

Bethel Baptist Church
Dr. Edward O. Williamson, Pastor-teacher
Bible Study and Discussion Group
Handout #6 – Chapters 11 & 12
March 20, 2024



Chapter 11 Styles of Literature

*God, who at various times and in various ways
spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.
Hebrews 1:1, 2*

In Various Ways

- a. The Bible is a collection of written literature composed of prose and poetry.
 - i. Under the inspiration of God, the writers utilized various styles of literature to convey truth to their audiences.
 - ii. Because each style of writing uniquely expresses truth, it is important to understand what type of literature you are reading for correct interpretation.
 - iii. Understanding the type of literature will open up new insights into the text and will inspire new appreciation of books of the Bible that may have seemed confusing or less interesting than other books.
 - iv. Remember that God is the One who inspired the writers of Scripture. We can assume that He also is pleased with the style of the literature in which the writers conveyed His message.
- b. In the Bible you will find every form of literature that can touch the hearts of men and women:
 - i. Forms of literature – history, music, imaginative and fantastic imagery, letters to friends, and stories.
 - ii. The Bible communicates in a way that meets you where you are.

- iii. In the upcoming chapters (12-18), we will study the literary styles in the Bible.
 - iv. We will be given tools to interpret the text, but we must also listen to our hearts. God will communicate uniquely through the styles with which He has chosen to deliver His message.
- c. Characteristics of the text:
- i. The Bible is accurate...
 - ii. Realism is found in every style of the text...
 - iii. As you work through the text of the Bible, remember the Bible deals with reality.
 - iv. Note: Even though the Bible was written many years ago in “ancient times”, God will touch you today through the pen of our spiritual forefathers.

Chapter 12

Old Testament Poetic Literature

*Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me,
Bless His holy name!
Psalm 103:1*

Introduction

- a. Poetic literature can be found in every book of the Bible.
- b. There are books designated as “poetic books” such as Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations; other books contain sections of poetry or use figurative language.
- c. Poetry speaks to the mind through the heart. Through vivid images and poetic devices, we encounter God in an emotional arena that is innate to our human nature.
- d. Note: One must be careful not to “overexegete” or to extract precise meaning out of every word and take its meaning beyond where the poet intended to go. He may have just painted a word picture to elicit an emotion, not to state a doctrinal position. Since poetry has its own set of rules, having some basic information on this type of literature will be very helpful as you encounter the Bible.

Notable Characteristics

- a. How do we recognize and interpret poetry?
 - i. Poetry is characterized by short, concise, and highly structured sentences.
 1. Poetry tries to “tighten” the sentences and use fewer words.
 2. Concise statements are a characteristic to look for in poetry.
 - ii. Poets have been compared to artists who draw a picture for their audience with words.
 1. Word pictures are a prominent tool of the poet.
 2. Word pictures are given to express the truths of God.
 3. They (word pictures) draw out emotion from the audience and provide images that go beyond the words.
- b. Parallelism is the most common characteristic of Hebrew poetry; it is its most notable structure.
 - i. This is where a thought is expressed on one line, followed by a parallel thought on the next line.
 - ii. Three basic types of parallelism used in Hebrew poetry.
 1. “Synonymous Parallelism” – similar thoughts, which is repetition of the same idea in consecutive lines or verses. The poet says the same thing two different ways.
 2. “Synthetic Parallelism” – additional thoughts, where the next line is used to develop, expand, or intensify a truth in a series of lines. The poet gives some additional information that both clarifies and enhances the first line.
 3. “Antithetic Parallelism” – opposing thoughts, is used to contrast two ideas.
 - iii. Note: Within parallelism, the poet often uses words that are commonly associated together to express his message. For example, night/day, sickness/health, silver/gold, or wise/foolish can tie consecutive lines together and convey a simple message...At times, the poet can use this structure to pose a question or leave the reader with a question concerning the first lines.

- c. Other Poetic Devices – Poetry uses figurative devices such as simile, metaphor, analogy, and personification to express ideas.
- i. Simile is a comparison of unlike things introduced by the word “like” or “as.”
 - ii. Metaphor uses a word or phrase in the place of another to suggest a likeness.
 - iii. Analogy is a comparison based on likeness.
 - iv. Personification gives personal qualities especially to an abstraction or thing.
 - v. Note: These poetic devices serve to illustrate and express truths in a way that appeals to the reader’s imagination. When approaching this type of literature, be careful to recognize when figurative speech is being used to make a point and do not interpret it literally.
- d. General Guidelines
- i. Always remember that a poem was meant to be read in its entirety, and strive to keep the total message of the poem in mind as you read.
 - ii. In addition, look for any use of parallelism because the poet will use this structure to help support the main theme of the poetry.
 - iii. Don’t forget to locate and visualize figures of speech in the text and to recognize the emotion that is “stirred” from them.
 - iv. Poetic language expresses ideas, feelings, and truths differently from prose. Don’t assume that the literal meaning is the correct one.
 - v. Remember that much of Hebrew poetry was written to music and performed (sung) rather than read. We do not have the music that accompanied the poetic literature, but we can still enjoy the beauty of this literature and let the words of the poets bring forth the images and emotions that were intended. This type of literature is a favorite for devotional reading, but don’t use it merely as a way to start your day with a “good feeling.” God is the One who is speaking; anytime He speaks, you need to listen and take heed, considering where you should be applying His message to your daily life.

Notes:

Questions/Comments: