

Supplement to “Songs in the Key of Life”

By Cloyce Sutton II

For several reasons (including time, space, ineptitude, and stupidity), I did not include this material in the original handout. I decided to include some of this in my oral presentation, and decided that a printed version would be helpful to you. I hope I was right.

Near Eastern Literature

See Part III — “Psalms as Literature” (p 13-18)

Mythopoeic Elements

Some pss seem to incorporate elements of ancient pagan mythology. Critics sometimes point to this and say that Biblical writers accepted the same mythology as their pagan neighbors. How do we account for this?

M. Futato (Interpreting, 53-55) refers to this as *mythopoeic imagery*. That is, Israelite writers used the language and elements of ANE mythology for polemical purposes. They did not believe the myths, but used the language in figurative ways to engage “the ancient Near Eastern worldview on its own terms.” They employed this “in their arguments against those who did believe in such forces and deities.” (54f)

Futato offers a superb comparison between the text of Ps 74.13f and an Ugaritic text (KTU 1.3 iii 38-42 / CTA 3.III 36-38).

<i>Psalms 74.13-14</i>	<i>Ugaritic Text</i>
You split the sea [yam] by your strength	Didn't I demolish El's Darling, Sea [yamm]? Didn't I finish off the divine river, Rabbim?
And smashed the sea monster's [tanninim] heads	Didn't I snare the Dragon [tannin]? I enveloped him,
You crushed the heads of Leviathan [liveyatan]	I demolished the Twisting Serpent [lotan]
And let the desert animals eat him. (NLT)	the monster of seven heads.

He notes that the names of the chaotic world forces are the same and are listed in the same order. Both texts affirm that a deity vanquishes these forces. But the Ps text asserts that it is the God of Israel, not Baal or any other God, who has such power.

R. Chisholm, citing Ps 18.7-15 as an example, notes that, “In the ancient Near East, any warrior-king worth his salt, especially a divine one, must appear in style with the proper cosmic fanfare

and effect. In describing the Lord, the divine warrior-king *par excellence*, the biblical poets employed this stereotypical language.” (Exegesis, 175)

I would also add that while most of these cases are probably figurative uses of language, we should not completely rule out that some of these divine visitations by storm might have a literal basis. For example, scholars generally view the storm or whirlwind from which God spoke to Job (Jb 38.1) as a literal storm. Craigie views Ps 29.3-9 as a description of a thunderstorm (WBC1, 245, 247, 249). It is also possible that Jg 5.19ff refers to a rainstorm sent by God to effectively disable Sisera’s chariot forces (Jg 4.12-16).

ANE Texts

Below are a few examples of ANE poetry for comparison with biblical pss. While some of the ANE compositions are reasonably good poetry, their biblical counterparts are clearly superior. Biblical pss demonstrate a much better caliber of poetry, a much higher conception of God, and a much greater sense of human morality.

“A Prayer for the Security of Ugarit”

*In Wyatt (Texts, 363ff); 14th - 13th centuries BC; KTU 1.65.
Compare to the Zion Pss (48, 84, 87, 102, 122, 125, 137).*

Gods of the pantheon,
family of the gods,
assembly of the gods;

Thukamun and Shanim,
{5} El and Athirat!

Be gracious, El!
Help, El!
Peace, El!

El, hasten!
{10} El, succour!

For the sake of Saphon,
for the sake of Ugarit!

By the divine spear;
by the divine axe;
{15} by the divine mace;
by the divine *dtn*-weapon;

By the divine burnt-offering;
by the divine perpetual-offering;
by the divine *gdyn*-offering;
{20} by the divine...

“Prayer to Any God”

*In Thomas (Docs, 111-17); Sumerian, c. 2000 BC.
Compare to the penitential pss (6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).*

(Of) my lord — may the anger of his heart to its place return; *cf., Ps 6.1*
(Of) the god who is unknown — to its place (return);
The mother-goddess who is unknown — to its place (return);
The god, known or unknown — to its place (return);
{5} The mother-goddess, known or unknown — to its place (return);
The heart of my god — to its place (return);
The heart of my mother-goddess — to its place (return);
The god and my mother-goddess — to its place (return);
The god w[ho is angry] with [me — to its place (return)];
{10} The mother-goddess [who is angry with me — to its place (return)].
The transgression [pI have committed] — I know not;
The sin [I have sinned] — I know not.
A good name — [may the god pronounce] for me (?);
A good name — [may my mother-goddess pronounce] for me (?);
{15} A good name — [may the god na]me;
A good name — [may my mother-goddess name].
Food [of my god (?) — unwittingly I have ea]ten;
Water of a cesspool (?) — [unwittingly I have] drunk;
What was forbidden by my god — unw[ittingly] I have eaten;
{20} What was forbidden by my mother-goddess — unwittingly I have trodden.
My lord — my transgressions are many, my sins are great; *cf., Ps 25.11*
My god — my transgressions are many, my sins (are great);
My mother-goddess — my transgressions are many, my sins (are great);
God, known or unknown — my transgressions are many, my sins (are great);
{25} Mother-goddess, known or unknown — my transgressions are many, my sins (are great).
The transgression I have committed — I know not;
The sin I have sinned — I know not; *cf., Ps 51.3*
The forbidden thing I have eaten — I (know) not;
The forbidden thing (ground) I have trodden — I (know) not.
{30} The lord in the anger of his heart has looked at me;
The god in the rage of his heart has turned on me;
The mother-goddess is angry with me and has made me ill;
The god, known or unknown, has afflicted me; *cr., Ps 88.7; 119.75*
The mother-goddess, known or unknown, has caused me anguish.
{35} I keep seeking help, but no one takes my hand;
I have wept, but to my side they have not come; *cf., Ps 18.41; 142.4*
I utter laments, but no one hears me;
I am in anguish, I am overwhelmed, I do not see (light).
The god who is merciful — (to him) I turn, my prayer I speak;
{40} My mother-goddess — her foot I kiss, before her (?) I crawl;
The god, known-or unknown — ... [I spe]ak (?);
The mother-goddess, known [or unknown] — ... [I spe]ak (?),

My lord, tu[rn to me]...;
 Mother-goddess, lo[ok upon me]...;
 {45} God, known [or unknown, turn to me]...; *cf., Ps 69.16*
 Mother-goddess, known [or unknown, look upon me]...
 How long, [my (?)] God — [until the anger of thy heart rests]?
 How long, my mother-goddess — [until the anger of thy heart rests]? *cf., Ps 13.1f; 79.5; 90.13*
 How long, god known or unknown — until the anger of [thy] heart [rests]?
 {50} How long, mother-goddess, known or unknown — until thy hostile heart returns to its
 place?
 Mankind is dumb and knows nothing; *cf., Ps 73.22; 92.6; 94.8*
 Mankind — name one who may — what know thy?
 Whether one does wrong or does right one knows not. *cf., Ps 19.12*
 My lord, thou wilt not strike down thy servant;
 {55} Into the waters of a morass he has been cast; take thou his hand. *cf., Ps 40.2; 69.14f*
 The sin I have sinned — turn thou to good;
 The transgression I have committed — may the wind carry away! *cf., Ps 1.4; 35.5; 68.2*
 My iniquities (which are) many — like a garment strip off.
 My god — the transgressions seven times seven, my transgressions, forgive.
 {60} My mother-goddess — the transgressions seven times seven, (my transgressions, forgive.)
 God, known or unknown — the transgressions seven times seven, (my transgressions, forgive.)
 Mother-goddess, known or unknown — the transgressions seven times seven, (my
 transgressions, forgive.)
 My transgressions forgive, and I will celebrate thy praises *cf., Ps 51.18f, 13; 61.8*
 May thy heart, like the heart of one's mother who bore — to its place return;
 {65} (Of one's) mother who bore and of (of one's) father who begot — to its place return.

“Prayer for the King”

*R. E. Murphy (cited by Goldingay, BCOT1, 34f); Babylonian; no date given.
 Goldingay suggests Ps 72 as a comparison.*

May Anu and Antu in heaven bless him,
 May Bel and Belit in E-kur determine his fate.
 May Ea and Damkina, who dwell in the great depths, grant him life unto distant days.
 May Makh, the ruler of the great countries, provide him with complete dominion (?).
 {5} May sin, the light of heaven, give him royal progeny unto distant days.
 May the hero Shamash, the lord of heaven and earth, make firm the throne of his kingdom unto
 distant days.
 May Ea, the possessor of the source, provide him with wisdom.
 May Marduk, who loves his rule, the lord of the sources, grant him blessing in fullness.

“A Hymn to Baal Enthroned”

*In Wyatt (Texts, 388ff); 14th - 13th centuries BC; KTU 1.101.
Compare various Hymns and Enthronement Pss (29, 47, 68, 93, 96, 147).*

Baal sits like the base of a mountain
Hadd set[tles] as the ocean

in the midst of his divine mountain, Saphon,
in [the midst of] the mountain of victory.

