line who followed David, but also to the descendants of Christ by faith. In the new heavens and earth, believers will reign as kings over creation, vice-regents under Christ’s authority (cf. Dan. 7: 18, 22, 27; Lk. 12: 32).]

³⁰ “If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments,³¹ If they violate My statutes And do not keep My commandments,³² Then I will punish their transgression with the rod And their iniquity with stripes.³³ “But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.³⁴ “My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.³⁵ “Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.³⁶ “His descendants shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me.³⁷ “It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful.” Selah.

[True to the format of the *covenant renewal liturgy* of Deut. 27—28, there is both **blessing and curse**. The same format is found in the *Davidic Covenant* in 2 Sam. 7: 14-15. Through covenant unfaithfulness, Solomon eventually lost the kingdom through his son, Rehoboam, but because of the everlasting promise to David, God’s lovingkindness did not depart from Solomon like it did from Saul. Typologically, the covenantal promise to David is fulfilled in the promise to Christ in Ps. 2 and Ps. 110. God has already installed His king—Christ Jesus—on Mount Zion; and He will not allow His king to be displaced by another king. His promise is everlasting.]

³⁸ But You have cast off and rejected, You have been full of wrath against Your anointed.³⁹ You have spurned the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown in the dust.⁴⁰ You have broken down all his walls; You have brought his strongholds to ruin.⁴¹ All who pass along the way plunder him; He has become a reproach to his neighbors.⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice.⁴³ You also turn back the edge of his sword And have not made him stand in battle.⁴⁴ You have made his splendor to cease And cast his throne to the ground.⁴⁵ You have shortened the days of his youth; You have covered him with shame. Selah.

[By now, you should recognize this portion of a *kingship psalm* as a *lament* or *complaint*. To the psalmist, the present circumstances of Israel cast a deep shadow of doubt over the covenant promises to David and his descendants. It would even appear that the everlasting covenant had been rendered null and void. Such a dramatic description may indicate a late date for the psalm, perhaps even during the reign of Zedekiah just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC (Leupold, p. 632). It is evident, then, that both the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience were in operation with respect to the Davidic Covenant. All the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were wicked. It fell first in 722 BC. Many of the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah were wicked, including the three sons of Josiah—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, three of the last four kings of Judah (see McNeill, *Major and Minor Prophets*, “Timeline”).

However, even in the face of the disobedience of David’s descendants, God cannot violate His everlasting covenant with David. He has **sworn** by His holiness and **will not lie** to David (vv. 34-35). But God did not swear to keep His promise by restoring the kingdom to a merely human king. Rather, when God finally restores a Davidic descendent to the throne, He is both God and man—the perfect King who will not fail to keep God’s commandments (vv. 30-31).

⁴⁶ How long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? ⁴⁷ Remember what my span of life is; For what vanity You have created all the sons of men! ⁴⁸ What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah. ⁴⁹ **Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, Which You swore to David** in Your faithfulness? ⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, the reproach of Your servants; How I bear in my bosom *the reproach* of all the many peoples, ⁵¹ With which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.

[This is a continuation of the *lament* (note—**how long?**). Unlike most laments, there is no resolution or thanksgiving indicating an answer to the psalmist’s prayer. This, too, may indicate that the psalm was written sometime near the fall of Jerusalem when all hope of restoration was lost. God allowed His sinful people to grope in darkness for 400 years before sending them another Davidic king.]

⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

Verse 52 is the closing doxology of *Book Three* of the Psalms (cf. Ps. 73-89; McNeill, *Hermeneutics*, p. 81). The verse has no connection or context with the rest of the psalm.

3. Songs of Zion (Wolvaardt, p. 231)

Psalm 87 (NIV)

Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.

¹He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; ²the LORD loves the gates of **Zion** more than all the dwellings of Jacob. ³Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: *Selah* ⁴“I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, ‘This one was born in **Zion**.’”⁵ Indeed, of **Zion** it will be said, “This one and

that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.”⁶ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: “This one was born in **Zion**.” *Selah*⁷ As they make music they will sing, “All my fountains are in you.”

Psalm 122 (NIV)

A song of ascents. Of David.

¹I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.” ²Our feet are standing in your gates, **O Jerusalem**. ³**Jerusalem** is built like a city that is closely compacted together. ⁴That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. ⁵There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. ⁶Pray for the peace of **Jerusalem**: “May those who love you be secure. ⁷May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.” ⁸For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.” ⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

F. Wisdom Psalms (Wolvaardt, p. 231; *Hermeneutics*, p. 88)

Harman (pp. 29-30) includes four characteristics of these psalms.

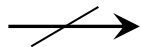
1. Concern for the practical issues of life
2. Clear distinction between the **two ways** which face us in life
3. Struggle with the problem of why the wicked seem to prosper as compared with the righteous
4. Hints that the final solution lies in the life to come

I would add another characteristic:

5. **The law of sowing and reaping** or retributive justice (see McNeill, *Proverbs*). There are blessings for the righteous and curses for the unrighteous—generally true in this life, but invariably true in the life to come. This is also known as the **character-consequence** motif of wisdom literature, particularly the wisdom psalms and Proverbs.

Psalm 37 (NIV) Of David.

¹**Do not fret**

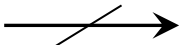


[a]

because of **evil men**

[b]

OR **be envious**



[a]

of **those who do wrong**;

[b]

²**FOR** *like the grass*

[c]

⇒ **they will soon wither**,

[d]

3. Struggle with the problem of why the wicked seem to prosper as compared with the righteous

The arrow with a line through it is a

Note the reason indicator, **For**, in v. 2. The reason we should not be envious of the wicked is because of the certainty of judgment. The arrow is future tense.

The negative imperatives of v. 1 are **antithetically parallel** with the positive imperatives of vv. 3-5. They are labeled [a].

like green plants
they will soon die away.

[c]

[d]

V. 2: 5. The law of sowing and reaping or retributive justice.

³ **Trust in the LORD** and **do good**;

[a]

The arrows are positive imperatives or commands.

dwelt in the land and enjoy safe pasture. [d]

Dwell in the land is antithetically parallel to **will soon die away**. They are marked [d].

⁴ **Delight yourself in the LORD**

[a]

and **he will give you the desires of your heart**. [d]

Verses 3-4: 1. Concern for the practical issues of life 5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive justice—blessings and curses. Note: **Those who delight in the Lord will desire what God desires for them**. God will give such a person the “desires of his heart” because he has the proper desires. Think about this verse in light of the **health and wealth gospel**. Why should God give the ungodly the desires of their hearts when they delight themselves in material things, not the Lord?

⁵ **Commit your way to the LORD**;

[a]

2. Clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life

trust in him

[a]

Verse 5: 5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive justice—blessings and curses

and **he will do this**:

[d]

⁶ **He will make your righteousness shine**

[d]

like the dawn,

[c]

[He will make—implied] the justice of your cause [d]

like the noonday sun.

[c]

Like the dawn and **like the noonday sun** are antithetically parallel with **like the grass** and **like green plants** (v. 2). Labeled [c].

⁷ **Be still** before the LORD

[a]

2. Clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life

and **wait patiently** for him;

[a]

3. Struggle with the problem of why the wicked seem to prosper as compared with the righteous

do not fret

[a]

when men succeed in their ways, [b]

The last line in v. 7 is an *ellipsis*. The imperative verb, **do not fret** is implied. The imperatives of vv. 7 and 8 are parallel to the imperatives of vv. 1-5. **When men succeed in their ways** (i.e. their evil ways) and **carry out their wicked schemes** are synonymously parallel with **evil men** and **those who do wrong** (v. 1) [b].

[do not fret—implied] [a]
when they carry out their wicked schemes. [b]

⁸ **Refrain** from anger [a]
 ↗

and **turn** from wrath; [a]
 ↗

do not fret— [a]
 ↗

it leads only to evil.

1. Concern for the practical issues of life (See Prov. 24: 19-20; Prov. 2: 21-22)
 But notice the context of v. 8. The **for (reason indicator)** in v. 9 indicates that there is no need for anger toward the wicked to consume us, **for** God will eventually **cut off** evil men.

Note the **character-consequence** implications of v. 8b. **Fretting** over evil men will lead us into **evil ways** [b]!

⁹ **FOR** **evil men** [b]
 ⇒

will be cut off, [d]
 →

BUT those who hope in the LORD [b]

will inherit the land. [d]
 →

Inclusion

2. Clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life
4. Hints that the final solution lies in the life to come. Note the future tenses (**will**).
5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive justice—blessing and curse—also known as character-consequence.

This is the first time that the righteous have been referred to in the third person. **Those who hope in the Lord** is antithetically parallel to **evil men** and **those who do wrong** [b].

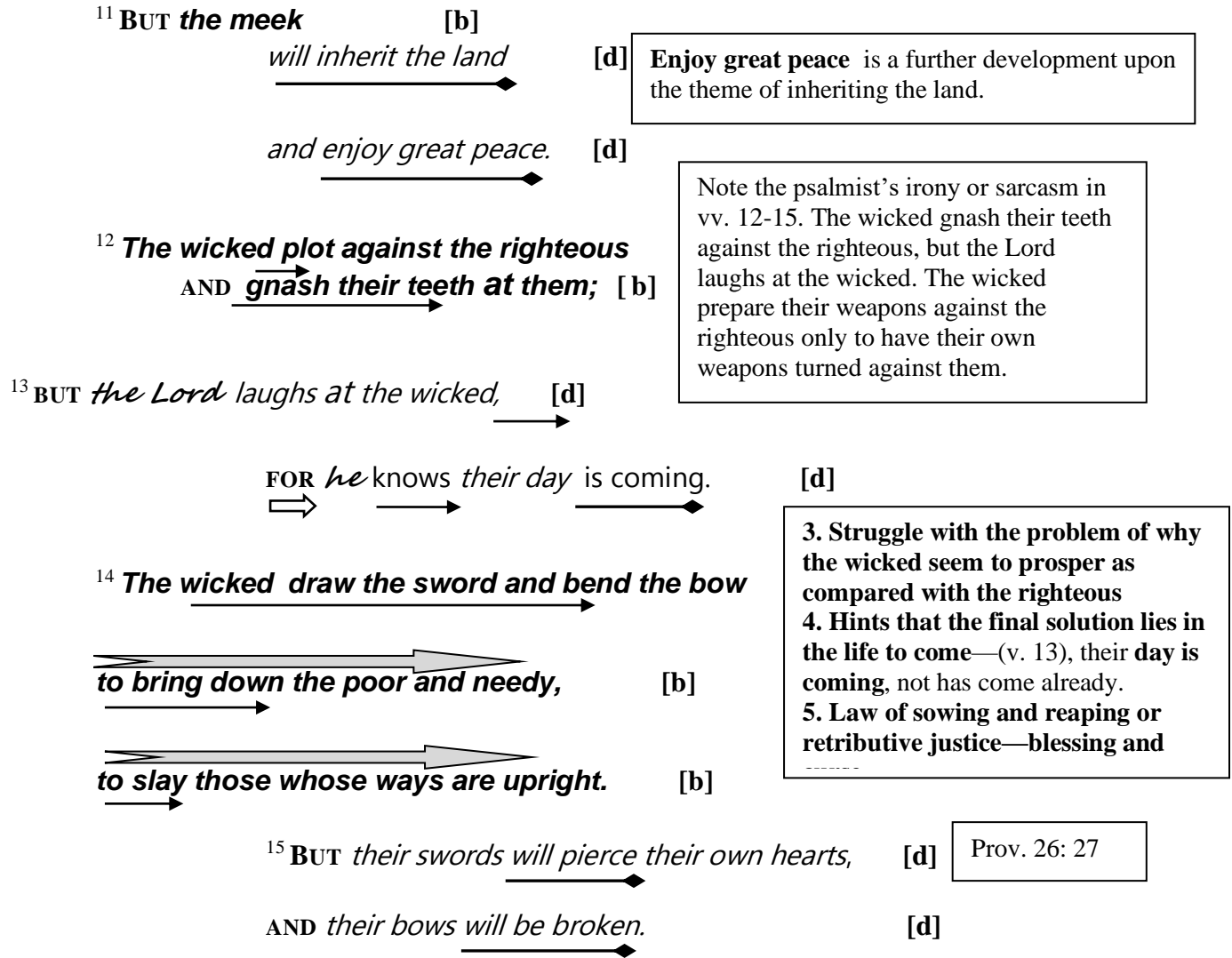
¹⁰ **A LITTLE WHILE,**
 and **the wicked** [b]
will be no more; [d]
 →


Verse 9 marks the beginning of an **inclusion** which “includes” the contents of v. 10. Notice the repetition of the phrase, **will inherit the land**. The whole psalm should be read and preached as a single unit without dividing into parts.

