



Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart."

Course Text: Bible Poetry

Outline:

<u>Lesson</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Psalm 23
2	Job 4:1-6
3	Proverbs 3:1-8
4	Psalm 1
5	Psalm 146
6	First John 2
7	First John 1



This course is not about a particular book. Instead it takes selected chapters and passages, mostly from the poetry books of the Bible, and analyzes the poetry. Not only are the "poetry books" Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon full of Hebrew poetry but many other books in the Old Testament have large sections of Hebrew poetry. It can even be seen as a literary device in some passages of the New Testament. (The New Testament was written in Greek, but all but one of the writers was Hebrew.) Anyone who can master the technique used in this course will enhance not only his understanding of Scripture but also his enjoyment at reading it.

Suggested methodology for each lesson:

1. Fellowship (Save most of this for the end of class.)
2. Take prayer requests (Try to keep it from becoming a competition to see who has the most or the worst.)
3. Pray (The idea here is to leave our troubles with God so we can give His word our attention with a clear mind.)
4. Read the lesson's text aloud from the Bible.
5. Answer and *briefly* discuss the "fill in the blank" questions if any. Usually there is none. (Let those who prefer to listen, listen. My answers on the next page are just one opinion; you may have a better answer if it is based on Scripture.)
6. Everyone should independently try to analyze the poetry, comparing their answers with the ones on the answer sheet.
7. Compare and discuss your solutions. (Never force anyone to share theirs. As with the other questions, my answer is just one more opinion; you may have a better answer.)
8. Close in prayer (It is best to call on others to pray, but try to get their permission ahead of time.)
9. Fellowship (Leave this as open ended as possible for the time and place you meet.)

I have only done these lessons by mail. I've never tried them in a classroom. I hope to soon, and when I do I'll update these expectations, but it looks like to me each lesson should take about an hour.

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Lesson 1 – Psalm 23 Synonymous Parallelism

What makes Hebrew poetry poetic is not rhyme and meter as in English, but parallelism. There is lots of different kinds of parallelism, and we will look at several different examples, but most parallelism is what is called *synonymous* parallelism. This is best learned by example and practice.

Psalm 120:2 says , "Lord, deliver me from lying lips and a deceitful tongue."

[1A] What is the difference between "lying lips" and "a deceitful tongue"? _____

[1B] Biblical poetry is full of this kind of parallelism. Let's analyze Psalm 23. I'll do the first couple of verses and then you finish it up.

(1) The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.	I will be cared for. I will be cared for.
(2) He makes me lie down in green pastures;	He takes care of my physical needs.
He leads me beside quiet waters.	He takes care of my physical needs.
(3) He restores my soul;	
He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.	
4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,	
(I fear no evil, for You are with me;	
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.	
(5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;	
You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.	
(6) Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,	
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	

Compare your answers with mine on the next page.

Lesson 1 – Synonymous Parallelism ANSWERS

[1A] What is the difference between "lying lips" and "a deceitful tongue"? Nothing They are each a figure of speech that means lies or a liar.

[1B] Your answers don't have to be exactly like mine.

(1) The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.	I will be cared for. I will be cared for.
(2) He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.	He takes care of my physical needs. He takes care of my physical needs.
(3) He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.	He takes care of my spiritual needs. He takes care of my spiritual needs.
(4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.	I have nothing to fear. I have nothing to fear.
(5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.	You bless me more than I could ever have hoped or expected. You bless me more than I could ever have hoped or expected.
(6) Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	God will love me forever. God will love me forever.

Notice also the parallelism within parallelism. In verse 6 – goodness and lovingkindness. In the first three verses the psalmist is talking to his readers, (calling God "He"), but in the final three verses the psalmist is talking to the Lord, (calling God "You"). Note also that the first and last verses are similar in meaning. The second and fifth verses talk about physical comfort. The third and fourth verses mention travel. This is Hebrew poetry – patterns in the meanings rather than the sounds. If you look for and find these patterns as you read the Psalms and other Biblical poetry, it will help your understanding, and make you more able to enjoy the beauty of the God's word.

The Back Pew – Jeff Larson

You are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble.. aka Mom & Dad! Ps 32:7



A Psalm for a 'Child in Trouble'

The Back Pew – Jeff Larson



PSALM 23 WEATHER ALERT

Life sometimes feels like the 'eye of the storm'.. but know Jesus will never leave you or forsake you.. HE STILL CALMS THE SEAS.

Lesson 2 – Job 4 More Synonymous Parallelism

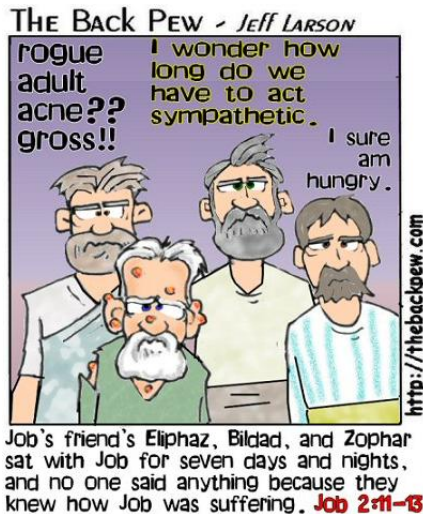
Most of Job is Hebrew poetry. Let's analyze a short example:

Again I'll start and you finish it up.

Job 4:1-6 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,

(2) If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient?	I need to speak to you
But who can refrain from speaking?	I need to speak to you
(3) Behold you have admonished many,	
And you have strengthened weak hands.	
(4) Your words have helped the tottering to stand,	
And you have strengthened feeble knees.	
(5) But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;	
It touches you, and you are dismayed.	
(6) Is not your fear of God your confidence,	
And the integrity of your ways your hope?	

My analysis is on the next page.



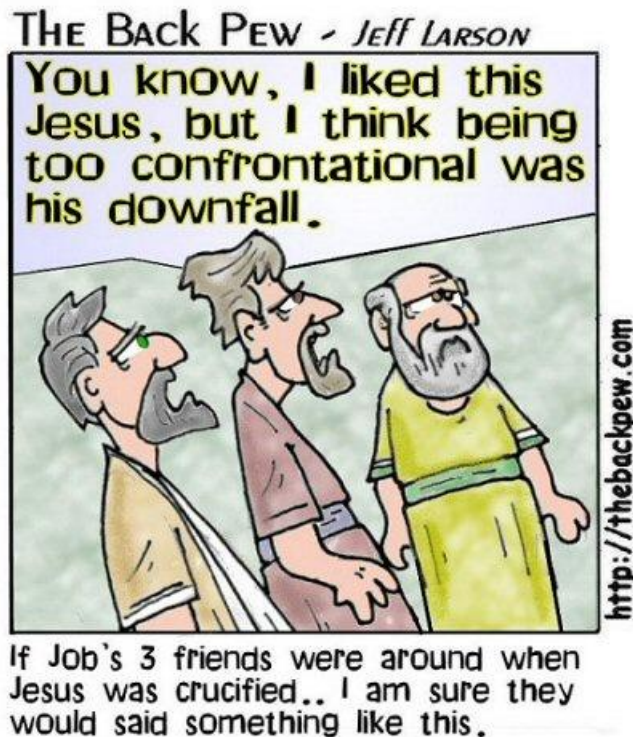
Lesson 2 – More Synonymous Parallelism ANSWERS

Most of Job is Hebrew poetry. Here is an example.

Job 4:1-6 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,

(2) If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient?	I need to speak to you
But who can refrain from speaking?	I need to speak to you
(3) Behold you have admonished many,	You words have helped others
And you have strengthened weak hands.	You have helped others
(4) Your words have helped the tottering to stand,	You words have helped others to stand
And you have strengthened feeble knees.	You have helped others to stand
(5) But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;	You can dish it out, but you cannot take it
It touches you, and you are dismayed.	You can dish it out, but you cannot take it
(6) Is not your fear of God your confidence,	Don't you believe in your righteousness?
And the integrity of your ways your hope?	Don't you believe in your righteousness?

Notice how the structure of 3 and of 4 parallel each other. You don't always have to analyze it this carefully to enjoy it. Once you have learned this technique examples of it will leap off the page at you. You will have to look at it in this level of detail to find them all, but who says you have to find them all?



Lesson 3 – Proverbs 3 Even More Synonymous Parallelism

Most of Proverbs is Hebrew poetry. Let's analyze a short example: And again I'll start and you finish it up. This one is a bit more challenging. It has some intricate structures.

Proverbs 3:1-8 (1) My son,

do not forget my teaching,	Remember what I am telling you (mentally)
But let your heart keep my commandments;	Remember what I am telling you (emotionally)
(2) For length of days and years of life	
And peace they will add to you.	
(3) Do not let kindness and truth leave you;	
Bind them around your neck,	
Write them on the tablet of your heart.	
(4) So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.	
(5) Trust in the LORD with all your heart	
And do not lean on your own understanding.	
(6) In all your ways acknowledge Him,	
And He will make your paths straight.	
(7) Do not be wise in your own eyes;	
Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.	
(8) It will be healing to your body	
And refreshment to your bones.	