{5} Seven lightning-flashes []
eight bundles of thunder []
a tree-of-lightning [in his] ri[ght hand].

His head is magnificent,
His brow is dew-drenched.
{10} His feet are eloquent in (his) wrath.

[His] horn is [exal]ted;
his head is in the snows in heaven,
[with] the god there is abounding water.

{15} His mouth is like two clouds [],
[his lips] like wine from jars,
his heart []

numerous missing lines

[] the Gracious one []
[] oil of peace poured into a bowl.

{20} Virgin Anat [washed] her hands,
her fingers [the Beloved of] of the Powerful One.

She took her lyre in her hand,
[she clasped] the bull-shaped instrument to her breast.

She sang of the loves of Valiant Baal,
{25} of the affection of <Pidray daughter of light,>
[the desire of Taliy daughter of Shower,]
[the love of Arsiy daughter of Snatch-for-ever]

text breaks off

Biblical Poetry

See part V — “Psalms as Poetry” (p 24-30).

Examples of alliteration, assonance, paranomasia (p 26).

- Alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds)
 - Ps 122.6 — repetition of 4 words with *sh-l-m* sounds
— Hebrew: שאלו שלום ירושלם ישליו אהביך
— Transliteration: *sha'alu shalom yerushalam yishlayu 'ohavayik*
— English: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you.
- Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds)
 - Ex 14.14 — repetition of the final “o” sound by four words spaced evenly through the verse.
— In each case, the sound is created by the suffixed pronominal 3rd pers sing ending of the given word (his, him, etc). The words are spaced 2-4 words apart.
— Hebrew: ... אתו ... אתו ... עמו ... ארצו ... לו ...
— Transliteration: ... *ato... ato... `amo... artso... lo...*
— English: ... him... him... his people... his land... him
- Paranomasia (play on words)
 - Ps 6.10 — a play on words with the three consonant sounds *b-w-sh*.
— Key words: “ashamed” = yeboshu [יבשו]; “turn back” = yashubu [ישבו]; disgraced = yeboshu [יבשו].

Parallelism

- On older & newer views:
 - **Older views** seem to emphasize two things: The kind (or form or type) of parallelism (e.g., synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, etc.), and the ways in which two lines are similar. **Newer views** seems to emphasize how the parallel members function, and how two lines are different.
 - It seems to be the classic **form & function** debate. I personally think there is room for both.
 - When teaching parallelism to others for the first time, I think that introducing the basic forms is helpful. The basic groupings of synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic are a good starting point. Of course you eventually want to take them further and show them how each type can work.

- If you start with a long list of all the ways two lines can relate to one another (general & specific; what & how; what & who; abstract & concrete; vague & intense; etc), this would probably confuse a novice.
 - Also, both similarity and differences are important: “We would want to assert, in some distinction from Alter and Kugel, that the repetition at work, at least in some ‘parallel’ or congruent construction, indicates that *sameness* is every bit as important as *difference*... *Both* sameness and difference matter.” (LeMon & Strawn, *Parallelism*, 510).
- Definitions (p 27).
 - As you think about how parallelism extends across a poem or across its constituent parts, remember that it can have three basic developments: linear, parallel, or inverted (chiastic).

Parallelism & Structure — More examples

Note: We are frequently surprised by the insights we draw from pondering parallelism. The insights usually come from asking why two things are put side-by-side in a verse.

Ps 1

The contrasts are interesting. In v 5, we expect that the sinner will not stand in judgment (v 5a). What is a bit unexpected is that this is equated with not being permitted in the righteous assembly (v 5b). The point seems to be that there is a temporal judgment (5b) that is just as fitting for the wicked as the final judgment (v 5a).

Also, in v 6, the Lord knows the way of the righteous (v 6a). This is not surprising, since the righteous also knows God’s ways (v 2) and since he has avoided the way of the wicked (v 1). This is compared with the way of the wicked perishing (v 6b). This reminds us that the reason the wicked wind up on a dead-end path is because it is a path unknown (unapproved) by the Lord. How can it lead anywhere?

Ps 2

- v 1-3 — Kings take counsel against YHWH
 - v 4-6 — YHWH speaks of his king
 - v 7-9 — YHWH’s Son speaks of his kingship
- v 10-12 — Kings urged to take refuge in YHWH

Ps 25

This is an alphabetic psalm. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In reality, three verses cheat a bit:

- v 2 should begin with *bet* [ב]; it actually begins with *alef* [א], but the second word begins with *bet*.
- v 5 uses two letters of the alphabet: *he* [ה] and *waw* [ו]; the portion of v 5 that should begin with *waw* actually begins with *alef* [א]; *waw* is the second letter of that word.
- v 18 should begin with *qof* [ק]; it actually begins with *resh* [ר], as does v 19.