THOUGH YOU LOOK FOR them,
 =
they [b]
will not be found. [d]
 →

As with so much **retributive justice** taught in the Bible, it does not seem to reconcile with the reality of daily life (compare the theology of **Proverbs** with the theology of **Ecclesiastes** and **Job**). Will the meek **really inherit the land and enjoy great peace**? This certainly does not seem to be the case in this world. See Waltke’s comments below. Notice, however, that the verbs **inherit** and **enjoy** are **future**, not present. The promises have a future orientation.

Inclusion



 This shaded arrow represents a purpose clause. **To bring down** and **to slay** are both purposes of the wicked; thus, I have placed a *purpose indicator symbol* above them. Note that all the [d]'s are character-consequence clauses, also known as retributive justice or the law of sowing and reaping. The [b]'s are the actions of the wicked or the righteous. The psalm shows the contrast between **the wicked** and **those who hope in the Lord**. It encourages the righteous not to envy the wicked and thus fall into their wicked ways.

Note the *antithetic parallels* throughout this psalm, as well as the irony. **The wicked plot against the righteous but the Lord laughs at the wicked** while they plot. **The wicked** (implied subject) **gnash their teeth** at the righteous in anticipation (looking ahead) of harming them, but the Lord **laughs** in anticipation of punishing the wicked. **Their day is coming** may be a reference to temporal punishment in this life, but most likely it is a reference to the final day of judgment in which retributive justice—the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6: 7-8; Ps. 1; Matt. 16: 27)—finds its absolute fulfillment. Therefore, in the *wisdom psalms* as in *Proverbs*, we see a correction to Qohelet's (the preacher's) statement, "It is the **same** for **all**. There is **one fate** for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean...as it is for the

good man, so it is for the sinner...” (Ecclesiastes 9:2 NASB; cf. Job 9: 22). Qohelet allowed the exceptions to the *rule*—the *rule* being **Psalm 1**—to dominate his thinking. But though we admit the exceptions, we live our lives according to *the general rule which on the day of judgment will become absolute*—*God will bless the righteous and punish the wicked.*

¹⁶ **Better** the little that the righteous have [a]
than the wealth of many **wicked**; [b]
¹⁷ **FOR** the power of the **wicked** will be broken, [b]
BUT the LORD upholds the righteous. [a]

Here, I have abandoned the labeling of vv. 1-15. I'm getting a headache keeping up with the parallels. Nevertheless, I hope the reader sees the value of labeling the parallels which helps you understand the meaning of the psalm. Interpretation is the whole point of determining the structure.

4. Hints that the final solution lies in the life to come.

The student has probably noticed how much the *wisdom psalms* resemble the *Proverbs*. The *better-than proverbs* read exactly like this wisdom psalm (cf. Prov. 12: 9; 15: 1-16; 16:8; 17: 1; 19: 1; see also McNeill, *Wisdom Literature*).

¹⁸ The days of the blameless are known to the LORD,
 and their inheritance will endure forever.

¹⁹ In times of disaster they will not wither;
 in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

²⁰ But the wicked will perish:
 The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields,
 they will **vanish**—
vanish like smoke.

5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive justice (See Ps. 1: 6; Ps. 139: 1-2 for other examples of being **known** to the Lord. The Lord does not simply know about us, but knows us intimately.

Verse 20b is an example of *climactic parallelism* or *repetitive parallelism*.

²¹ The wicked borrow and do not repay, [a]
 but the righteous give generously; [b]
²² those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, [a]
 but those he curses will be cut off. [b]

1. Concern for the practical issues of life

2. Clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life

Examples of other proverbial sayings: For vv. 23-24, see Prov. 12: 28; 2: 21-22. *Wisdom psalms* read like the typical

²³ If the LORD delights in a man's way,
 ➡
 [then—implied] he makes his steps firm;
 ➡
²⁴ though he stumble, [yet—implied] he will not fall,
 ➡ ➡ ➡
 for the LORD upholds him with his hand.
 ➡

V. 23—If...then conditional statement
 Vv. 24-25—Contra-expectation

²⁵ [Although—implied] I was young and now I am old,

2. Clear distinction between the two ways which face us in life 4. Hints that the final solution lies in the life to come.

Obviously, there are exceptions to vv. 25-26 which should be understood; otherwise, all children begging bread would be considered the children of the wicked. Both verses use *hyperbole*—**never, always**. The general rule, however, should not be cast aside because of the exceptions. The righteous love their children more, and take



yet I have **never** seen the righteous forsaken
 or their children

begging bread.

²⁶ They are **always** generous and lend freely;
 their children

will be blessed.

²⁷ Turn from evil and do good;
 then you will dwell in the land forever.

²⁸ For the LORD loves the just
 and will not forsake his faithful ones.
 They will be protected **forever**,
 but the offspring of the wicked will be **cut off**;

²⁹ the righteous will **inherit the land**
 and dwell in it **forever**.

³⁰ The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom,
 and his tongue speaks what is just.

³¹ The law of his God is in his heart;
 his feet do not slip.

³² The **wicked** lie in wait for the **righteous**,
 seeking their very lives;

³³ but the LORD will not leave them in their power
 or let them be condemned when brought to trial.

³⁴ Wait for the LORD and keep his **way**.
 He will exalt you to **inherit the land**;
 when the wicked are **cut off**, you will see it.

³⁵ I have seen a wicked and ruthless man
flourishing like a green tree in its native soil,
³⁶ **but** he soon **passed away and was no more**;
 though I looked for him, **he could not be found**.

³⁷ Consider the blameless, observe the upright;
 there is a **future** for the **man of peace**.

³⁸ But all **sinner**s will be destroyed;

Note the emphasis on being **cut off** from the land
 and **inheriting the land** (cf. vv. 9, 22, 28, 34, 38)

This is a reference to covenantal blessing or curse;
 hence,

**5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive
 justice—blessing and curse** (cf. Deut. 27: 2-3; 28:
 8, 20-21, 63; Ex. 20: 12).

Living in the land of promise was symbolic of
 salvation and blessing. Thus, to **inherit the land**
 and **dwell in it forever** was interpreted as a blessing
 which transcended earthly existence; therefore, **4.**
Hints that the final solution lies in the life to come
 (For v. 30, see Prov. 10: 31; 18: 4; 2: 6). Inheriting
 the land was also typical of inheriting eternal life
 and the new heavens and earth.

**2. Clear distinction between the two ways
 which face us in life**

**3. Struggle with the problem of why the
 wicked seem to prosper as compared with the
 righteous**

**5. Law of sowing and reaping or retributive
 justice—blessing and curse**

See vv. 2 and 10. Though they may flourish
 for a while, they will soon wither. There is
 much similarity here with Ps. 73: 1-20.

**2. Clear distinction between the two ways
 which face us in life**

**4. Hints that the final solution lies in the life to
 come**

the **future of the wicked will be cut off.**

³⁹ The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

⁴⁰ The LORD helps them and delivers them;
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Do these two verses promise more than they can deliver? Some liberal scholars would say so since it is evident that many righteous people are **not** delivered from the wicked in this life. See the lengthy quotation below from Bruce Waltke on similar texts in *Proverbs*.

[“Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?”, *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 910-913, Bruce K. Waltke; bold italic emphasis, except for “**I AM**”, and bold italics in brackets are mine. This is a long, difficult quotation but well worth reading. Read it many times to understand it.]

These heavenly promises of life, health, prosperity, and honor seem detached from earth’s harsh realities. The promises seem false to human experience under the sun, as Job (9:22-23) and Qoheleth (Eccl. 9: 2-3) complain, and contrary to sound doctrine. Eliphaz resolves the conflict by the doctrine of original sin (Job 4: 17), but the narrator of Job disallows the argument (1: 8), and so does **I AM [Yahweh]** (42: 7). Solomon, however, adds to the covenant obligation in Proverbs 3:1-10 that **I AM** disciplines those he loves (Prov. 3: 11-12), probably to motivate a person to keep his covenant obligations to make him or her fit to experience covenant blessings. If anyone should reckon that Solomon and other sages [*wise men*] are dullards [*stupid people*] who cannot see or think straight, let them recall that keen observation and cogent reflection mark the sage. Kenneth Aitken takes an exceptional misstep when he suggests the sages were too optimistic in their promises: “There is a strong suspicion here Israel’s sages have confused their belief about what **ought to be the case with what actually is the case.**” Von Rad goes further, suggesting Qoheleth accuses the sages of so-called “old wisdom” of becoming “entangled in a single false doctrine.” James G. Williams shares that opinion: “His [*Qoheleth’s*] primary mode of presentation of contrasting proverbs... is in order to contradict traditional wisdom.” These solutions deconstruct with Proverbs, which calls for truthful speech, and the canon, and so undermine Christ’s and his apostles’ claims that all Scripture is inspired of God, who does not author confusion, and that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10: 35; 1 Cor. 14: 33; 2 Tim. 3: 16).

The popular evangelical solution that these are **probabilities**, not promises, though containing an element of truth, raises theological, practical, and psychological problems by stating the matter badly. According to this wording **the human partner is expected to keep his obligation perfectly** (Prov. 3: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9), **but God may keep his imperfectly** (3:2, 4, 6, 8, 10). In truth, however, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful” (2 Tim. 2: 13) [**but see Hendriksen’s interpretation of this NT passage**]. Moreover, a sober person would like to know the probabilities, and a psychologically well person could scarcely trust the **I AM** with all his heart (Prov. 3: 5), knowing God **usually, but not always**, keeps his obligations.

Other steps, however, can be taken toward a resolution. First, the promises are partially validated **by experience**. The sober, not the drunkard (cf. Prov. 23: 29-35), the cool-tempered, not the hothead (15: 18; 19: 19; 22:24; 29: 22), and the diligent, not the sluggard, **usually** experience health and wealth.

Second, the epigrammatic nature [short and to the point] of the proverbs often cause the audience to overlook the counterproverbs that qualify these promises. “There are many proverbs,” says Raymond Van Leeuwen, “that assert or imply that the wicked prosper...while the innocent suffer.”...The wicked has treasures gained by wickedness for a season (10: 2a), but they will not deliver him from death (10: 2b). At that time the wicked’s craving will be frustrated (10: 3b). In contrast, the righteous one who is afflicted at death will be delivered from death (10: 2b) and be fed (10: 3a). The several “better-than” proverbs assume the reality that *at present* the wicked have material presents and the righteous do not: “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (cf. Prov. 16: 8, 19; 17:1; 19: 1, 22; 21: 9, 19; 22: 1; 25: 24; 28: 6; Ps. 37: 16; Eccl. 4: 6). *Without these qualifying sayings, one could legitimately accuse Solomon of being guilty of spouting half-truths.*

Third, the genre effect of being a primer [a basic reader] on morality for youth cause Proverbs *to focus on a future when the righteous rise, not on a present when they fall*: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down in calamity” (Prov. 24: 16). “Seven” symbolizes completeness, like the “count of ten” in boxing and the proverbial “nine lives” of a cat. In a word, “the righteous are regarded as knocked out for good.” Yet the saying throws away the harsh reality in a concessive clause for the greater reality that the righteous will rise. By contrast, the genre effect of *empiricism* causes Job and Ecclesiastes to focus on the sufferings of the righteous *before* they rise.

Finally, as pointed out above, the righteous rise in a blessed future that *outlasts death*. In addition to the exegetical arguments presented there, Proverbs’ concept of justice *demand such a hope*. Like so much of the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs is a masterpiece of indirection, preaching its message through the theological reflection of those with ears to hear. Instructively, the opening situation depicted in the father’s first lecture resembles the first situation of humanity outside of the Garden of Eden. Even as Cain murdered righteous Abel, sending him to a premature death, after which Cain lived out a normal life span, so the father represents a traveler’s “innocent blood” (Prov. 1: 11-19) as being dispatched to a premature death by venal sinners who walk on top of his grave and plunder his house. *These initial situations discredit the popular interpretation that life and death in Proverbs refer respectively to living to an old age and to a premature death. For justice to be done, as Proverbs assures it will be (e.g., 3: 31-35; 16: 4-5), Abel and the innocent traveler must be vindicated and delivered from death in a future that lies beyond their clinical deaths.* If clinical death is the last word for the waylaid innocent, then the father’s first lecture, along with other biblical stories about the deaths of martyrs, *deconstruct the Bible’s claim that God upholds justice*. Kathleen A. Farmer rightly comments: “One either has to give up the idea of justice or one has to push its execution into some realm beyond the evidence of human experience.” Obviously that future is not accessible to verification, as Jerry Gladson notes critically, but without that kind of faith one cannot please God. *If these promises could be validated by experience, why does the father command the son to trust in the I AM (3: 5)?*

If God rewarded virtue immediately, the son would *confound pleasure with piety*, using piety and ethics to satisfy his prurient [*lustful*] interests. He would substitute eudaemonism (i.e. the system of thought that bases ethics on personal pleasure) for the true virtues of faith, hope, and love. God develops the character of his saints by calling them to suffer for the sake of righteousness, while living in hope of eternal life. In this way he teaches them virtue while upholding justice (Rom. 5: 3-4; 2 Peter 2: 3-11).