Lesson 3 – Even More Synonymous Parallelism ANSWERS

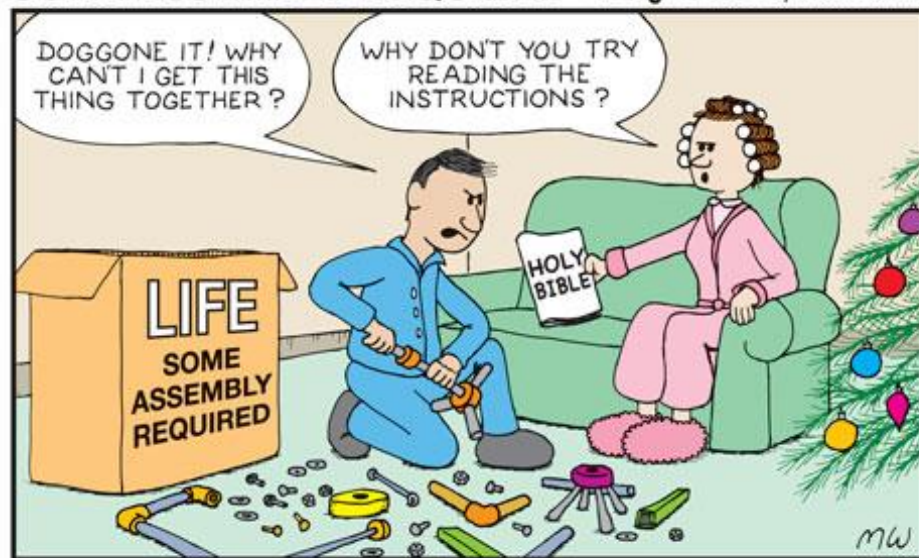
Proverbs 3:1-8 (1) My son,

do not forget my teaching,			Remember what I am telling you (mentally)
But let your heart keep my commandments;			Remember what I am telling you (emotionally)
(2) For length of days and years of life			It will help you have a longer life (notice the parallel within the parallel - days and years)
And peace they will add to you.			It will help you have a longer life (lack of warfare gives you better chance of survival)
(3) Do not let kindness and truth leave you;			Parallel to verse 1
Bind them around your neck,			Connect them to you closely (external)
Write them on the tablet of your heart.			Connect them to you closely (internal - contrast to external)
(4) So you will find	favor and	In the sight of God and man.	You will have a good reputation (with men)
	good repute		You will have a good reputation (with God)
(5) Trust in the LORD with all your heart			Trust God completely
And do not lean on your own understanding.			Trust God completely (by contrast)
(6) In all your ways acknowledge Him,			Do things God's way
And He will make your paths straight.			It will be good for you
(7) Do not be wise in your own eyes;			Do things God's way
Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.			Do things God's way
(8) It will be healing to your body			It will be good for you
And refreshment to your bones.			It will be good for you

The parallel between 1&2 with 6-8 might define a stanza of the poem, opening and closing with the same idea. The proverbs between the two also seem to support the same general idea.

Here we have slyly introduced the next topic. In verse 1 "forget my teaching" is really the opposite of "let your heart keep my commandments." Also in verse 5, "trust in the Lord" is really the opposite of "lean on your own understanding." The word "not" keeps the parallelism synonymous, but without it, the parallelism would be called antithetical parallelism. We will look at that next.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



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 paths straight. — PROVERBS 3: 5,6 NIV

Lesson 4 – Psalm 1 Antithetical Parallelism

Take a look at Proverbs 10:2, "Ill-gotten gains do not profit anyone, but righteousness rescues from death." i.e. Bad behavior has no benefits for anyone vs. good behavior has excellent benefits. This kind of parallelism is a little harder to practice because there are not lengthy passages of it, at least that I could find. It is found in the middle of a lot of synonymous parallelism.

Psalm 1 has some intricate patterns. In addition to the synonymous parallelism it has some triple parallelism and some antithetical parallels - i.e. opposite in meaning instead of the same in meaning. I'll fill in some of it and you finish it up.

(1) How blessed is the man	Triple parallelisms
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,	Does not go the way of evil people
Nor stand in the path of sinners,	Does not go the way of evil people
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!	Does not go the way of evil people

(2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD,	
And in His law he meditates day and night.	

(3) He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,	Triple parallelisms
Which yields its fruit in its season	
And its leaf does not wither;	
And in whatever he does, he prospers.	

Antithetical parallel to what? _____ and triple parallel with self	
(4) The wicked are not so,	
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.	
(5) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,	
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.	

Antithetical parallel with what? _____	
(6) For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,	
But the way of the wicked will perish.	

Lesson 4 – Antithetical Parallelism

Psalm 1 has some intricate patterns. In addition to the synonymous parallelism it has some triple parallelism and some antithetical parallels - i.e. opposite in meaning instead of the same in meaning.

