

# WHAT'S THE SECOND LINE?

In a Hebrew-poetry conversation with me in his livingroom, an eminent Hebrew poet (& liturgist, Chaim Stern), gently (with a smile) grumbled "Willis, we always have to think up the second line." Far better than I, he knew the glory of the second line (viz., that the Hebrew poet can't go on to a further thought until he/she's developed the first thought-line by a similar thought (=synonymous parallelism), an additional thought (=synthetic parallelism), or a contrary thought (=antithetic parallelism); & he was pretending to complain about the burden of it!

This Bible study asks you to put yourself in the Hebrew poet's pickle. You have a thought that surfaces as a line, & immediately you're faced with "What's the second line?" PROCESS: (1) I give you a line from TANAKH: A New Translation of THE HOLY SCRIPTURES According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (Jewish Publication Society/85). (2) You write a second line in the spirit of the first line. (3) We (the Bible-study group) hear each person's second line & try to arrive at the most probable (i.e., the one in the Bible; of course somebody may short-circuit the process by knowing-speaking the Bible-line). (3) The facilitator reads (from p2 of this Thinksheet) the Bible-line (participants have been warned against looking at p2). (4) Discuss the Bible's second line. (5, optional) Each write a prayer incorporating the distich (Greek, "two-row"; French, "couplet").

This Thinksheet's first words tell its purpose (i.e., that you experience the writing of Hebrew poetry) & its limit (viz., that the items are only of the first of the three types of distich). (Three lines [tristichs]? Far less common.)

Why TANAKH? Because it's the Hebrew Scriptures translated by Jews. The said Hebrew poet, Chaim Stern, told me that in his opinion, the best translation of the Bible's Hebrew poetry is by a Southern Baptist. (He said "Today's English Version," but didn't know that Bob Bratcher, the translator [& a seminary classmate of mine], was a Southern Baptist.)

CLUE: The second line often uses a synonym of a word in the first line. NT examples (NRSV): (1) soul/spirit in the Magnificat (L.1.46-47: "My SOUL magnifies the Lord, / and my SPIRIT rejoices in God my Savior"); (2) worship/serve in the Temptation (L.4.8 from Deut.6.13: "WORSHIP the Lord your God, / and SERVE only him").

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- 1 And God created man in his image,
- 2 This one at last is bone of my bones
- 3 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
- 4 For dust you are,
- 5 A faithful God, never false,
- 6 For the LORD will vindicate His people
- 7 They followed in Your steps,
- 8 Riding through the skies to help you,
- 9 I will sing, will sing to the LORD,
- 10 The LORD deals death and gives life,
- 11 Israel does not know,
- 12 To uproot and to pull down,
- 13 She is left without a mighty rod,
- 14 He attacked, and He can heal us;
- 15 I loathe the Pride of Jacob,
- 16 Thou I have fallen, I rise again;
- 17 Write the prophecy down,
- 18 Rejoice greatly, Fair Zion;
- 19 Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked,
- 20 Let us break the cords of their yoke,
- 21 The earth is the LORD's and all that it holds,
- 22 for Your faithfulness is as high as heaven;
- 23 The LORD is king,
- 24 O LORD, hear my prayer;
- 25 Alongside justice there is wickedness,

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## THE SECOND LINES

### Torah (The Law)

- 1 Gn.1.27 in the image of God He created him;
- 2 2.23 and flesh of my flesh.
- 3 3.15 And between your offspring and hers;
- 4 3.19 And to dust you shall return.
- 5 Deut.32.4 True and upright is He.
- 6 32.36 And take revenge for His servants.
- 7 33.3 Accepting Your pronouncements,
- 8 33.26 Through the skies in His majesty.

### Nevi'im (The Prophets)

- 9 Jud.5.3 Will hymn the LORD, the God of Israel.
- 10 1Sam.2.6 Casts down into Sheol and raises up.
- 11 Is.1.3 My people takes no thought.
- 12 Jer.1.10 To destroy and to overthrow,
- 13 Eze.19.14 A scepter to rule with.
- 14 Hos.6.1 He wounded, and He can bind us up.
- 15 Am.6.8 And I detest his fortresses.
- 16 Mic.7.8 Though I sit in darkness, the LORD is my light.
- 17 Hab.2.2 Inscribe it clearly on tablets,
- 18 Zech.9.9 Raise a shout, Fair Jerusalem!

### Kethuvim (The Writings)

- 19 Ps.1.1 or taken the path of sinners,
- 20 2.3 shake off their ropes from us!
- 21 24.1 the world and its inhabitants.
- 22 57.11 Your steadfastness reaches to the sky,
- 23 93.1 He is robed in grandeur; [followed by a second distich:]  
The LORD is robed, / He is girded with strength.
- 24 102.2 let my cry come before You.
- 25 Eccl.3.16 Alongside righteousness there is wickedness.