In sum, Proverbs characterizes the wise as living by faith entirely (“with all your heart,” 3: 5), exclusively (“lean not on your own understanding”), and exhaustively (“in all your ways acknowledge him,” 3: 5-6a).

Make note of the other wisdom psalms listed in Wolvaardt and *Hermeneutics*, including Ps. 36, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, 128,

G. Songs of Trust and Confidence (Wolvaardt, p. 231; *Hermeneutics*, p. 86)

Harman (p. 30) lists the following characteristics of psalms of confidence and trust (slightly modified): (the numbers are used below to indicate the characteristic of the statements in the psalm)

1. While their structure is not the same they share a common content
2. In the face of enemies there is a calm trust in the Lord
3. Their declarations have a ring of certainty about them
4. They use a variety of metaphors to describe God or His benefits (“refuge”, “rock”, “shepherd”, “help”, “portion”, “cup”, “table”, “valley”, “green pastures”, “quiet waters”, etc.).

Psalm 23 (NIV)

A psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my *shepherd*, [4.]

I shall not be in want.

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ *he restores my soul.*

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. [3.4.]

⁴ **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,**

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. [2. 3.4.]

⁶ *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,* [3.]

and *I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.* [3. 4.]

Note the metaphor: **shepherd**. Notice also the phrases which indicate the certainty of the Lord’s care and protection. (Those which are highlighted are not the only ones. They exist throughout the psalm.)

Psalm 16 (NIV)

A *miktam* of David.

¹ **Keep me safe**, O God, for in you I take *refuge*. [4.]

² I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing." [3.]

³ As for the saints who are in the land,

Refuge—one of the familiar metaphors of the psalms of confidence (cf. Ps. 11:1; Ps. 62 (below))

they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

⁴ *The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. [3.]*

I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.

⁵ *LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.*

⁶ The *boundary lines* have fallen for me in pleasant places; [4.]

surely I have a delightful inheritance. [3.]

⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me.

Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. [3.]

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,

¹⁰ *because you will not abandon me to the grave, [3.]*
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

¹¹ You have made known to me the *path of life;*

you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. [3.]

In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter quotes Ps. 16: 8-11 introducing the passage with, “David said about Him...(Acts 2: 25a). Notice that David has confidence and trust in God’s goodness *beyond the grave. My body also will rest secure.* There is strong evidence here that he has hope in everlasting life which was a type of the hope that every believer now has.

Psalm 62 (NIV)

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

My soul finds **rest in God alone**; my salvation comes from him.² He alone is *my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*³ How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down—this leaning wall, this tottering fence?⁴ They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. *Selah*⁵ **Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.**⁶ He alone is *my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*⁷ My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is **my mighty rock, my refuge.**⁸ **Trust in him at all times,** O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is *our refuge. Selah*⁹ Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath.¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.¹¹ One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong,¹² and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

H. Imprecatory psalms

Harman and Longman do not include the imprecatory psalm as a separate category although Longman mentions imprecations as one of the seven elements of a lament (See p. 81 of your notes, “Elements of a Lament”). It could, therefore, be argued that they do not constitute a separate genre of psalms although Pss. 35, 69, and 109 would surely merit close attention for this

possibility. Whatever view we take, they are troublesome for many Christians and have to be reckoned with one way or the other.

An imprecation is the act of calling down a curse upon someone. This fact is especially troublesome for African Christians who have grown up in a culture filled with stories of witch doctors being employed to curse one's enemies. Africans who have been correctly taught by their Christian pastors and teachers to depart from such pagan practices and to love their enemies are then confronted with seemingly the same practice by no less than King David himself, a man after God's own heart. David said, "Let his [*the wicked man's*] days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes....Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children....[*etc.*]" (Ps. 109: 8-10, 12). Also attributed to David is the statement, "O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord" (Ps. 58: 6).

How can this be reconciled with our Lord Jesus' command to "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous....Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5: 44-45, 48)? And how can these words be reconciled with the admonitions of the Apostle Paul who told us to "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone....Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12: 17a, 19); and "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to *all* men, and especially [*but not exclusively*] to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6: 10).

New Testament passages like these have caused many Christians to banish the imprecations of David to the dim and murky past of the OT when the saints didn't know any better and were not informed by the superior NT principle of loving one's enemies. But this explanation is much too simple and drives a wedge between the Old and the New Testaments.

First, it fails to account for the same acts of charity which are evident in the OT even by the same person who utters the imprecatory psalms. David spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul on at least two occasions, and he shows kindness to Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, when the standard procedure at the time was to eliminate any potential enemies of the crown (1 Sam. 24 and 26; 2 Sam. 9) (See also L.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 18). The OT demands that people show love for their enemies through acts of kindness (Ex. 23: 4-5; cited by John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 339).

Secondly, it fails to reckon with the fact that the author of these imprecations was no hard-hearted sinner, but David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13: 14), a man who was spiritually capable of writing a large portion of the psalms of praise, thanksgiving, and wisdom. He was not perfect, to be sure, but his spirituality is not subject to serious scrutiny. Further, David was not inconsistent when he wrote these imprecations. In the *same* psalm in which he says, "Pour out Thine indignation on them, and may Thy burning anger overtake them," he also says, "For the Lord hears the needy; and does not despise His who are prisoners. Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them" (Ps. 69: 24, 33-34).

Third, this view fails to reckon with the imprecations of the NT. “It is rather surprising that the New Testament has striking points of similarity in the conduct of exemplary individuals, whose course of conduct has always been regarded as being model.” Leupold mentions Paul’s remark concerning Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4: 14); his rebuke of Ananias in Acts 23: 3; and Peter’s rebuke of Simon Magus in Acts 8: 20 (Leupold, p. 20). We should also not forget the imprecations of Paul against anyone, including himself, who would preach a false gospel (Gal. 1: 8-9).

Fourth, some of the imprecations in the psalms are quoted in the NT as predictions of what would befall the *enemies of Christ*. Peter applies the imprecations of Ps. 69: 25 and Ps. 109: 8 to Judas in Acts 1: 20. In Matt. 23: 38, Jesus applies the same imprecation of Ps. 69: 25 to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem. Likewise, Paul condemns the unbelieving Jews of his day with the imprecation of Ps. 69: 22-23 (Rom. 11: 9-10). If the imprecations were beneath the dignity of the NT Christian, it is doubtful that Peter and Paul, and Jesus Himself, would have employed them to make their point.

It is this last point which moves us toward a solution to the interpretation of imprecatory psalms. The imprecations are not to be interpreted as the personal vendettas (personal acts of revenge) against one’s enemies. When David (or another psalmist) called upon the Lord to punish his enemies, he should be understood as the *spokesman for Christ* or *for the corporate people of Christ*. The imprecations of the psalms are not in any sense comparable to the curses which are called down upon one’s *personal* enemies by a local witch doctor (or priest) working for hire—a purely selfish venture. Speaking of this practice in his day John Calvin laments,

How detestable a piece of sacrilege is it on the part of monks, and especially the Franciscan friars, to pervert this psalm by employing it to countenance [approve] the most nefarious [wicked] purposes! If a man harbour malice against a neighbor, it is quite a common thing for him to engage one of these wicked wretches [the friars] to curse him, which he would do by daily repeating this psalm. I know a lady in France who hired a parcel of these friars to curse her own and only son in these words (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 6, Psalm 109, p. 276).

By employing another human being to avenge the evil against us, we take matters into our own hands, quite the contrary of what Paul does with Alexander the coppersmith by saying, “The **Lord** will repay him according to his deeds” (2 Tim. 2: 14). This is the same spirit in which Paul speaks when he says, “Never take your *own* revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, **I** will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12: 19). Paul’s imprecation against Alexander was not a prayer of personal vengeance, but a prayer against him as the enemy of a chosen instrument of God in spreading the gospel—Paul, the Apostle. When Alexander persecuted **Paul**, he persecuted **Christ**. This observation leads me to the following conclusions below.

The imprecatory psalms are *prophetic* of all the enemies of Christ who persecuted Him while He was here on earth and who persist in persecuting the people of Christ to this very day (Acts 9:4). The persecutors of Christ are the *enemies of God*, a fact which is clear from Ps. 69: 9, “For zeal

for Thy house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach *Thee* have fallen on *me*.” When Jesus cleansed the temple of the money-changers, His disciples realized that His actions were a fulfillment of this psalm (Jn. 2: 17). They did not sufficiently understand the second half of the verse. Those who reproached God and the house of God would also reproach Christ by rejecting His message and nailing Him to a cross, the agony of which is prophesied in the same psalm (vv. 4, 7-8, 20-21, 26). But the persecutors of Christ would not be satisfied in putting Jesus to death, but would persist in harassing and putting to death the followers of Christ: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (Jn. 15: 18; see also Rev. 12: 17). But they will not prevail against God’s people any more than they were able to prevail against Christ Himself. They crucified Him, but He rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God until the Father makes His enemies a footstool for His feet (Ps. 110: 1; Matt. 22: 44). This is precisely why personal vengeance is condemned. The real offense is not against us, even though we are always tempted to take it personally and often do so. If the offense is real rather than imagined, it is first and foremost an offense against God, and He will deal with it in His own good time and in His own way. This gives us the psychological and spiritual freedom to love our enemies and to pray for those who mistreat us. Rather than calling down fire from heaven (Lk.9: 55), we should fear for their safety and pray for their repentance knowing that our heavenly Father takes serious offense at their mistreatment of His children.

Given what has been said above, what is the *present application* of the imprecatory psalms for Christians today? I have already said that they are not relics of an age long-past, but were employed by Jesus and His apostles in the NT, and they should be employed today when the honor of Christ is at stake, when the gospel is hindered, or when the actions of wicked men threaten the Church, the people of God, etc. Many scenarios could be imagined in which such psalms would be appropriate, but three examples, one from Scripture, one from history, and one current example may be sufficient for explanation.

When Peter and John healed the man who was lame from birth (Acts 3), they were apprehended by the priests and Sadducees who put them in prison (Acts 4: 3). The next day as they appeared before the Council, they were told to speak no longer in the name of Jesus, or they would suffer the consequences (4: 17-18). They replied to this threat by saying, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (4: 19-20).

Fearing the repercussions of a popular uprising, they let the disciples go. When Peter and John came together with other disciples, they reported everything that had happened, a report which elicited a quotation from Ps. 2, a psalm of imprecation against anyone—particularly leaders—who would dare lift a hand against the Lord or against His Anointed One (4: 25-26). Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Gentiles, the people of Israel and their religious leaders had fulfilled the prophecy of Ps. 2 by gathering themselves together against Jesus Christ and putting Him to death (4: 27). But they did not know that this was all part of God’s plan (4: 28).

What follows in vv. 29-30 is an imprecation, " "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." The phrase, “take note of their threats,” is a reference to Ps. 2: 3 which is the threat of all

religious and political leaders against the rule and reign of Christ whom they repudiate, the same threat being made by the Council against Peter and John. The disciples were not concerned about their personal safety. They were concerned that their work as heralds of the gospel would be hindered by wicked men. In response to these threats, their fellow disciples repeat the imprecation of Ps. 2 which is a warning to all not to challenge the authority of Christ.

In the same way, we have the privilege, indeed the duty, to call upon God to “take note of the threats” of godless men who would dare stand in the way of the gospel of Christ and our work as messengers. What God does to the wicked in response to our request is His business. He may choose to remove them by death, or He may choose to allow us to die a martyr’s death as He did in Stephen’s case (Acts 7). He may even choose to convert them, but would we object to this response? Of course not. However, conversion of such enemies is somewhat unrealistic and not the immediate need of those facing imminent destruction (cf. Frame, pp. 341-342). Whatever God does, the end result will be the same, the progress of the gospel (See Acts 8: 1-4 in which the persecution of believers resulted in their dispersion to different places, preaching the gospel as they went.)

Using an historical example, we all remember the trail of death and destruction left by the regime of Idi Amin, a man who attempted to convert Uganda to the Muslim faith by torture and execution. (His motives were not religious, but purely political with his nefarious connections with Mohamar Qadafi in Libya.) Christians living during this holocaust would have been obliged to pray for his removal. **How** God chose to remove Him, whether by a bullet between his eyes or by conversion to Christ would be left to Him, but his removal was necessary for the survival of the church and the progress of the gospel in Uganda. God chose to dislodge Amin through popular resistance and the aid of Tanzania, and though he lived to old age God “took note of his threats” against His church, and Amin was never again a danger to God’s people. He did not heed the warning of Ps. 2: 10-12 to “kiss the son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way.”

