

Glorify God and Enjoy His Hymns Forever

Part 2

THE PSALMS OF ASCENT AND STAIRCASE PARALLELISM (Psalm 120; 121; 122; 123; 127; 133; 134; cf. Genesis 7:17-20; Judges 5:11-12; Psalm 29:1-2; 92:10; 93:3-4; 137; Isaiah 8:9-10; 17:12-14; Matthew 5:22; John 1:1-5; 1 Cor.15:51-58)

“Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord Yahweh, the God of Israel. For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you **go up** three times a year to appear before the Yahweh your God.” (Exodus 34:23-24; see also Ezra 7:9)

A. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 120 and the repetition of words/concepts:

STAIRCASE PARALLELISM

PSALM 120

In my trouble I _____ to the LORD,
And He answered me. (v.1)

Deliver my soul, O LORD, from _____,
From a _____. (v.2)

What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
You **deceitful** _____? (v.3)

Sharp arrows of the _____.
With the burning coals of the broom tree. (v.4)

Woe is me, for I **sojourn** in **Meshech**,
For I _____ among the **tents of Kedar**! (v.5)

Too long has my soul had its _____
With those who hate **peace**. (v.6)

I am for **peace**,
but when I **speak**, (v.7ab)

They are for _____. (v.7c)

B. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 121 (help//help; keep//slumber; slumber//sleep//keep; shade//keeper; sun//moon; keep/keep; keep).

STAIRCASE PARALLELISM

PSALM 121

From this time forth and forever. (v.8b)
and your coming in (v.8a)
The LORD will **guard/keep** your going out
He will _____ your soul. (v.7)
The LORD will **protect/keep** you from all evil;
Nor the _____ by night. (v.6)
The _____ **will not smite** you by day,
The LORD is your _____ on your right hand. (v.5)
The LORD is your _____ ;
Will neither _____ nor _____. (v.4)
Behold, He who _____ Israel
He who _____ you will not _____. (v.3)
He will not allow your foot to slip;
Who made heaven and earth. (v.2)
My _____ comes from the LORD,
From where shall my _____ come? (v.1)
I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;

C. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 122



ACROSTICS (Psalm 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119; 145, Proverbs 31:10-31; Lamentations; Nahum 1)

A In **A**dam's **F**all **W**e sinned all.
B Thy **L**ife to **M**end **T**his **B**ook **A**ttend.
C The **C**at doth play **A**nd after slay.
D A **D**og will bite **A** Thief at night.
E An **E**agle's flight **I**s **O**ut of sight.
F The **I**dle **F**ool **I**s **W**hipt at **S**chool.
—New England Primer

What is an alphabetic acrostic?