Aside from this, the ps can be analyzed in different ways. Its alphabetic sequence can be viewed simply as a linear arrangement. It might also use an inverted structure — at least two versions have been suggested.

Möller and also Ruppert (cited by Craigie, WBC1, 217f) analyze it in this way:

- A (my soul, v 1; ashamed, v 2; enemies, v 2; wait, v 3) — v 1-3
- B (sins, v 7; YHWH, v 4) — 4-7
- C (good, v 8; instructs, v 8; way, v 8; covenant, 10) — v 8-10
- D — v 11
- C' (instruct, v 12; way, v 12; prosperity, v 13; covenant, v 14) — 12-14
- B' (sins, v 18; YHWH, v 15) — v 15-18
- A (enemies, v 19; ashamed, v 20; soul, v 20; wait, v 21) — v 19-21

Dorsey analyzes it this way (Structure, 183-184):

- A — introductory cry for help (v 1-3) — shame, wait, enemies
- B — YHWH, teach me your ways (v 4f) — ways
- C — plea for forgiveness (v 6f) — transgressions, for YHWH's goodness
- D — YHWH's goodness (v 8ff)
- C' — plea for forgiveness (v 11) — guilt, for YHWH's name
- B' — YHWH will teach his followers his way (v 12ff) — way
- A' — concluding cry for help (v 15-21) — shame, wait, enemies
- Addendum (v 22)

Ps 57

Note the refrain, “Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Your glory above the earth” at v 5, 11. This marks the end of two stanzas.

Ps 90

Note the inverted use of time units:

Everlasting (v 2)
Generations (v 1)
Years (v 4)
Day (v 4)
Night (v 4)
Morning (v 14)
Days (v 15)
Years (v 15)
Generations (“their children” — v 16)

Note also, that at the beginning, God uses time and mortality to “turn back” (*shuvu* [שׁוּבוּ]) his people. At the end, his people, having learned their lesson, urge YHWH to “return” (*shuvah* [שׁוּבוּה]) to his people. They may live under the constraints of time, but YHWH can take their time-bound existence and make it significant.

Ps 96.1

Note how the parallelism develops in the first three verses. Each is a call to “Sing to the Lord!” or some similar statement. The main difference is in the , however in the second part of each line. V 1a tells *what* should sing (“a new song”). V 1b tells *who* (“all the earth”). V 2a tells *how* (“bless his name”). V 2b tells the *content* of the song (“good tidings”). V 3a-b expand the scope of the worship by including “the nations” and “all the peoples.”

Ps 131

Only three verses long, this gem is full of surprises. It begins as a wisdom ps (v 1), proceeds as a ps of trust (v 2), and ends by shifting from a personal ps to a corporate ps (v 3). The imagery is also unusual in using a sleeping, weaned toddler as an example of personal and corporate contentment.

Ps 136

- 1a - Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
2a - Give thanks to the God of gods,
3a - Give thanks to the Lord of lords,

4a - To Him who alone does great wonders,
5a - To Him who made the heavens with skill,
6a - To Him who spread out the earth above the waters,
7a - To Him who made *the* great lights,
8a - The sun to rule by day,
9a - The moon and stars to rule by night,

10a - To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn,
11a - And brought Israel out from their midst,
12a - With a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
13a - To Him who divided the Red Sea asunder,
14a - And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
15a - But He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
16a - To Him who led His people through the wilderness,

17a - To Him who smote great kings,
18a - And slew mighty kings,
19a - Sihon, king of the Amorites,
20a - And Og, king of Bashan,
21a - And gave their land as a heritage,
22a - Even a heritage to Israel His servant,

23a - Who remembered us in our low estate,
24a - And has rescued us from our adversaries,
25a - Who gives food to all flesh,
26a - Give thanks to the God of heaven,

Ps 147

This ps divides easily into three strophes, each beginning with an imperative to praise God (v 1, 7, 12), and ending with a statement about God's favor upon certain people (v 6, 11, 20). Fokkelmann (Guide, 218) divides the ps into three stanzas, each with two or more strophes: 1-3 / 4-6 // 7-8 / 9-11 // 12-14 / 15-17 / 18-20.

Also, note that each stanza, in addition to the summons and blessing, has a description of YHWH's cosmic power.