For a current application, Christians in the US could be praying for the removal of all the Supreme Court justices who support the wicked practice of abortion and for them to be replaced by God-fearing men and women who are pro-life. How God chooses to do that (or if He chooses to do that) is His business. I am hoping that they may get converted, change their views, retire from office, get sick, or even die a natural death or by a car accident if that is what it takes to give millions of unborn babies the chance to live. This may sound radical to many Christians, but it is not as radical as premeditated murder. Christians in Uganda must likewise be clear about *who* are the enemies of Christ and His church, and pray that God would remove them—either by giving them repentance and faith (for this is one way to remove them), or by popular election, or by sickness or death. In no sense am I suggesting taking matters into your own hands through violent means. The **Lord**, not individual Christians, will choose what to do with such people. Our responsibility is to **pray**—through **imprecations** like those of Peter in Acts 4—that the gospel is not hindered. Is it still possible to love the same people we are praying against? Yes. To use the example of Idi Amin again, if he had been captured and put in prison, the same Christian people who were praying for his death would have then had the opportunity of visiting him in prison and showing him mercy by taking him food and sharing the gospel with him.

The conclusion, then, is this: the imprecatory prayer is still appropriate and useful to the child of God, and still more useful and appropriate for the corporate church to employ as a means of God's protection of His Church and His gospel, to the end that King Jesus might reign wherever the sun shines, that God's will be done, and His kingdom come, on earth, as it is in heaven.

I. Combination of Categories

As we have seen above, it is often the case that a psalm may be classified in more than one way. Psalm 73 has the marks of a lament but is also a wisdom psalm. Psalm 78 is a wisdom psalm and a psalm of remembrance. Psalm 45 is a kingship psalm, a wisdom psalm, and a hymn. As Longman notes, "Genres are not written on tablets of stone; they are flexible. Psalms may be profitably studied under more than one of our stated genres" (p. 35).

III. Meaning Structure of the Psalms (p. 153, Wolvaardt)

Thus far we have concentrated our effort on identifying the parallels, stylistic features, and figurative language of the psalms. We will now concentrate on examining the entire structure of a psalm. To do this, I will use the same procedure as I did in *Biblical Interpretation—New Testament Epistles*, by identifying meaning blocks which make up strophes. Psalm 1 is examined in Wolvaardt. We will examine Psalm 2.

A. Meaning Blocks of Psalm 2

¹Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

A

The nations are planning something which will not succeed, so why do they even try?

²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

B

World rulers—as representatives of the nations—make a collective attempt to resist the authority of God and His anointed king.

³"Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."

C

World rulers, and their nations, do not want to submit to God, His anointed king, or His law.

Make note of the fact that I have attempted to summarize each meaning block in *my own words*. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. If you cannot summarize meaning blocks in your own words rather than simply repeating the words of the text, you have not demonstrated that you really understand the text. In that case, you need to go back to *the meaning of words and phrases*.

⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

D

God is amused that puny men would seriously believe that they could resist His sovereign rule over their lives and kingdoms. Their striving for independence appears absurd to God, who does not even bother to get up from His throne to see what the world rulers are doing (cf. NASB, **He who sits in the heavens laughs**).

⁵ Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶ “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

E

We don't know when, but at the hour of God's choosing, He will have enough of man's rebellion and will lash out at him with His terrible wrath. God the Father is angry with man for refusing His anointed king, Jesus Christ, whom He has already given universal dominion. He will not change His mind.

⁷ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:

F

The psalmist will now reveal something the Lord decided in the past.

He said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.

G

The Lord decided to make the psalmist, David, His son. This is an expression of kingship. (As king, David is a type of Christ. See explanation below.)

⁸ Ask of me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.

H

The Lord invites David, the psalmist, to request the nations and kingdoms of the world as a gift for his inheritance as king. (Once more, this should be understood typically of Christ).

⁹ You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

I

The chosen king will rule the nations with severe punishments for those who did not submit to his rule.

¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

J

Because God is angry with rebellious rulers, the leaders of this world should take the words of this psalm as a stern warning. They should be wise and listen to the following command.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.

K

They should obey the Lord, fearing to displease Him; and they should rejoice at their abundant opportunity to serve Him as a world ruler, afraid to fail the Lord with their enormous responsibility.

¹² Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry
and you be destroyed in your way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.

L

World rulers and nations should bow to the Lord in humble worship so that His anger against their rebellion would be turned away. They should do this immediately; for at any time the Lord's patience with them may end. If they refuse, their administrations and nations will fail;

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

M

But any world ruler who submits to the Lord and depends on His protection will receive His blessings, blessings which will also be applied to the nation.

(Now we will examine the strophes. Rather than repeating the summaries above, I have provided a short commentary.)

B. Commentary on the Strophes of Psalm 2

¹Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

²The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together against the LORD
and against his Anointed One.

³“Let us break their chains,” they say,
“and throw off their fetters.”

A

This is the first unit of thought in the psalm. The translators of the NASB and the NIV have provided a space between v. 3 and 4 to show that the first strophe stops at v. 3 and a new one begins with v. 4, but the careful reader can see that a new thought begins in v. 4. God begins to laugh at the puny rebellion of world leaders.

God’s sovereign rule over men is not welcome, and they plot together to throw off God’s rule and live independently of God within their own domains. The initial question is rhetorical but the answer to it is not immediately evident. The psalmist is essentially asking, “What use is there to rebel against God’s authority? It is vain and futile to attempt the impossible!” Nevertheless, world rulers and leaders insist on something they can never have—independent authority.

⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord **scoffs** at them.

⁵Then he **rebukes** them in his anger
and **terrifies** them in his wrath, saying,

⁶“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

B

God is not alarmed at man’s rebellion, but laughs at men’s efforts to throw off His sovereign rule over them. This an *anthropopathism*—ascribing to God the human emotion of mocking. The omnipotent God created man, and his rebellion is like an ant challenging an elephant.

Note the progressive parallels. God **scoffs...Then he rebukes...and terrifies**. This is not simple synonymous parallelism but is progressive and developing. A. He **scoffs**, B. what’s more, He **rebukes**, C. what’s more, He **terrifies**. In spite of man’s desire to throw off God’s rule, God has already **installed** His king on Zion. His coronation of Christ as king has already been accomplished, and the only thing left for human kings to do is to submit to His will, or perish.

⁷I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:

He said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.

⁸Ask of me,

and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

C

Theology: There is no mention of authorship for Ps. 2, but **Acts 4: 25** attributes the psalm to David. This is significant especially when interpreting v. 7. **The decree of the Lord** must then be the Lord’s decree to David in 2 Sam. 7 to build him a house, a dynasty, which would be everlasting. **You are my son; today I have become your Father**, is first of all, then, a poetic repetition of 2 Sam. 7: 14a, “I will be his father, and he will be my son”, speaking of Solomon. But if this was true of Solomon, it was certainly true of David. David was in a very special sense, “the son [little “s”] of God”, that is, the earthly king in special relationship to Yahweh.

The phrase, **today I have become your Father** points to the *king's coronation ceremony* in which the human king, David (**He said to me**), is designated as a “son” in special relationship to God as a ruling, earthly monarch (king) (cf. F.F. Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 275-276; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, pp. 483-484). In Acts 4: 27, the companions of Peter and John apply this Psalm to Jesus, and Paul does the same in his address to the Jews in Psidian Antioch (Acts. 13: 33). How, then, can the same words apply to Christ as they applied to David? Although *eternally* the Son of God and *pre-existent* with the Father, Christ at His incarnation receives this special distinction as an *earthly* king in human flesh—*something He had never been before*.

The Apostle Paul seems to designate the time of this declaration (coronation) as Son at the resurrection (Rom. 1: 4), but we should understand the resurrection not so much as the *precise time* that Jesus became king so much as the *climax and vindication* of the coronation event. Christ “uttered his enthronement speech after his resurrection and before his ascension when he said, ‘To me all authority has been given in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28: 18)” (Kistemaker, p. 484). By rising from the dead, Christ was vindicated as the Son of God *He had always been and claimed to be*. Jesus is identified as the Son of God—or identifies Himself as the Son of God—before His birth (Lk. 1: 32), at His birth (Gal. 4: 4), at His baptism (Matt. 3: 17), by Nathanael (Jn. 1: 49), at His temptation (Mat. 4: 3, 6), by Peter (Matt. 16: 16), at the transfiguration (Matt. 17: 5), and at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Lk. 22: 70-71) (cf. *The Person of Christ*, Donald Macleod, pp. 90-92).

When David was anointed as king by Samuel, the Holy Spirit came upon him *in power* for the performance of his calling as king (1 Sam. 16: 13). Antotypically (as the antitype of David), Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His ministry during His baptism (Matt. 3: 16-17); and by considering both v. 16 and 17 together, we may conclude that the baptism of the Spirit was the official coronation (crowning) of Christ as the divine-human king of Israel and the world. The resurrection, on the other hand, merely vindicated this fact. Verse 9 is not a description of Christ’s rule over His people who have willingly surrendered to His grace and lordship. Rather, it is a description of His rule over those who *refuse* His lordship. At the final judgment, the rule of Christ will be known to all—both believer and sinner alike—and those who have not repented and believed will be broken **to pieces like pottery**—particularly *world rulers* who had the opportunity not only to believe the gospel, but to become an example of Christian justice and righteousness to their people, but failed to do so. In Daniel 2: 34-35, 44-45, the **stone cut out of the mountain without hands** crushes and destroys all competitive, earthly kingdoms.

¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry
and you be destroyed in your way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.



This is the last of four *strophes* in the psalm which consists of a main idea distinct from the other strophes. Remember that the strophe in poetry is the same as a *paragraph* in narrative or exposition/exhortation genre. The main idea of this strophe is the opportunity for repentance granted to earthly rulers. *Two ways* are presented as options: either to **kiss the son** (upon the hem of his robe or upon the hand; Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 55), thus doing homage as a sign of surrender, or being **destroyed**. No other option is given. Their kingdoms hang by a single thread and may be dissolved in the Son's wrath at any time. Kings, presidents, and world leaders who bask in the glory of their power should rather **rejoice with trembling** at their opportunity to **serve the Lord** in such an influential capacity. Their power is not cause for pride and self-glory, but for fear and trembling at the gravity (graveness) of the responsibility (1 Cor. 2: 2-3).

Putting the ideas of the four strophes together, we have the following:

- A. World leaders—representing the nations—foolishly attempt to maintain their authority independently of God and His law (vv. 1-3).
- B. God will not allow world rulers to rule independently because He has already established the rule of Christ over the entire world (vv. 4-6).
- C. According to the sure promises of God to David, God has granted victory over the kingdoms of this world to His Son, Jesus Christ, who will destroy all competitors to His throne (vv. 7-9).
- D. Nevertheless, God offers the opportunity of repentance and surrender to all world rulers and nations. Either they worship Jesus Christ as the universal king, surrendering their claim to independence, or they will be swept away in the Son's wrath (vv. 1-12).

C. Stylistic Features of Psalm 2

¹Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?

²The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

³“Let us break their chains,” they say,
“and throw off their fetters.”

⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.

⁵Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

⁷I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me,
“You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

A

As far as the structure is concerned,
vv. 1-3 consist of *what kings say*
about the Lord's rule over them.
“We don't want the Lord to rule over
us!”

B

Verses 4-6 consist of *what the*
Lord says to the kings about their
rejection.
“I have already chosen my king,
therefore, submit to Him.”

B

Verses 7-9 consist of *what the Lord*
says to His Son about the kings'
rejection.
“You will rule over them no matter
what they say.”

¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

¹¹ **Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.**

¹² **Kiss the Son, lest he be angry
and you be destroyed in your way,**
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.



Verses 10-12 consist of *what the psalmist says to the kings about what they said earlier* (v. 3) and about *what the Lord says to them and to His Son in response* (vv. 6-9).

“Surrender and worship...or perish!
Decide quickly; you don’t have
much time!”

D. Sermon from Psalm 2

The **main idea** of a sermon could be the following:

World rulers should humble themselves by surrendering to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This brings up the following **question**: In consideration of their power and authority, **why should world leaders become Christians?** The **answer** to this question could make up the points of the sermon.

- I. Any attempt to rule independently (or insubordinately) of Christ and His law is futile (useless) because Christ has already been crowned as the universal king (Strophes A and B; vv. 1-6).
- II. The enthronement of Christ as king is the fulfillment of the ancient promise to David, king of Israel, and is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ who is now reigning over the world from heaven at the right hand of God the Father. (Dan. 2 would be a key text in developing this point.) (Strophe C; vv. 7-9)
- III. Any attempt of world leaders to resist the authority of Christ over their administration will result in ruin—either in this life or in the life to come, or both. (Strophe D; vv. 1-12)
- IV. Any leader who surrenders to Christ’s rule over his administration will be blessed, and the people of his country will be blessed through him. (Strophe D; vv. 10-12).