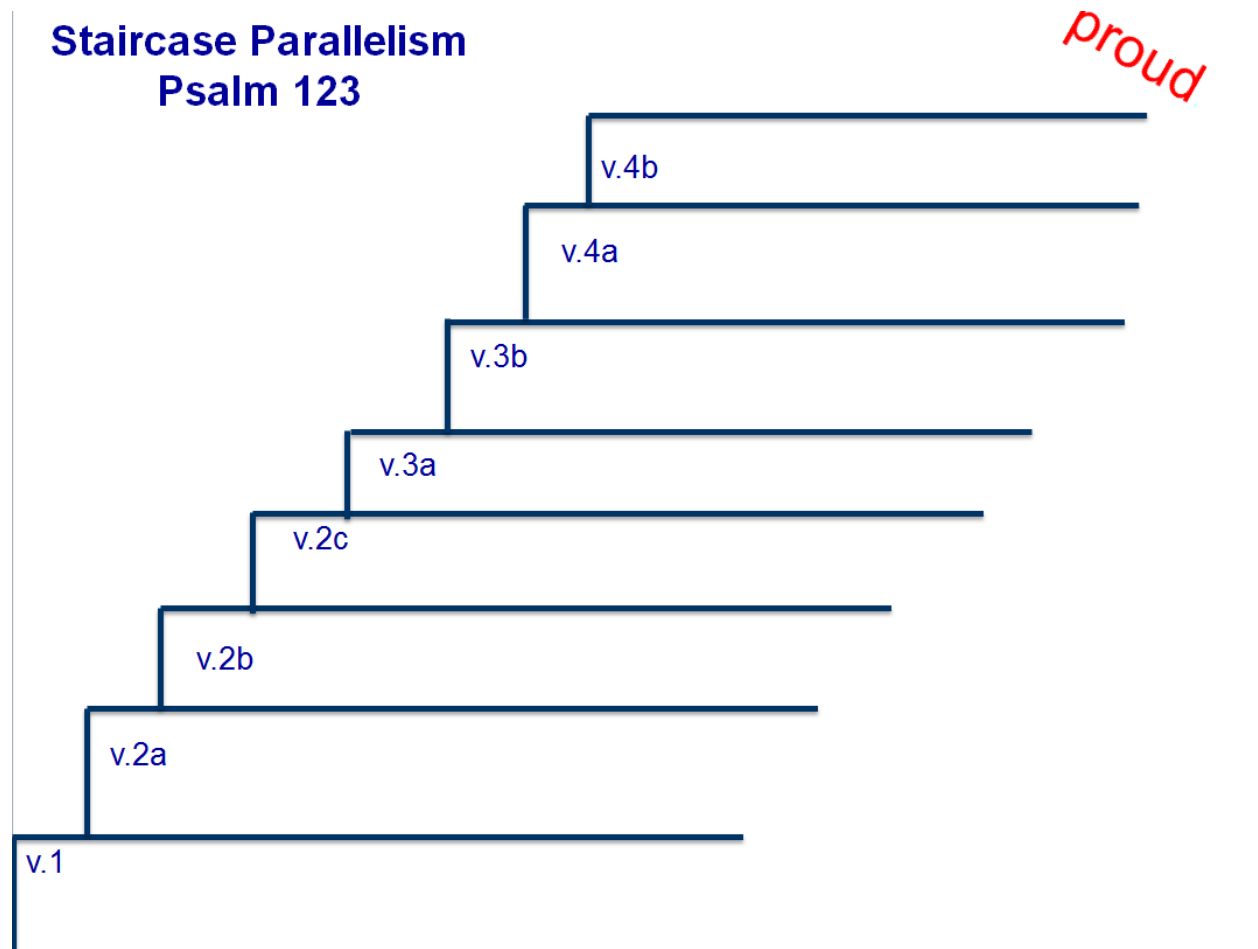
How many letters are there in the Hebrew alphabet?

How many letters are there in each of the five chapters of Lamentations?

NOTE: There are non-alphabetic acrostic psalms (22 verses but not according to the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet: cf. Psalm 33; 38; 94:103).

STAIRCASE PARALLELISM CONTINUED

A. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 123 (eyes//eyes//hand//master;
gracious//gracious//greatly filled//contempt//proud)



B. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 127

1. Psalm 127 is in the middle of the Psalms of Ascent.
 - a. There are seven Psalms of Ascent before (120-126)
 - b. Seven Psalms after (128-134)
2. As God's people left their homes to go to God's house, they were looking for His blessing upon their homes.

Staircase Parallelism Psalm 127

When they speak with their enemies in the gate.
(v.5b; see Gen.3:15; 22)
They will not be ashamed

How blessed is the man whose _____
is full of them; (v.5a)

So are the _____ of one's youth. (v.4)
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,

The fruit of the womb is a reward. (v.3b)

Behold, children are a _____ of the LORD, (v.3a)

For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. (v.2b)
To eat the bread of painful labors/toil;

To _____ late, (v.2a)
It is vain for you to rise up early,

The watchman keeps awake in _____. (v.1cd)
Unless the LORD guards the city,

They labor in vain who _____ it; (v.1ab)
Unless the LORD _____ the house,

C. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 133

Staircase Parallelism
Psalm 133

It is like the **precious oil**
upon the
head,

Coming down upon the
beard

Even **Aaron's beard,**
Coming down upon the
edge of his robes

It is like the **dew of Hermon**
Coming down upon the
mountains of Zion

D. Staircase parallelism in Psalm 134 (bless the LORD//servants//serve//house of the LORD//sanctuary//Zion).

STAIRCASE PARALLELISM

PSALM 134

He who made heaven and earth. (v.3b)

May the LORD bless you from Zion, (v.3a)

And bless the LORD. (v.2)

