



Discovering the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures

Winter 2021, Lecture 5

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The Writings (Kethuvim)

- Last section of the Old Testament to be canonized, sometime after 200 CE (est.)
- Contains Chronicles, Daniel, Job, Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, other smaller books.
- “Wisdom literature”
- Includes “practical” religious literature germane to everyday worship.

Jewish Skepticism

- Not everyone was satisfied with the conclusions of the Deuteronomistic school or the Chronicler.
- Some Jews believed they should not suffer for their parents' misdeeds
- Some believed that the whole Exile was undeserved.

Writings as Response to Calamity

- “The Jewish War” recorded by Flavius Josephus
- An attempt to win freedom from the Romans
- Resulted in the loss of the Temple in 70 CE



The Second Calamity

- Bar Kokhba rebellion, 132-136 CE
- Messianic movement built around rebel leader, Simon Bar Kokhba
- Free Jewish state for two years

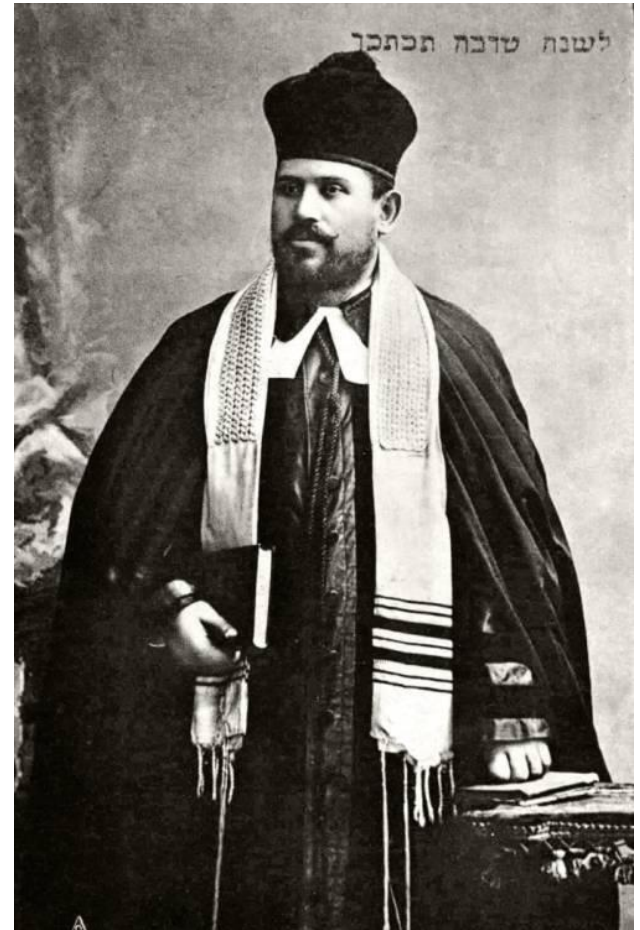


Addressing Ambiguity

- While the Deuteronomistic school gave answers to explain Judaism's past failures, not everyone was satisfied with them
- The Writings gave voice to those who felt that D's model was inadequate

Psalms: Five “Books”

- Psalms 1-41; an early collection of Davidic hymns.
- Psalms 42-72; a northern collection of hymns
- Psalms 73-89; a collection from the temple singers
- Psalms 90-106; psalms from a royal collection, perhaps for the New Year celebrations.
- Psalms 107-150; a second and expanded Davidic royal collection.



Parallelism

- Semitic poetry tends to “rhyme” concepts or ideas
- This applies not just to Hebrew, but poetry in Arabic and other Semitic languages, living and dead.
- Basic form is the Parallel Couplet (*parallelismus membrorum*)

“Dialectus poetica”

This is straight-up synonymous parallelism
where the same idea is repeated twice:

Amos 5:24:

*But let judgment run down as waters,
and righteousness as a mighty stream.*

More Parallelism: Isaiah 2.4/Micah 4.3

Another example of synonymous parallelism:

*They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.*

Antithetical Parallelism

Proverbs 10:1:

*A wise son maketh a glad father,
but a foolish son is the heaviness of his
mother.*

Grammatical Parallelism

A grammatical framework forms the first half of the line, and the second half answers:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven,

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

The *Inclusio*

A phrase brackets a section of text as in Psalm 8:

1. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

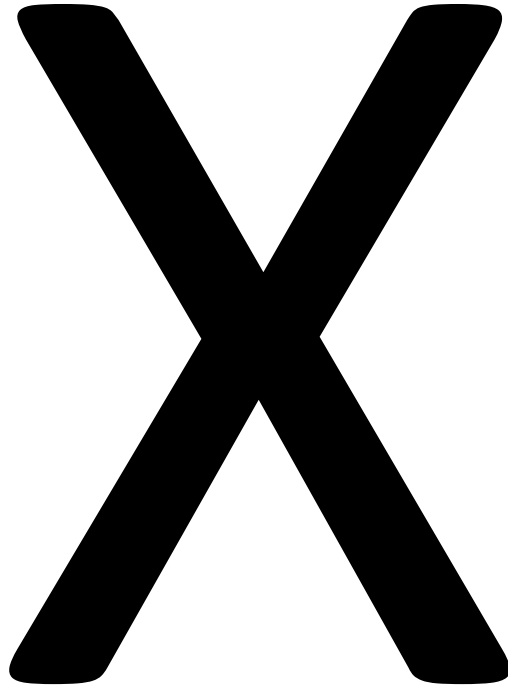
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9. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Chiasm or Chiasmus



- Named for Greek letter Chi
- Key words follow order in
- Meet at an apex
- From the apex
- Key words reverse order
- Like the shape of the Greek letter Chi

Examples of Chiasmus

Isaiah 5:20

A Woe to those who call **evil**
B **good**,
B' and **good**
A **evil**;

A Who substitute **darkness**
B for **light**
B' and **light**
A' for **darkness**;

A Who substitute **bitter**
B for **sweet**,
B' and **sweet**
A' for **bitter**!

Amos 5:24. A Second Look

- Sometimes seeing poetic structure depends on the quality of the translation
- This more careful rendering reveals a chiasm instead of a basic *dialectus poeticum*.

A Let-**roll-down**

B like-**waters**

C **justice**

C' and **righteousness**

B' like-a-**stream**

A' **ever-flowing**

“N, N + 1” Structure

- Found in contemporary Canaanite poetry, Ugaritic texts
- Somewhat uncommon, but does appear in Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him.

Proverbs 6:16

Psalms by Literary Genre

Hymns of Praise	Psalm 8
Thanksgiving Hymns	Psalm 18
Individual Laments	Psalm 89
Community Laments	Psalm 126
Liturgical Psalms	Psalm 15
Wisdom Psalms	Psalm 1
Trust Songs	Psalm 121
Royal Psalms of the King	Psalm 101
Zion Hymns	Psalm 122
Royal Psalms of Yahweh as King	Psalm 47

Themes in Wisdom Literature

- Concerned with more pragmatic issues: what is the good life, and how does one lead it?
- How does one become successful?
- Less concerned with big issues of salvation and acts of divinity, or Jewish national identity
- More cosmopolitan in scope
- Questioning, skeptical. Likes to ask hard questions
- Enjoys contemplation of God's creation

Proverbs and Amen-em-opet

Amen-em-opet, chapter 1

Give your ear and hear what
is said,
Give your heart to
understand it.
Putting them in your heart
is worthwhile.

Proverbs 22:17-18

Bend your ear and hear the
words of the wise;
apply your mind to my
knowledge,
for it will be a delight if you
guard them within you

Proverbs and Amen-em-opet

Amen-em-opet, chapter 6

Better is bread when the
heart is happy;
than riches with sorrow.

Proverbs 15:16

Better is little with Fear of
the Lord,
than great wealth and
trouble along with it.

Proverbs and Amen-em-opet

Amen-em-opet, chapter 18

One thing are the words
said by men,
Another thing is what the
god does.

Proverbs 19:21

The plans in the mind of a
man are many,
But it is God's purpose that
will prevail.

Ecclesiastes

- Generally considered “the most skeptical book in the Bible”
- Attributed to Solomon, which may have helped get it into the canon.
- “All is vanity”; nothing lasts for very long, death overcomes everything in the end
- Seems to respond to certain Greek philosophical ideas.

Fate is a Matter of Chance

“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the skilful; but time and chance happen to them all.”

– Ecclesiastes 9:11

Humans vs. Animals

“For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth?”

– Ecclesiastes 9:19-21

What is Good in Life

“This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God.”