Of course, you could slice the cake much differently; this is only one possibility. You would also want to shorten the main headings to pithy (brief) statements which can be remembered. I have included long headings above only for explanation. Another possible outline would be the following chiasmic outline:

- I. Kings rebel (from strophe A)
- II. God laughs (from strophe B)
- III. God decrees (from strophe C)
- IV. Kings tremble...or perish (from strophe D)

The student can see that a psalm, like the epistles of the NT, should be examined from several different perspectives and angles. You will discover something new from each angle. Furthermore, you will notice that the basic method of interpretation is the same as that of interpreting the epistles (see “The Steps of Exegesis”, p. 79, Wolvaardt; McNeill, *Biblical Interpretation—The New Testament Epistles*).

E. Meaning blocks in Psalm 34 (NIV)

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

¹I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.

A

David will never cease praising God.

²My soul will boast in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

B

David will also boast in the Lord’s goodness, and those who are in trouble will hear this boast and rejoice in the Lord.

³Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.

C

David invites others to give due weight to God’s attributes and to lift high the name of God in praise and worship.

End of first strophe—*a call to praise*

⁴I **sought** the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears. [a]

D

David prayed for help, and the Lord rescued him from the things he feared.

⁵Those **who look to him** are radiant; [b]
their faces are never covered with shame.

E

Those who look to the Lord for help will smile, and they will never be ashamed because the Lord will not fail to answer their prayers.

⁶**This poor man called**, and the LORD heard his cry;
he saved him out of all his troubles. [a]

F

David’s humble cry for help (**This poor man**) was heard by the Lord, and the Lord rescued him.

⁷The angel of the LORD
encamps around **those who fear him**. [b]
and he delivers them.

G

God sends angels to protect those who believe in Him and obey Him. They encircle them and protect them from harm (cf. Ex. 23: 20; Heb. 1: 14).

End of second strophe—*reasons for praise*

⁸**Taste and see** that the LORD is good;
blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

H

David invites those in trouble to put God to the test to see for themselves that He blesses those who trust Him.

They are further invited to reverence the Lord—
be in awe of Him. Those who worship Him will
not lack.

⁹ **Fear the LORD**, you his saints,
for those who fear him lack nothing.
⇒

I

¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

J

Although powerful lions lack food, those who look to the Lord for help will lack nothing they need.

End of third strophe — *call to praise and reasons*

¹¹ **Come, my children, listen to me;**
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

K

David wishes to teach the Israelites (**my children**) the proper worship and reverence for God on the basis of (1) his personal experience of God's help and deliverance and (2) his understanding of the law of God (cf. Deut. 6: 2-5).

¹² Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,
¹³ **keep your tongue from evil**
and your lips from speaking lies.

L

¹⁴ **Turn from evil and do good;**
seek peace and pursue it.

Fullness and enjoyment in life will come to those who are faithful to the covenant (true believers) by loving others. **You shall not bear false witness** and **You shall not murder** are the two commandments brought to mind here. The commandments are summarized by “ ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.’ ” (Leviticus 19:18 NASB).

End of fourth strophe — *a call to worship and reverence* rather than praise specifically (It includes a call to obedience. Thus, we can see that the *praise hymns* do not all fit a neat and predictable formula. Notice that the next strophe M reads more like a *wisdom psalm*.)

¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their cry;

M

¹⁶ the face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

The Lord watches over true believers and hears their prayers, but He frowns upon those who do evil and will not give them an eternal future. (The blessing and curse of the covenant. See Ps. 1.)

End of fifth strophe *E—reasons for praise, worship, and reverence*

¹⁷ The righteous cry out,
and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.
¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

N

When in trouble, true believers cry for help, and the Lord responds to their prayers. He rescues them from their suffering either by getting them out of trouble *or* by giving them more grace to bear their suffering (v. 18).

End of sixth strophe—*reasons for praise and worship*

¹⁹ A righteous man may have many troubles,
but the LORD delivers him from them all;
²⁰ he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken.

O

Believing in God will not free us from affliction and suffering, but the difference is that God will eventually—in the life to come—deliver us from every affliction. Even our physical bodies will be preserved for eternal life (cf. Ps. 51: 8; Jn. 19: 33).

End of seventh strophe—*reasons for praise and worship*

²¹ Evil will slay the wicked;
the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
²² The LORD redeems his servants;
no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

P

Unbelievers will be put to death by their own unrighteousness, and the enemies of God’s people will be declared guilty. But God will save those who serve him. He will not declare guilty those who put their trust in Him.

End of eighth strophe—*reasons for worship, reverence, and praise* (again, similar to wisdom psalms)

For the meaning blocks above, I have provided more commentary than summary. Refer to the summaries for Psalm 2 for an example of how you should go about making summaries. Below, I have provided the summaries of the strophes while developing the meaning structure.

F. Stylistic Features of Psalm 34

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

¹I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.

Call to praise

²My soul will boast in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

A

I will continually praise the Lord; therefore, *praise and glorify the Lord with me*, giving Him the *weight* (glory) which is due to His name. You should do this **because...**

³*Glorify the LORD with me;*
let us exalt his name together.

Note the **imperative** verbs indicating the obligation of praise. Praise is not optional.

Reason for praise

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered
he delivered me from all my fears.

⁵*Those who look to HIM are radiant;*

B

...I have personally experienced the Lord’s help in the past—help which gives me the certainty of His help in the present and future. He even sends His angels to guard us. **Therefore...**

their faces are never covered with shame.

⁶This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;

he saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷The angel of the LORD
encamps around *those who fear HIM*,
and HE delivers them.

Note the **past and present** verbs indicating past petitions, answered prayers, and present help from the Lord. We have many reasons to praise Him.

Call to praise

⁸*Taste and see that the LORD is good;*

blessed is *the man who takes refuge* in HIM.

⁹*Fear the LORD, you his saints,*

A ...put the Lord to the test for yourself. Prove Him, even as I have done, and you will see that what I am saying is true. You should reverence the Lord because...

Reason for praise

for *those who fear HIM* lack *nothing*.

¹⁰The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but *those who seek the LORD* lack *no good thing*.

B ...the one who reverences Him, seeks Him, and trusts Him is blessed and will lack nothing he needs. **However...**

Present tense verbs showing present provision

¹¹*Come, my children, listen to me;*

I will teach you the **fear** of the LORD.

¹²Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days, *[then—implied]*

¹³*keep your tongue from evil*
and *[keep—implied] your lips from speaking lies*.

¹⁴*Turn from evil and do good;*

seek peace and pursue it.

Call to worship and reverence through obedience

...let me tell you how to sincerely reverence the Lord: **Keep His commandments** by guarding your tongue, by being truthful with your neighbor, by seeking peace and reconciliation rather than revenge, and by being kind to him...

Imperative verbs showing obligation.

The condition of loving life and seeing many good days is to keep the covenant. There is no sure covenant blessing without obedience. Verse 12-13 is a subtle if...then statement. But how can we keep His commandments? Extreme self-effort? No, but by believing in His abundant grace to change us. Only by His continuing grace working in us can we hope to become in practice what we are in position (Phil. 2: 12-13).

Note further that there is no contradiction between **fearing** the Lord and **praising** the Lord. Any attempt to praise the Lord without godly fear and keeping His commandments is hypocrisy, not praise.

15 The EYES OF THE LORD are on the *righteous* and HIS EARS are attentive to *their* cry;
 16 THE FACE OF THE LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
 17 The *righteous* cry out, and THE LORD hears *them*;
 HE delivers them from all *their* troubles. **B**
 18 THE LORD is close to the *brokenhearted* and saves *those who are crushed in spirit*.
 19 A *righteous man* may have many troubles, but THE LORD delivers him from them all;

[what's more...]
 20 he protects all his bones,
 [what's more...]
not one of them will be broken.

Reason for praise

...because the Lord watches over those who *sincerely* fear Him by keeping His commandments (vv. 13-14), and He listens carefully to their prayers. **But** the Lord frowns upon those who practice evil. They have no future on earth. **Furthermore.....the Lord listens to the righteous**, and He rescues them from every difficulty. He is intimate with them and will save them eternally and completely—both body and soul. **On the other hand...**

Typology—(cf. John 19: 36). The deliverance of Christ is also typological for the ultimate deliverance of all believers.

Verses 19-20 is developing parallel. Note the interpretive comment “furthermore”.

Verses 19 is an antithetic parallel. Note the **but**. Verse 20 is synonymous. **All** and **not one**.

21 Evil *will slay* the wicked; [a]
 the foes of the righteous *will be condemned*. [b] **B**
 22 THE LORD *redeems* his servants; [a]
 no one *will be condemned* who takes refuge in him. [b] **Cont.**

...the **unrighteous**, whose wicked lives prove that they do **not** fear the Lord, will perish because of their own deeds, and they will be condemned because they do not seek their safety in God. But the Lord saves those who serve Him and who trust Him for their protection.

In the meaning structure suggested above for Ps. 34, **A** represents the commands made to believers to praise, worship, reverence (fear), and obey the Lord. **B** represents the promises to believers—their ultimate, eternal deliverance from affliction, their daily provision, the Lord’s answers to their prayers, and His intimate presence with them. Embedded in **B** is the sad, horrible fate of those who do not fear the Lord and do not obey Him—condemnation, lack of any future, God’s disapproval. Therefore, the psalmist gives his audience **both positive and negative** reasons for praising the Lord. On the positive side are the blessings and protection for the

righteous; on the negative side are the curses upon the wicked. The blessings and curses are evidence of the covenantal structure for the psalms.

The strophe divisions of Psalm 34 are different in the NIV and NASB translations of the OT. In the NIV, there are eight strophe divisions; in the NASB, there are only seven. This is because the NASB grouped the imperative commands of vv. 8, 9, 11, 13, and 14 together into a single strophe. Strophe divisions are generally provided in “study bibles” but sometimes also in bibles which are not “study bibles”. Such divisions—like chapter and verse divisions—are not divinely inspired but are the work of skillful translators who are experts in the Hebrew language. Therefore, they should generally be trusted unless there is compelling reason to divide the text otherwise.

Possible Sermon on Psalm 34

[Note: I compiled this outline hurriedly. If I studied the text another few hours, I would probably come up with an entirely different outline, and maybe a different **main idea**. To do a good job in determining the main idea, the preacher should study the text many hours, possible four or five hours, before he even begins composing his sermon. A good sermon will require 20 to 25 hours of preparation.]

Main Idea: We should praise and exalt the Lord for all of His blessings to those who believe in Him.

This brings up the following question: **What are the Lord’s blessings to believers? Or What reasons do believers have for praising the Lord?**

Either of these two questions provides the framework for developing the points of your sermon which should be drawn directly from the text. (You may own an automobile. But owning an automobile is not one of the blessings derived from Psalm 34. Stick to the blessings that can be proven from the text!)

Introduction (vv. 1-3)

[The first strophe, vv. 1-3, is a general call to praise God. It serves as the heading for the whole psalm and could be used as an introduction along with additional commentary.]

- I. The Lord delivers His people from trouble (vv. 4-7).
- II. The Lord does not withhold anything good from those who trust and fear Him (vv. 8-10).
- III. The Lord informs us how to experience His blessings (vv. 11-14).
- IV. The Lord sets His love upon the righteous but sets His face against the wicked (vv. 15-21).

I. The Lord delivers His people from trouble (vv. 4-7).

[Naturally, this statement brings up many other questions: Does the Lord **always** deliver His people from **all** trouble? Job argues energetically against this statement. Nevertheless,

remember that Psalms and Proverbs have a future orientation beyond physical death; otherwise, they are misunderstood to promise an absolutely carefree life—the “prosperity gospel”. (Review Waltke’s important quotation above.) But just because the promise must be qualified, let’s not throw it away. All of us can recount many, many times how the Lord delivered us from trouble in this present life. We should never forget His many benefits (Ps. 103: 2). But when we consider the promise of our inheritance, the new heavens and new earth, we can certainly say with confidence that He delivers the believer out of **all his troubles**, not just some of them. The believer will not carry a single problem with him into heaven.

To fill out the first point, you would need to supply additional points *taken from the text*, not from your vivid imagination.]

- A. The Lord answers prayer (v. 4).
- B. The Lord will never put us to open shame by abandoning us (v. 5).
- C. The Lord hears the prayers of those who are poor in spirit, and saves them from trouble (v. 6).
- D. The Lord gives believers angelic protection (v. 7; cf. Heb. 1: 14).