Lift up your hands to the sanctuary

Who serve by night in the house of the LORD! (v.1b)

all servants of the LORD, (v.1a)

Behold, bless the LORD,

CHIASMUS/MENORAH PATTERN

A. Chiasmus is named after the Greek letter _____.

Wash me clean from my guilt,



From my sin purify me

- B. Chiasmus is found outside the Bible going back to the 3rd millennium B.C.
- C. There are hundreds of examples of chiasmus in the Bible (Genesis 9:6; Psalm 112:7-8; 113:2-3; 145:2,20; Isaiah 6:10; Matthew 19:30; Mark 2:27).
- D. Chiasmus is similar to staircase parallelism, except the “stairs” go up AND down. There is a connection between like a menorah.

Repetition comes in different shapes, sounds, and structures

Parallel Lines



Chiasmus (lines cross)



Stairs



Menorah



Chiasmus/Menorah Pattern in Psalm 56

A Prayer for help (vv.1-2)

1 Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me; Fighting all day long he oppresses me.
2 My foes have trampled upon me all day long, For they are many who fight proudly against me.

B Profession of faith (vv.3-4)

3 When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.
4 In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust;

I shall not be afraid What can mere man do to me?

C What men do and what God does (vv.5-8)

5 All day long they distort my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil.
6 They attack, They lurk,
7 Because of wickedness, cast them forth, In anger put down the peoples
8 You have taken account of Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?
my wanderings

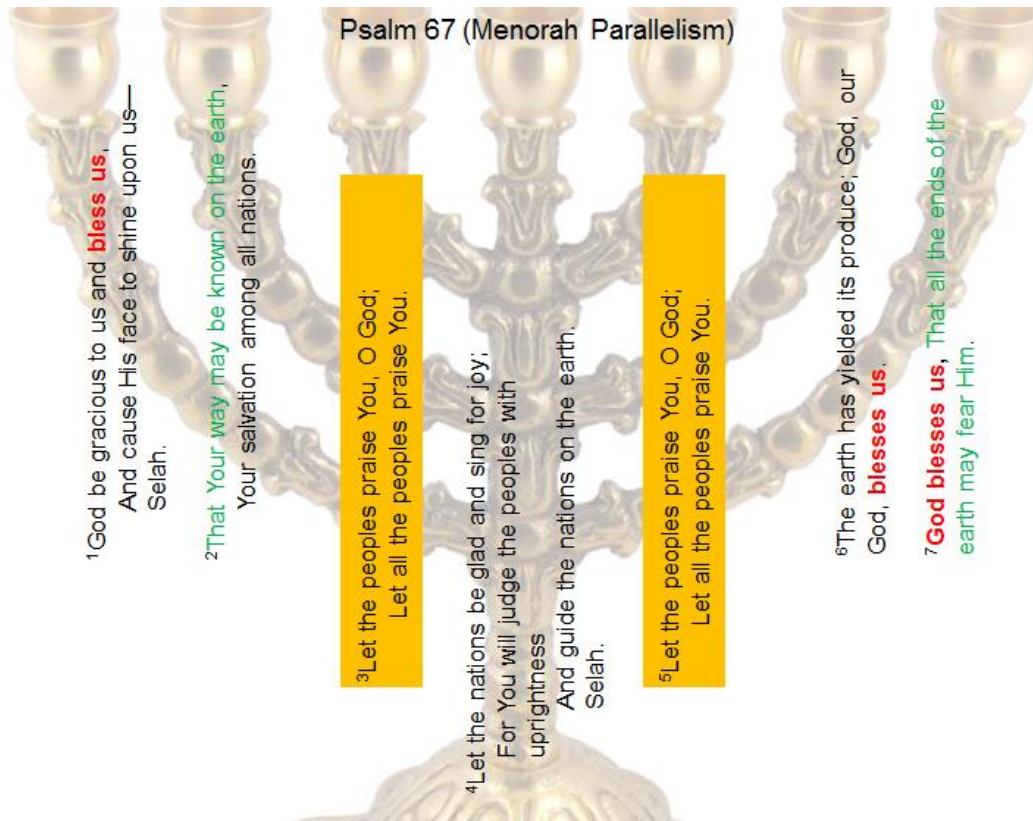
B' Profession of faith (vv.9-11)

9 Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; This I know, that God is for me.
10 In God, whose word I praise, In the LORD, whose word I praise,

11 In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

A' Praise for help (vv.11-12)

12 Your vows are binding upon me, O God; I will render thank offerings to You.
13 For You have delivered my soul from death, Indeed my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God In the light of the living.