– Ecclesiastes 5:19

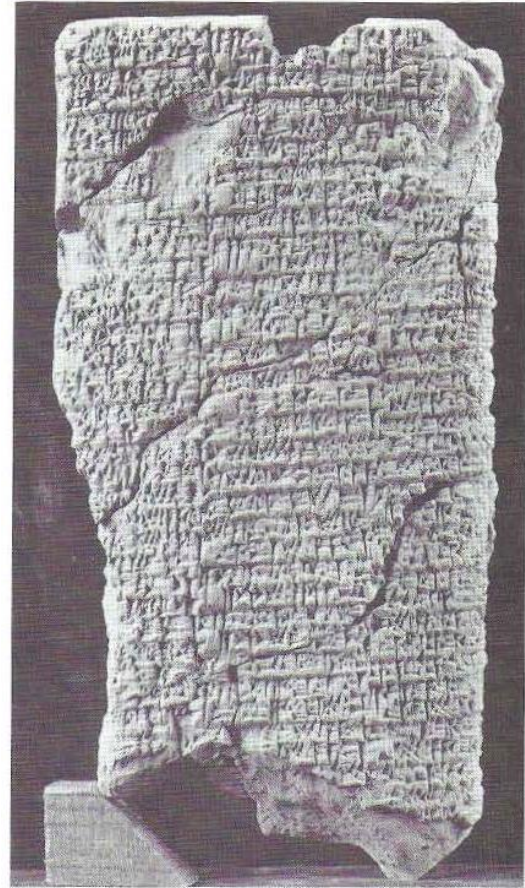
Job

- Definitely a mythical character
- Lives in the “Land of Uz” near Moab
- *Not* Jewish
- Many antecedents in ancient Near Eastern literature



Job: Sumerian Antecedent

There is a young man who does not wickedly put his efforts into evil murder, yet he spends the time in grief, *asag* illness and bitter suffering. The fate demon has brought need and close to him. Bitter has confused his judgment (?) of it, and covered his Behind his back they have overpowered him like a Before his god the youth, the young man weeps bitterly over the malice he has suffered. He is reverent and performs obeisance.



The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer (*Ludlul bel-nimqi*)

3 My ill luck was on the increase, | I could find no good
fortune.

4 I called to my god, | but he did not show me his face,

5 I prayed to my goddess, | but she did not raise her head.

6 The diviner with his inspection | did not get to the bottom
of it,

7 *Nor did the dream priest with his incense | clear up my
case

8 I beseeched a dream spirit, | but it did not enlighten me;

9 And the incantation priest with his ritual | did not
appease the divine wrath against me.

The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer (*Ludlul bel-nimqi*), continued...

- 10 What bizarre actions | there were everywhere!
11 I looked behind, | there was persecution, trouble.
12 *Like one who has not | made libations to his god,
13 *nor with a food offering | invoked his goddess,
14 who is not wont to prostrate himself, | nor has been
seen to bow down,
15 from whose mouth there has been no issue | of prayer
or supplication
16 who has skipped holy days | and despised festivals,
17 who has been neglectful | and scorned the god's rites,
18 who has not taught his people | reverence and worship,

The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer (*Ludlul bel-nimqi*), continued...

19 who has not invoked his god | but eaten his food offering,

20 who has snubbed his goddess | by not bringing a flour offering,

21 like one possessed | who has forgotten his lord,

22 who has casually sworn | a solemn oath by his god,

22a (like such a one) did I seem!

Job in Islam

Koran (21:83-84):

And (remember) Job, when He cried to his Lord, “Truly distress has seized me. But Thou art the Most Merciful of those that are merciful.”

So We listened to him: We removed the distress that was on him, and We restored his people to him, and doubled their number,- as a Grace from Ourselves, and a thing for commemoration, for all who serve Us.



Job's Contention

1. His humanity entitles him to certain moral rights which Yahweh seems to be ignoring by letting him suffer without cause.
2. If Job is guiltless, who is responsible for not only the evil that he is suffering, but that all others endure?



“Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.
If I summoned him and he answered me,
I do not believe that he would listen to my voice.
For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon *him*?”

– Job 9:15-19

“I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
let me know why you contend against me.
Does it seem good to you to oppress,
to despise the work of your hands
and favour the schemes of the wicked?
Do you have eyes of flesh?
Do you see as humans see?
Are your days like the days of mortals,
or your years like human years,
that you seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,
although you know that I am not guilty,
and there is no one to deliver out of your hand?”

– Job 10:2-7

God's Cosmic Troubles

- The world is not a safe place
- Chaos, while controlled, still exists
- No one but God can deal with it
- Chaos breaks out occasionally
- Bad things happen



The Resolution (?)

- God acknowledges in so many words that there are difficulties
- Job likewise admits that the problem is bigger than he can grasp
- God respects Job's honest doubts and questions more than his friends' pat answers.



THANK YOU!