[We should never worship angels nor think that each of us has his own private angel, but we should not forget the explicit statement of scripture that God uses angels to protect believers.

Already, you can see that vv. 1-7 could be a single sermon. Psalm 34 could be a series of sermons, depending on the skill of the preacher.]

II. The Lord does not withhold anything good from those who trust and fear Him (vv. 8-10).

- A. If we seek refuge in Him we will experience His goodness (v. 8; **taste and see**).
- B. If we fear the Lord, He will give us everything we really need (vv. 9-10).

[But what do we *really* need? This strophe brings up the question of *needs versus wants*, which means that the preacher will want to support his sermon with NT teaching, for example, Matthew 6: 19-34. But use this text briefly without taking the focus off the preaching text of Ps. 34.

The text also brings up the difficult question of *absolute promises verses general promises*. (Once again, consult the quotation from Waltke. See also McNeill, *Ecclesiastes* and *Job*.) Job’s friends operated from the principle of *retributive theology*—namely, that the promises of God operate without exception *in this lifetime*. Job’s earthly life proved that righteousness does not *always* deliver us from temporal hardships, the general promise of *Proverbs*. Jesus was the only perfectly righteous man who ever lived but was **a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering** (Isa. 53: 3). Nevertheless, both Job and Jesus were vindicated by God in the end as righteous men who experienced suffering *in this life*. Job’s health, wealth, and posterity were restored before his death as a visible vindication to his critics, and Jesus was resurrected from the dead as a visible vindication that He was the perfect Son of God. Temporal restoration in this life may not happen for the believer *in his earthly lifetime*—this is not necessary since we have the testimony of Scripture—but certainly he will be restored

to blessing in his spiritual resurrection at death and at his physical resurrection at the second coming of Christ.]

III. The Lord informs us how to experience His blessings (vv. 11-14).

- A. When we experience the Lord's goodness, then we can teach others how to experience it (v. 11).
- B. We experience the Lord's goodness by fearing Him and keeping His commandments (vv. 12-14).

[This is the biblical principle of sowing and reaping (cf. Gal. 6: 8). Although God is merciful and forgives our sin, we should not expect His temporal blessings when we are living in disobedience and fail to repent. Rather, we should expect His discipline, for we will surely get it if we are believers (cf. Ps. 32: 3-4).]

IV. The Lord sets His love upon the righteous but sets His face against the wicked (vv. 15-21).

- A. The Lord hears the cries of desperation from the righteous, but He will forget the wicked (vv. 15-16; cf. Prov. 1: 20-33).
- B. etc. [the rest of the outline can be filled out using vv. 17-21. The general theme is the Lord's distinction between the righteous and the wicked.]

[The psalms not only extol the goodness of the Lord toward the righteous but also the severity of the Lord toward the wicked. The severity of the Lord should be preached. After all, it's in the Bible. Wicked men should be warned of the wrath of God to come. Passages like these serve an evangelistic purpose. Those who claim that evangelistic sermons should always be about the love of God, fail to preach the whole counsel of God, including His wrath against sin. They also forget the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 4: 17).

The distinction between the righteous and the wicked should be dealt with carefully. God loves the righteous not because they **became** righteous. Rather, He loved them **before** they became righteous. We are righteous because of His grace, not because of personal self-effort. Obviously, this text bears an important relationship to the electing grace of God. God chooses us to become righteous through His grace, and then He blesses us for the obedience which His grace produces. Psalm 34 is about grace, not self-righteousness and earning God's blessings.]

Interpreting Proverbs

Almost all of the *wisdom literature* of the Bible is poetry. A few exceptions are found in Job 1—2 and 42: 7-17 which are written in narrative. The rest of the book is poetry. **Proverbs**,

Ecclesiastes (except 12: 9-14), *Song of Songs*, and the *wisdom psalms* are poetry. As in the *Psalms*, the poetry in all *wisdom* books is interpreted the *same* way, through a careful examination of the parallels, figurative language, meaning structure, etc. Proverbs 1 is the thematic introduction to the book, so this may be a good place to start with our analysis of *Proverbs*.

I. Meaning Indicators and Stylistic Features for Proverbs 1 (NIV)

(1) ¹The **proverbs** of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

Inclusion

Verses 1-7 serve as the *title* and *preamble* to *Collection I* of the book of Proverbs (see outline)

- (2) ² for **attaining** [a¹]
 ⇒ *wisdom and discipline,* [b¹]
- (3) for **understanding** [a²]
 ⇒ *words of insight,*³ [b²]
- (4) for **acquiring** [a³]
 ⇒ **a disciplined and prudent life,** [b³]
- (5) [*for—implied*] **doing** [a⁴]
 ⇒ **what is right and just and fair;** [b⁴]

- (6) ⁴ for **giving** [a⁵]
 ⇒ **prudence** [b⁵]
 to the simple.
- (7) [*for giving—implied*]
 ⇒ **knowledge and discretion** [b⁶]
 to the young— [c²]
- (8) ⁵ *let the wise* [d¹]
 → *listen and add to their learning,* [e¹]
- (9) and *let the discerning* [d²]
 → *get guidance—* [e²]

This is series of synonymous parallels, but every proverb pair has a distinct emphasis and does not say exactly the same thing as the other pairs. **Wisdom and discipline, words of insight** are the means to a **disciplined and prudent life** and **doing what is right and just and fair**. Therefore, L2-3 emphasize the knowledge itself while L4-5 emphasize the expected results of this knowledge.

In L6-7, the emphasis is upon the recipients of **prudence** and **knowledge**, namely, the **simple** (simple-minded) and the **young**. Note the prepositional phrases beginning with **to**. (L5 and L7 is an *ellipsis* in which **for giving**, L6, is omitted in L7 but is clearly implied.) But notice that the proverbs are not just for the simple and the young, but for **the wise** and **the discerning**. Those who are already wise can **listen and add to their learning** and those who have sound judgment (**the discerning**) can **get** [more] **guidance**. The **for** in L2-7 is not a reason indicator but a prepositional phrase indicating *purpose*.

Inclusion

- (10) ⁶ for understanding **proverbs and parables,**
- (11) **the sayings and riddles of the wise.**

The words **proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise** form an *inclusion* which “includes” L2-9.

The theme statement for *Proverbs* which sets forth the *two ways* in antithetic (contrasting) parallel—the **way of the fool** and the **way of the wise** who fear the Lord.

End of first strophe

(12) ⁷ THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE,
(13) BUT FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND DISCIPLINE.

End of second strophe

(14) ⁸ Listen, my son, [e³]
→ 0
to your father's instruction [f¹]

(15) and do not forsake [e⁴]
↗ 0
your mother's teaching. [f²]

(16) ⁹ They will be a garland to grace your head [g¹]

(17) and a chain to adorn your neck. [g²]

Verse 8 begins *Lecture One* of the father to the son, the first of ten lectures in Collection I (see outline of *Proverbs*). The exhortation to the wise to listen (v. 5) is now applied directly to the son, whom the father wishes to be wise. This lecture continues through 1: 19. The ten lectures are often marked by the address, **my son** (2: 1; 3: 1; 4: 1; 4: 10; etc. The imperative (commands) are labeled [e] and marked by → or ↗

(18) ¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, [e⁵]

(19) do not give in to them. [e⁶]

(20) ¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us; [h¹]

(21) LET'S lie in wait for someone's blood, [h²]

(22) LET'S waylay some harmless soul; [h³]

(23) ¹² LET'S swallow them alive, [h⁴] like the grave, [i¹]

(24) and whole, [h⁵] like those who go down to the pit; [i²]

Lines 20-24 is a *climactic* or *staircase* parallel which uses the repetitive phrase, **let's** (a contraction of **let us**).

Notice the progression—**Come along with us...** what is more, **Let's lie in wait...** what is more... **Let's waylay...** what is more... **Let's swallow them alive...** what is more, **Let's swallow them alive whole.**

L24 is an *ellipsis* in which **let's swallow them** is omitted but implied.

(25) ¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things [h⁰]

(26) and fill our houses with plunder. [h⁷]

All the [h]'s refer to the **enticements** of the gang. The [e]'s are the commands of the father not to follow the gang. The [i]'s are similes using **like** or **as**. In one sense the enticements of the gang are like a contrasting set of commands. The son must decide whose commands he will obey, the gang's or his father's.

(27) ¹⁴ *throw in your lot with us,* [h⁸]

(28) *and we will share a common purse”—* [h⁹]

(29) ¹⁵ *my son, do not go along with them,* [e⁷]

(30) *do not set foot on their paths;* [e⁸]

See L19 for the first negative command.

(31) ¹⁶ *for their feet rush into sin,* [j¹]

⇒ *they are swift to shed blood.* [j²]

Note the parallelism of **do not go along, do not set foot on their paths, their feet rush, they are swift**—all implying the persistent activity of sin.

Feet is a *synecdoche*, a part representing the whole. The feet represent the whole person.

(32) ¹⁷ **How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!** [e⁹]

Line 32—a *metaphorical* expression forming an **antithetical parallel** with L33-34. The “yet” is implied on L33. Dim-witted birds (ever hear the expression, “bird-brain”?) are not sufficiently stupid to fall into a trap laid for them by the fowler while they are looking. Yet, the thieves wait for their own blood. In other words, they lay a trap for themselves and then fall into it! Solomon is pointing to the **character-consequence sequence** which is fulfilled beyond physical life. As we all know, some thieves make a considerable living stealing from others and get away with it—until death.

(33) ¹⁸ *These men lie in wait for their own blood;* [j²]

(34) *they waylay only themselves!* [j³]

(35) ¹⁹ *Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain;* [j⁴]

(36) *it takes away the lives of those who get it.* [j⁵]

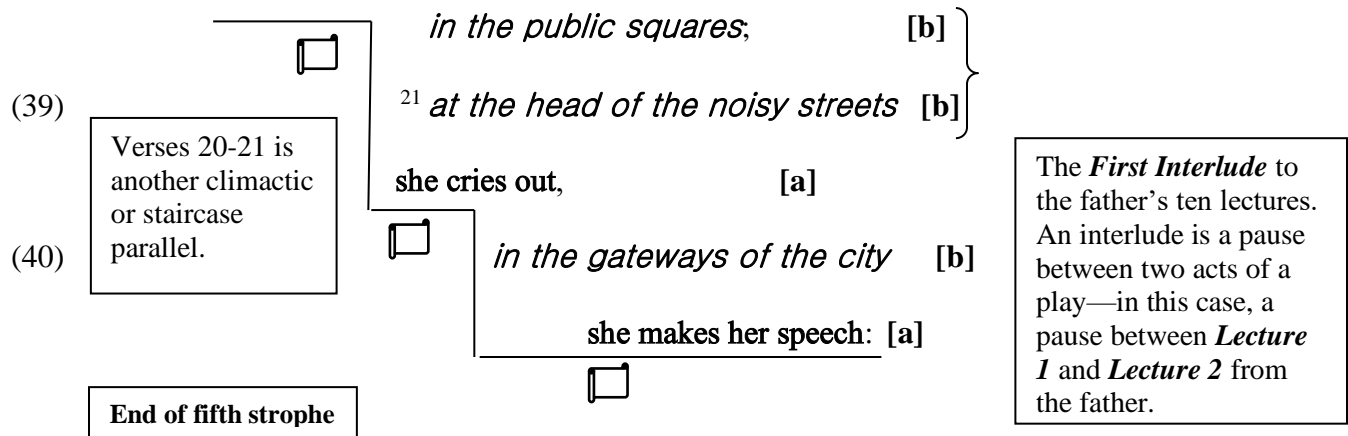
End of fourth strophe

(37) ²⁰ *Wisdom calls aloud* [a]

□ *in the street,*

(38) *she raises her voice* [a]

[b] Center of chiasm and emphasis of vv. 20-21.



Wisdom is *personified* by a woman crying out in the public streets. L37-40 is an **abab-baba** chiasm. By using a chiastic structure, Solomon **emphasizes** two different elements: (1) Wisdom’s **activity** is emphasized with four verb phrases—**calls aloud, raises her voice, cries out, makes her speech**. She wants to be heard and is not ashamed of what she wants to say. (2) Her public presence is emphasized at the center of the chiasm. She is at the busiest intersections of the city and at the gate where all public litigation is transacted. In other words, wisdom is not hidden away in some dark corner where men can never find her. She is in every place where people are gathered. She cannot be avoided by people who will wish to claim innocence by saying, “I never heard her voice!”

