

Lecture 3 – How to Read and Apply Biblical Poetry, I

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
And he will make your path straight. Proverbs 3:5-6*

*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline
And do not resent his rebuke,
Because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
As a father the son he delights in. Proverbs 3:11-12*

Key Terms

Semiotics, poetics, truth claim, truth value

Lecture Objectives

- *Articulate the differences between reading poetry and other types of literature.
- *Explain the importance of recognizing this difference.

Preliminary Questions

- *Consider the key terms above. How would you define “truth claim” and “truth value?” How do you think they might differ? Why might it be important to understand this difference?
- *How do the ideas of “truth claim” and “truth value” and their differences help you think more critically about the claims to truth you encounter every day?

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I. How to Read and Apply Biblical Poetry

A. “Literary competence” and interpretation; *Illustration: Brazilian gestures vs. US gestures; European longhand vs. US typing*

1. “Semiotics” - a general science of signs; *Illustration: summons to jury duty; 2 women missionaries*
 - a. Cultural competence
 - b. Linguistic competence
 - c. Literary competence

Explain how psalms can be both our prayers to God and God’s instruction to us. Do you tend to read the Psalms more in one way than the other?

2. “Poetics” - a grammar of literature
 - a. Definition: Adele Berlin, *Poetics & The Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*
 - 1) Narrative - poetics describes basic components of literature and the rules governing their use.
 - 2) NOT: study of poetry!
 - b. Qualifications
 - 1) Poetics - helps us understand what a text’s truth claim is, not its truth value
Illustration: UFO; Judges 4 vs. Judges 5, Prose v. poetry
 - 2) Grammar is descriptive not prescriptive

Why would literary competence be important in our approach to the Psalms?