

Understand and Study the Bible
Session 7: Understand & Study Biblical Poetry & Prophecy

Getting Started

- Most biblical prophecy is in the form of poetry, so you need to be able to handle poetry well before tackling the prophetic elements.
- Poetry and prophecy are challenging for cultural reasons
 - Hebrew and Greek poetry is very different from English poetry
 - They're intensely visual in nature, whereas English writing typically isn't
 - Uses images from a very different culture
- The process of reading carefully in context doesn't change – but how you determine the answers to some of the questions should change!

Biblical Poetry

- Intended to evoke powerful feelings and impressions rather than conveying detailed propositional truths
- Doesn't rhyme – poetry is defined by rhythm, meter, structure, and content
- Shorter lines of roughly equal length and similar grammatical structure with rhythmic balance between the lines
- Extensive use of parallelism – groups of 2-4 lines making parallel statements
 - Some simply restate and clarify (Matthew 7:7-8, Psalm 52:8)
 - Some intensify (Matthew 10:40, Luke 1:51)
 - Some express an opposite sentiment (see Proverbs 10-15 for numerous examples)
- Very visual in nature, many figures of speech, symbolic language
- The Bible gives us two places where we can compare prose accounts and poetic descriptions of the same historical event – Exodus 14 & 15 and Judges 4 & 5.

Biblical Prophecy

- A prophet was sent to deliver a message from God.
- Biblical prophecy had two common functions:
 - Foretelling (less common) – proclaiming what will happen, particularly if things do/don't change
 - Forthtelling (most common) – strongly critiquing the present situation, usually Israel's covenant unfaithfulness toward God
- Most prophecy is in the form of poetry – so highly visual, extensive use of figurative language, and a great deal of symbolism – these are challenges to our study
- Invest time in learning the historical context of the prophecy – who delivered it, to whom was it delivered, when was it spoken, what was happening then?
- Read it carefully in its context (e.g. Isaiah 13:9-11 isn't describing the end times)
- Seek to understand the message to the original audience before applying it to the present