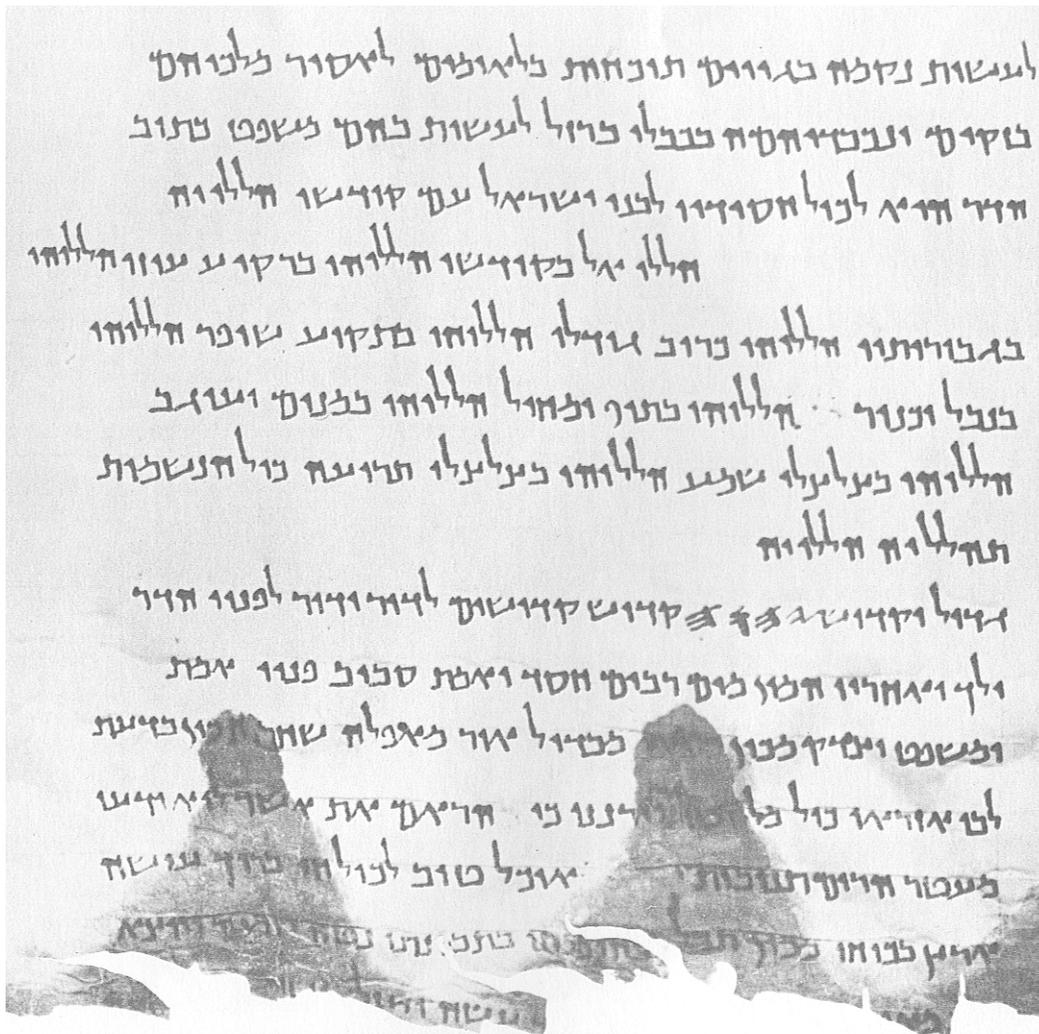
Finally, after stating that YHWH builds up Jerusalem (v 2), we might expect a statement about the city's fortifications and the nation's armies (cf., Ps 48). We get that later (v 13f), but immediately we are reminded that Jerusalem's infrastructure does not consist of walls and towers, but people (v 2b-3).

Psalms in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Although no complete copies of the Psalter were found, several portions of the Pss have been discovered among the scrolls at Qumran. Below I have reproduced two columns from 11QPs-a, the longest Ps scroll among the DSS. It was found in Cave 11, and is a non-canonical collection of biblical pss and other writings. Both are from J. A. Sanders (DJD).

Psalms 149-150

11QPs-a, Column xxvi; Plate XVI; Ps 149.7-9; 150.1-6; apocryphal "Hymn to the Creator" 1-9.



Psalm 119

11QPs-a, Column xii; Plate IX; Ps 119.128 [נ], 129-136 [פ], 137-142 [צ]