- (41) ²² “**How LONG** will you simple ones [a]
- (42) **love your simple ways?** [b]
- (43) **How LONG** will mockers [a]
- (44) **delight in mockery** [b]
- (45) and [how long will] fools [a]
- (46) **hate knowledge?** [b]

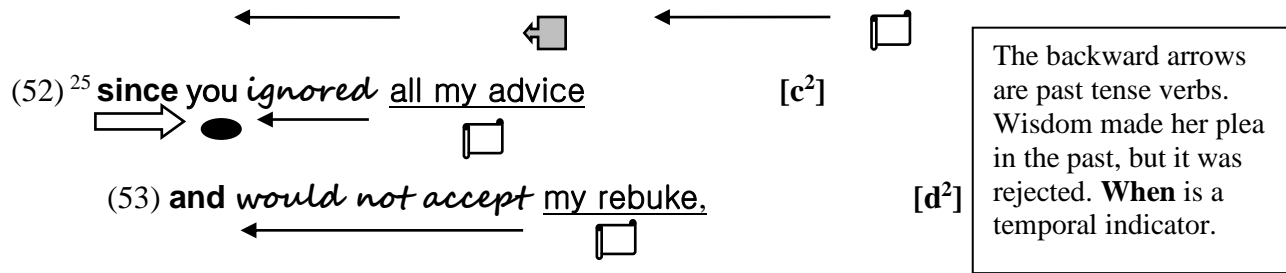
Wisdom now begins her speech. Note the quotation marks. **How long** is the beginning of wisdom’s **lament**. She **complains** about simple-minded people and those who mock wisdom. L45 is another **ellipsis** which omits the words **how long will** which are implied in the sentence. **Simple ones, mockers, and fools** are progressive terms indicating a progression into a sinful lifestyle. The **simple ones** are gullible and easily influenced by the **mockers** and **fools** who are entrenched in their rebellion against God.

- (47) ²³ **If you had responded to my rebuke,**
- (48) [then] **I would have poured out my heart to you**
- (49) **AND made my thoughts known to you.**

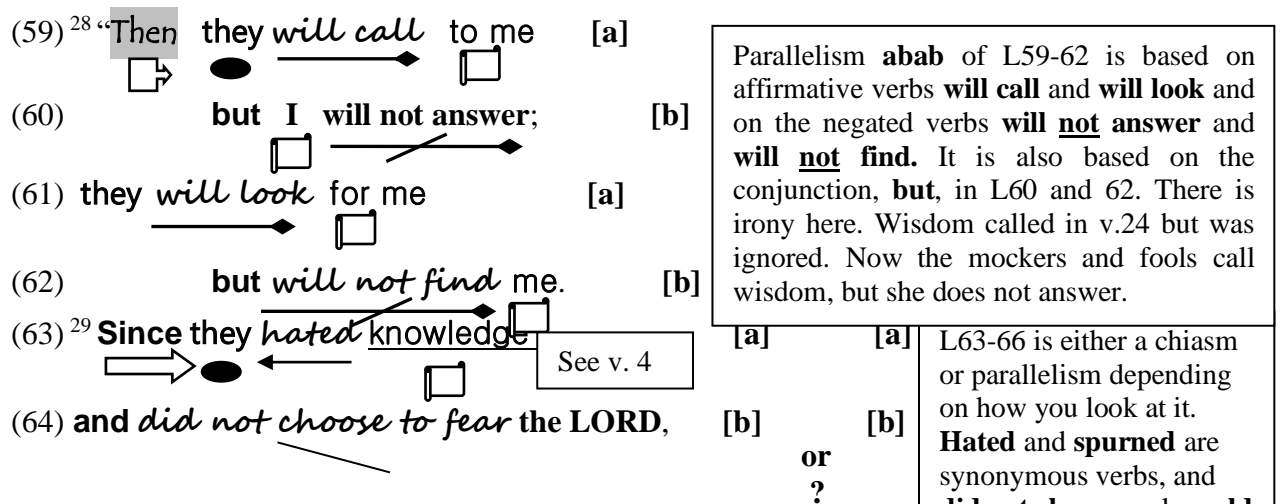
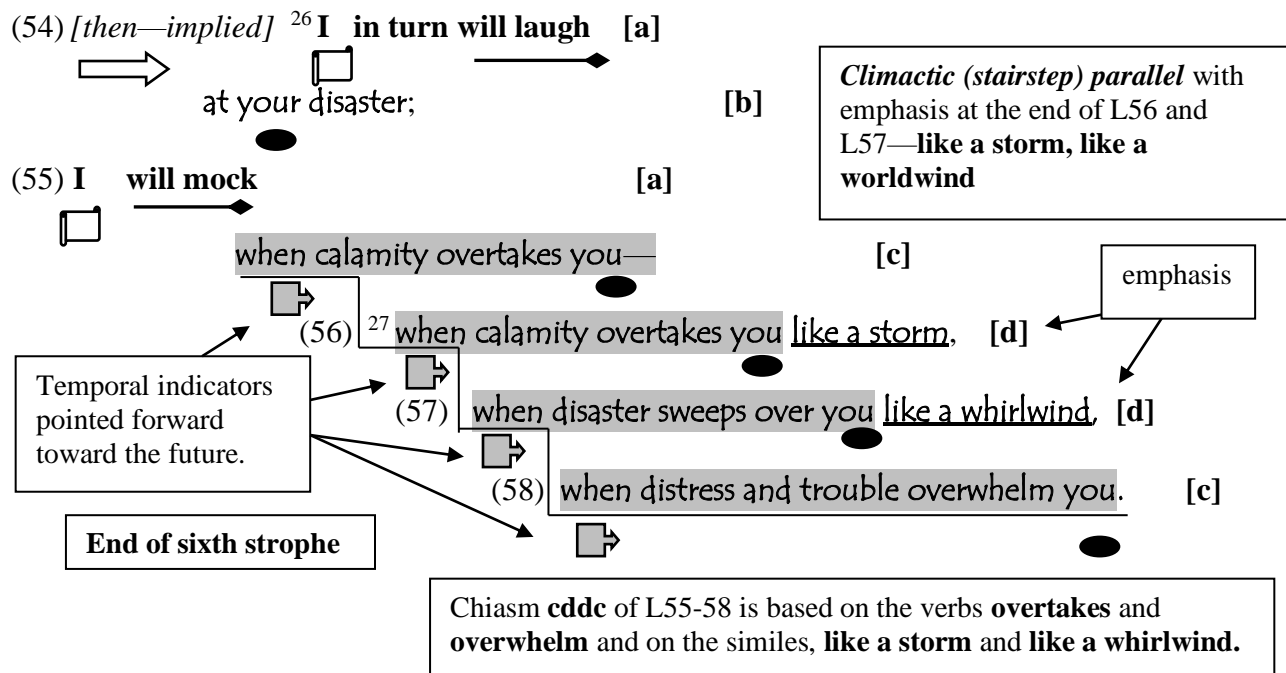
Verse 23 is an if...then statement. The action of the second clause is dependent on the first clause. Wisdom’s willingness to pour out her heart and make her thoughts known depends on the response of her audience, which in this case is poor.

Verse 23 illustrates the difficulty in translating Hebrew. The NASB reads, “Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.”

- (51) **AND no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,** [d]



The NIV has made v. 23 into an **if...then** statement. For this reason, I have shown the action of the verbs to be uncertain or contingent. In other words, something must happen in order for something else to happen. Wisdom **would have** revealed her thoughts **if** men **would have responded** to her and not **rejected her**. But they rejected her, resulting in the consequences in L54-62. Note the syntactic indicators **if, and, but since, and** which show the relationships within the verses. The verbs **called** and **stretched out** are past tense, indicating that wisdom's invitation had been rejected thus far. However, wisdom still hopes for a change of heart from her audience (v. 33).



(65)³⁰ **since** they would not accept my advice [b] [a]
 (66) **and spurned** my rebuke, [a] [b]

L63 begins a **since...then** reason statement
 (**then** is omitted but is implied in L67)

(67)³¹ [~~then—implied~~] **they will eat** the fruit of their ways [a]
 (68) **and be filled** with the fruit of their schemes. [b]
 (69)³² For the waywardness of the simple **will kill** them, [c]
 (70) **and the complacency** of fools **will destroy** them; [d]
 (71)³³ **but whoever** listens to me **will live in safety**
 (72) **and** [~~will—implied~~] **be at ease, without fear of harm.**”

End of seventh strophe

The law of sowing and reaping which occurs throughout *Proverbs*.

will be filled goes beyond **will eat**. Thus, synonymous parallels are usually more than simple repetitions of ideas: **A, what is more...B**. This parallel could be interpreted, **they will eat...what's more, they will be filled** (or gorged to the point of being sick). The same could be said of L69-70. **will destroy them** expresses an eternal punishment beyond **will kill them** which is temporal.

II. Meaning of words and phrases (Step 3.3 Wolvaardt, p. 79) and Meaning Blocks of Proverbs 1 (Step 3.4 Wolvaardt, p. 79)

We will accomplish both steps simultaneously by developing the meaning blocks in Proverbs 1.

(1) The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

- (2)² for attaining **wisdom** and **discipline**;
- (3) for understanding words of insight;
- (4)³ for acquiring a disciplined and **prudent** life,
- (5) doing what is right and just and fair;

A

Studying the proverbs of Solomon is for the purpose of acquiring (getting) practical knowledge (**wisdom**) producing an orderly (**disciplined**) and sensible (**prudent**) life which is just and fair.

- (6)⁴ for giving **prudence** to the **simple**,
- (7) knowledge and discretion to the young—
- (8)⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning,

The proverbs make simple-minded people and young people wise. Furthermore, people who are already wise are invited to become even wiser. Those who make careful judgments (**the discerning**) are invited to get further instruction (**guidance**) for making good judgments by learning to interpret the proverbs. (The omission of the mocker and the fool in this introduction may be significant. See below).

- (9) and let the discerning get guidance—
 (10)⁶ for understanding proverbs and parables,
 (11) the sayings and riddles of the wise.

B**End of first strophe**

- (12)⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
 (13) but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

C**End of second strophe**

A person begins to acquire wisdom by worshiping God and accepting His law, but fools hate God's law and His discipline (cf. the synonymous parallel in Ps. 19: 7-9; see also Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs*, I. pp. 100-101.

- (14)⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
 (15) and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
 (16)⁹ They will be a garland to grace your head
 (17) and a chain to adorn your neck.

D**End of third strophe**

Do not turn away from your father's and mother's teaching. If properly applied, our teaching will adorn your life with honor and respect.

- (18)¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you,
 (19) do not give in to them.

E

Son, don't follow the crowd, no matter how much it promises you.

- (20)¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us;
 (21) let's lie in wait for someone's blood,
 (22) let's waylay some harmless soul;
 (23)¹² let's swallow them alive, like the grave,
 (24) and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
 (25)¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things
 (26) and fill our houses with plunder;
 (27)¹⁴ throw in your lot with us,
 (28) and we will share a common purse"—

F

Some people will promise you success through injustice and fraud, even murder. They will pretend to offer you community and belonging through crime and wrongdoing. (It should be noted here that the father describes the activity of the unrighteous in the worst possible terms using *hyperbole* to describe *any* kind of injustice toward others as a means of financial gain. There are more subtle forms of injustice that are also condemned—"little white lies" and character assassination through slander.)

- (29)¹⁵ my son, do not go along with them,
 (30) do not set foot on their paths;
 (31)¹⁶ for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.

G

Don't throw in your lot with people who compromise biblical principles for material gain. Such people violate God's law without thinking of the consequences.

- (32)¹⁷ How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!
 (33)¹⁸ These men lie in wait for their own blood;
 (34) they waylay only themselves!

Even stupid birds have sense enough not to fall into a trap they have seen laid for them, but sinners cannot understand that the trap they lay for others will become their own trap.

- (35)¹⁹ Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain;
 (36) it takes away the lives of those who get it.

H

End of fourth strophe

- (37)²⁰ Wisdom calls aloud in the street,
 (38) she raises her voice in the public squares;
 (39)²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out,
 (40) in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:

I

God's wisdom through His word and through creation is being proclaimed in every place men live and work, so that no one can claim they have never heard it (cf. Rom. 1: 18-32).

End of fifth strophe

- (41)²² "How long will you simple ones
 (42) love your simple ways?
 (43) How long will mockers
 (44) delight in mockery
 (45) and fools
 (46) hate knowledge?"

J

How long will you simple-minded people enjoy following the crowd? How long will you mockers enjoy ridiculing the law of God? How long will you fools hate the knowledge of God and everything which is good? (**How long?** indicates that their rebellion against wisdom has been persistent, probably from their youth (Waltke, *Proverbs*, I. pp. 202-203).

Note: In summarizing meaning blocks, you are also explaining words and phrases in your own words. You are trying to understand the text and make it plain to your audience by *paraphrasing*; you are not offering an alternative translation. Therefore, you have a certain degree of liberty in your summary.