E. Other entire Psalms that are structured in a menorah/chiastic parallelism: 7; 18; 67; 68; 70; 86; 116.

Chiasmus/Menorah Pattern

Psalm 45

A (w.1,2)

B (w.3-8)

C (v.9)

D (w.10,11)

C' (v.12)

B' (w.13-15)

A' (w.16,17)

What is the center of Psalm 45?

Where in the New Testament do we find the center of Psalm 45 reiterated in Paul's teaching about marriage?

NOTE: Dr. Edward Robson has done extensive work showing the chiastic structure of the book of Revelation. See, "Revelation: Book of Blessing" Volume 1.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENJOYING THE PSALMS

Become familiar with the Psalms. Prayerfully read them, sing them, and listen to them. The Psalms must shape and transform your life and worship! Check these resources out and load up your iPod with Psalms!

Crown and Covenant: <http://www.crownandcovenant.com/>

Sons of Korah: <http://www.sonsofkorah.com/>

Max McLean: "The Listener's Psalms" (NIV; ESV; KJV); <http://www.listenersbible.com/>

Is the Psalm related to another Psalm (e.g. Psalms 1-2; 111-112)? Is it part of a larger collection of Psalms (e.g. 93-100; 113-118; 120-135; 146-150)?

How does the Psalm begin and end?

Take note of how your Bible indents/formats the Psalm.

Is there a larger structure to the Psalm (e.g. acrostic, chiasmus)?

Try and outline the main sections of the Psalm (e.g. Psalm 19).

Put the Psalm into your own formatting that helps visualize the repetition and parallelism (see the examples I've provided). Caution: Avoid imposing a structure or trying to make the Psalm fit into what you think the structure is.

What words, phrases, and lines are repeated in the Psalm?

What is happening with the parallelism? (staircase, antitheses, synthetic, etc.)

Use a good commentary that explains the literary nature of Psalms and is aware how biblical poetry works. I recommend:

- Volume 5 of the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* edited by Tremper Longman III & David Garland. Revised Edition.

Is the Psalm found in the New Testament? If so, where and how is it used?

How does the Psalm highlight God's glory and Christ, the hope of glory?

Take your (life)time with the Psalm(s) and enjoy them!

Not sure where to start?

- Your favorite Psalm(s)
- Psalm 1-2; 8; 19; 29; 57; 84; 96; 103; 136; 148; 150
- Chiastic/Menorah Pattern Psalms (see the above notes)
- Psalms of Ascent (120-134)

SUMMARY

- _____% of the Old Testament is poetry. God loves poetry, and we should too!
- Man's chief end is to *glorify God* and *enjoy* Him forever.
- Appreciation/enjoying OF poetry is part of our conversing with and glorifying God and is important for understanding what He is saying.
- Too often we think *polemically* about the Psalms and not enough *poetically*. Arguably, *enjoying* the poetry is the best *polemic*! (Taste and see...)
- The aesthetic beauty of Hebrew poetry is a constant reminder of the beauty of the LORD, His word, and His works!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is God teaching us by the amount of poetry there is in the Bible?

What does the poetry of the Bible teach us about the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism?

How does poetry communicate differently from other forms of writing (e.g. narrative or epistles)?

One of the themes of the conference is “The Sacrifice of Praise”:

- *Is sacrifice hard work?*
- *Is the pursuit of **enjoyment** hard work (sacrificial)? Explain.*

*Pray that God would give you a growing and lifelong **enjoyment** of His Word. Come up with a plan for how you can make the **enjoyment** of God and His Word a major life goal.*

FOR FURTHER READING/STUDY

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Second Edition).

John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*.

David Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*.

Mark Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*.

Leland Ryken, “Metaphor in the Psalms,” *Christianity and Literature* 31.3 (1982) 9–29.

*Leland Ryken, J.C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

*Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*.

Tremper Longman and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*.

*Willem A. VanGemeren, Volume 5 of the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* edited by Tremper Longman III & David Garland. Revised Edition.

*Start here.