- (47)²³ If you had responded to my rebuke,
 (48) I would have poured out my heart to you
 (49) and made my thoughts known to you.

K

Wisdom will come to anyone who submits himself to God's sovereignty over his life.

- (50)²⁴ But since you rejected me when I called
 (51) and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
 (52)²⁵ since you ignored all my advice
 (53) and would not accept my rebuke,
 (54)²⁶ I in turn will laugh at your disaster;
 (55) I will mock when calamity overtakes you—
 (56)²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
 (57) when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
 (58) when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

L

The mocker and the fool have rejected wisdom; therefore, wisdom will reject them on the day of calamity. Stated another way, **since** fools have mocked wisdom, **then** wisdom will mock them. L50-53 is the **premise** of a conditional statement. L54-58 is the **conclusion**. **Since** the premise is true—fools have rejected wisdom—**then** the conclusion is also true—wisdom will mock them. However, wisdom is speaking this way to warn the simple. She makes a final plea in v. 33.

End of sixth strophe

Further commentary on vv. 24-27.

If a person rejects the Lord in this life, the Lord will also reject him at death. Since he mocked the Lord in this life, the Lord will also mock him at death. The rejection by the Lord must be a reference to death. Every man has the opportunity to respond positively to either special or general revelation while he is living, but at death, his pleas for help will fall on deaf ears. However, there may come a time in a man's life when he is *no longer potentially receptive to God's invitation*. This is represented by the **mock**er and the **fool** who have gone beyond the resistance of the **simple one** or gullible person. The mocker and fool may represent persons who have gone *beyond the possibility of repentance*. In vv. 24-27, there seems to be the certainty and finality of judgment based on the finality of their rejection of wisdom.

The *mock*er and the *fool* have not rejected wisdom once or twice when she called to them, but repeatedly their whole lives. In his analysis of the mocker and the fool in *Proverbs*, Waltke holds out *no hope* for their restoration—unlike the gullible (**simple ones**), who may be influenced to turn from their foolishness to wisdom (Waltke, *Proverbs*, pp. 203, 112-114). As indicated above, the purpose of the proverbs is to make the **simple** and **young** wise and the **wise** even wiser, but *nothing* is said about the benefit of the proverbs to the **mock**er and the **fool**. Waltke believes that this omission is significant.

(59)²⁸ “Then they will call to me
(60) but I will not answer;
(61) they will look for me
(62) but will not find me.

M

When the final disaster of death comes upon those who reject God's wisdom, God will not answer their cries for mercy. Although they will look to Him for help, He will not show Himself. (Once again, this is not the cry of true repentance—which God will always hear—but the cry for mercy when the final disaster, death, has come.)

(63)²⁹ Since they hated knowledge
(64) and did not choose to fear the LORD,
(65)³⁰ since they would not accept my advice
(66) and spurned my rebuke,
(67)³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways
(68) and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

N

Since they did not listen to the law of God or fear His reproof, they will finally suffer the eternal consequences of their own sinful lifestyles. The eternal law of **sowing and reaping** will be fulfilled in their judgment.

(69)³² For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
(70) and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

O

In the end, their doom is well-deserved, for they have brought their judgment upon themselves.

(71)³³ but whoever listens to me will live in safety
(72) and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

P

Whoever responds to the wisdom of God through repentance and faith will be saved.

End of seventh strophe

III. Possible Sermon on Proverbs 1: 2-6

The title of the sermon could be: *Why should we study the proverbs?* The *answer* to this question could be *three parts* of the sermon:

- I. Because the proverbs impart the knowledge necessary for living successfully
 - A. By imparting practical knowledge
 - B. By developing discipline and order
 - C. By developing good sense
- II. Because the proverbs are an important means to practical obedience
 - A. In living a disciplined life of sound judgment
 - B. In living a just and fair life
- III. Because the proverbs are for everyone
 - A. For simple-minded people and young people who lack experience
 - B. For experienced people who already have much wisdom.

To fill out the sermon, various proverbs could be used to illustrate all the sub-points in the outline (A's, B's, and C). *Proverbs* speaks extensively on the subjects of discipline, sound judgment, justice and fairness, wisdom, and youth. You could use an exhaustive concordance or the cross references in your study Bibles.

IV. Stylistic Features in the Meaning Blocks of Proverbs 1

Proverbs 1 (NIV)

(1) The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

- (2)² for attaining wisdom and discipline;
 (3) **for understanding words of insight**;
 (4)³ for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
 (5) doing what is right and just and fair;

A

The purpose of the proverbs—attaining knowledge which leads to practical godliness and a good life.

- (6)⁴ for giving prudence to **the simple**,
 (7) knowledge and discretion to **the young**—

B

The purpose of the proverbs to specific audiences—to make the simple and the young wise and to make the wise and the discerning even wiser.

- (8)⁵ let **the wise** listen and add to their learning,
 (9) and let **the discerning** get guidance—

B

The purpose of gaining knowledge—to get more knowledge leading to a good life.

- (10)⁶ **for understanding proverbs and parables**,
 (11) **the sayings and riddles of the wise**.

A

The purpose of gaining knowledge—to get more knowledge leading to a good life.

- (12)⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,*
 (13) *but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*

Introduction to the two ways which are described in the following verses—the way of the father's and mother's instruction or the way of the gang.

- (14)⁸ **Listen, my son, to your father's instruction**

The father promises *wisdom's reward* of blessing in *private*. Synonymous with Lady Wisdom's call *in public places* (L37-40).

- (15) **and do not forsake your mother's teaching.**
 (16)⁹ **They will be a garland to grace your head**
 (17) **and a chain to adorn your neck.**

C¹

- (18)¹⁰ **My son, if sinners entice you,**
 (19) **do not give in to them.**

Inclusion

The father's first warning to the son against following the gang. Synonymous with Lady Wisdom's warning to the simple ones in the streets (L41-46).

- (20)¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us;
 (21) let's lie in wait for someone's blood,
 (22) let's waylay some harmless soul;
 (23)¹² let's swallow them alive, like the grave,
 (24) and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
 (25)¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things
 (26) and fill our houses with plunder;
 (27)¹⁴ throw in your lot with us,
 (28) and we will share a common purse"—

D¹

The deeds of the gang are synonymously parallel with their rejection of wisdom (L47-53). The promise of easy money is antithetically parallel with the certainty of judgment in L31-36. (Note the highlighted words in L21-22 and their parallels in L33-34.) Further, the promises of easy money correspond to the father's promise of the blessings of wisdom (L16-17).

Inclusion

- (29)¹⁵ **my son, do not go along with them,**
 (30) **do not set foot on their paths;**

C²

The father's *second warning to the son against following the gang* followed by his reasons in L31-36.

- (31)¹⁶ **for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.**
 (32)¹⁷ **How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!**
 (33)¹⁸ **These men lie in wait for their own blood;**
 (34) **they waylay only themselves!**
 (35)¹⁹ **Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain;**
 (36) **it takes away the lives of those who get it.**

D²

*The certainty of judgment is antithetically parallel with the promise of easy money in L20-28. While lying in wait for someone else's blood, the gang is actually lying in wait **for their own blood** (L21-22).*

Note to the student: Determining parallels is not an exact science. The important thing is not the way you label them, but in understanding the passage. In D¹ and D², the father is speaking, but he is describing the actions of the gang and their consequences. L31-L32 could be labeled C²

- (37) **she raises her voice in the public squares;**

in *private* (L14-17), *Lady Wisdom calls* to the simple in *public places* (cf. Waltke).

- (39)²¹ **at the head of the noisy streets she cries out,**
 (40) **in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:**
 (41)²² **“How long will you simple ones**
 (42) **love your simple ways?**
 (43) **How long will mockers**
 (44) **delight in mockery**
 (45) **and fools**
 (46) **hate knowledge?**

C³

Lady Wisdom warns the simple ones, mockers, and fools in the streets. Synonymous with the father’s warning the son in private (L14-17).

- (47)²³ If you had responded to my rebuke,
 (48) I would have poured out my heart to you
 (49) and made my thoughts known to you.
 (50)²⁴ But since you rejected me when I called
 (51) and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
 (52)²⁵ since you ignored all my advice
 (53) and would not accept my rebuke,
 (54)²⁶ I in turn will laugh at your disaster;
 (55) I will mock when calamity overtakes you—
 (56)²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
 (57) when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
 (58) when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

D³

The rejection of wisdom is synonymously parallel with the deeds of the gang (L20-28) (D¹). The certainty of judgment for the rejection of wisdom (L47-58) (D³) is synonymously parallel to the certainty of judgment for the deeds of the gang (L31-36) (D²). The temporal outcome of rejecting wisdom is a lifestyle of sin—the deeds of the gang—which deserve judgment.

This is the law of sowing and reaping—the deed-outcome relationship between sin and judgment.

- (59)²⁸ **“Then they will call to me**
 (60) **but I will not answer;**
 (61) **they will look for me**
 (62) **but will not find me.**

C⁴

Lady Wisdom called out to unrepentant sinners in the streets and was rejected. No one listened. At the final disaster—death—unrepentant sinners call out to Lady Wisdom, but she rejects them and does not answer them.

- (63)²⁹ Since they hated knowledge
 (64) and did not choose to fear the LORD,
 (65)³⁰ since they would not accept my advice
 (66) and spurned my rebuke,
 (67)³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways
 (68) and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
 (69)³² For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
 (70) and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
 (71)³³ **but whoever listens to me will live in safety**
 (72) **and be at ease, without fear of harm.”**

D⁴

The law of sowing and reaping—the deed-outcome relationship between sin and judgment. L67-70 are synonymous with L33-36.

C⁵

As the father promises blessing to the son if he will listen to instruction, so Lady Wisdom promises protection and salvation. The law of sowing and reaping—the deed-outcome relationship between listening to wisdom and receiving salvation.

The important thing is not determining the exact stylistic sequence but seeing the interchange between the father's commands to the son in contrast to the gang, wisdom's public speech, and the consequences of the gang's actions.

V. Outline of Collection I of Proverbs

The following is an outline of **Collection I** of *Proverbs* adapted from Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*. For a concise commentary on the Proverbs see my *Wisdom Literature—Proverbs*.

Collection I (1:1—9: 18)

Collection I sets the context for the entirety of the book and is made up of extended poems in praise of wisdom which serve to motivate the reader to receive the wisdom offered in all seven collections (Waltke, p. 10).

A. Title with Preamble (1: 1-7)

1. Title (1: 1)
2. Preamble (1: 2-7)

B. Prologue (1: 8—8:36)

1. Lecture 1: Exhortation to listen and to reject the gang's invitation (1: 8-19)

[First Interlude: Wisdom's rebuke of the gullible (1: 20-33)]

2. Lecture 2: Safeguard against the wicked (2: 1-22)
3. Lecture 3: The Lord's promises and the son's obligations (3: 1-12)
4. Lecture 4: The value of wisdom (3: 13-35)
5. Lecture 5: Get the family heritage (4: 1-9)
6. Lecture 6: Stay off the wrong way (4: 10-19)
7. Lecture 7: Don't swerve from the right way (4: 20-27)
8. Lecture 8: The folly of adultery and the wisdom of marriage (5: 1-23)

[Appendix: Three inferior types of men (6: 1-19)]

9. Lecture 9: The high price of an unchaste wife (6: 20-35)
10. Lecture 10: The unchaste wife's seductive tactics (7: 1-27)

[Second Interlude: Wisdom's self-praise to the gullible (8: 1-36)]

C. Epilogue: Rival banquets of wisdom and folly (9: 1-18)

Waltke offers the following **chiastic** arrangement for Collection I (*Proverbs*, Vol. I. p. 12).

A—Rival invitations of the father and the gang to the son	1: 8-19
B—Wisdom's rebuke of the gullible	1:20-33
C—Janus: The father's command to heed teaching as a safeguard against evil men and the unchaste wife	2: 1-22
D—The father's commands to heed teaching	3:1—4:27
D'—The father's warnings against the unchaste wife	5: 1—6:35

C'—Janus: The father's warnings against Wisdom's rival	7:1-27
B'—Wisdom's invitation to the gullible	8:1-36
A'—Rival invitations of Wisdom and the foolish woman to the gullible	9:1-18

(A *janus* is a transition saying which looks *backward* to what has been said before and *forward* to what is going to be said afterwards. Incidentally, Waltke calls the structure of Proverbs 1: 1—9: 1-18 a *concentric* pattern, not a *chiastic* pattern (I. p. 12). In his terminology, a *concentric* pattern is **ABCCBA** while a *chiastic* pattern is **ABCXCBA** with a middle element (I. p. 47). Thus, there are differences among scholars about the definitions of stylistic features, but this should not concern you. The important thing is to see the patterns regardless of what you wish to call them. Understand, however, that there are chiastic patterns with a middle element.)