(1) How blessed is the man	Triple parallelisms
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,	Does not go the way of evil people
Nor stand in the path of sinners,	Does not go the way of evil people
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!	Does not go the way of evil people

(2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD,	He loves God's law
And in His law he meditates day and night.	He loves God's law

(3) He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,	Triple parallelisms
Which yields its fruit in its season	He thrives
And its leaf does not wither;	He thrives
And in whatever he does, he prospers.	He thrives

Antithetical parallel to verse 3 and triple parallel with self	
(4) The wicked are not so,	
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.	The evil ones do not go to heaven
(5) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,	The evil ones do not go to heaven
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.	The evil ones do not go to heaven

Antithetical parallel with self	
(6) For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,	The good ones are preserved
But the way of the wicked will perish.	The evil ones die

Notice how the first part of verse 6 parallels verses 1-3 and the second part of verse 6 parallels verses 4 & 5.



He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.
- Psalm 1:3 NIV

Lesson 5 – Psalm 146 Parallelism

Try one on your own!

<p>PSALM 146 (NIV)</p> <p>1 Hallelujah! My soul, praise the Lord.</p> <p>2 I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing to my God as long as I live.</p> <p>3 Do not trust in nobles, in man, who cannot save.</p> <p>4 When his breath leaves him, he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die.</p> <p>5 Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God,</p> <p>6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever,</p> <p>7 executing justice for the exploited and giving food to the hungry. The Lord frees prisoners.</p> <p>8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises up those who are oppressed. The Lord loves the righteous.</p> <p>9 The Lord protects foreigners and helps the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.</p> <p>10 The Lord reigns forever; Zion, your God reigns for all generations. Hallelujah!</p>	
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Praise the Lord, Oh by soul!



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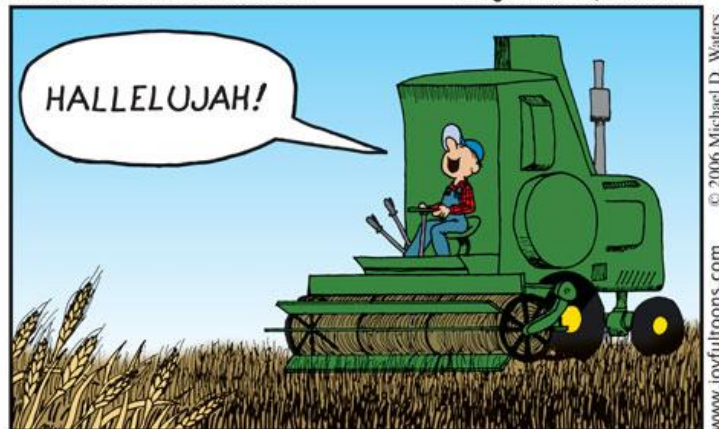
Lesson 5 – Psalm 146 Parallelism

This is how I did it. If yours is different, it doesn't mean it is wrong.

Psalm 146	Parallel Meaning
1 Hallelujah!	Praise the Lord
My soul, praise the Lord.	Praise the Lord
2 I will praise the Lord all my life;	I will praise God always
I will sing to my God as long as I live.	I will praise God always
Do not trust in nobles,	Do not trust people
in man, who cannot save.	Do not trust people
4 When his breath leaves him,	People die
he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die.	People die
5 Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob,	He is blessed who trusts in God
whose hope is in the Lord his God,	He is blessed who trusts in God
6 the Maker of heaven and earth,	God made everything
the sea and everything in them.	God made everything
He remains faithful forever,	God does right continually
7 executing justice for the exploited	God does right continually
and giving food to the hungry.	God helps the helpless
The Lord frees prisoners.	God helps the helpless
8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.	God heals broken people physically
The Lord raises up those who are oppressed.	God heals broken people spiritually
The Lord loves the righteous.	God loves people
9 The Lord protects foreigners	God protects all, even strangers
and helps the fatherless and the widow,, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.	God protects all, especially the helpless
10 The Lord reigns forever;	God will be God forever
Zion, your God reigns for all generations.	God will be God forever
Hallelujah!	Praise the Lord

PRAISE HARVESTER

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.

– PSALM 67:5,6 NIV

Lesson 6 – New Testament Parallelism (First John 2)

Look at **1st John 2:12-14** (HCSB). Even though John wrote in Greek, he apparently was still thinking in terms of Hebrew poetry.

See if you can complete this chart. Put notes on the structural/grammatical parallelisms in the last column and the parallelism of meanings in the last row.

(12) I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus' name.	(13a) I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning	(13b) I am writing to you, young men, because you have had victory over the evil one.	
(13c) I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father.	(14a) I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning	(14b) I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have had victory over the evil one	
			Parallelisms

WRONG TURN

A Joyful'toon by Mike Waters



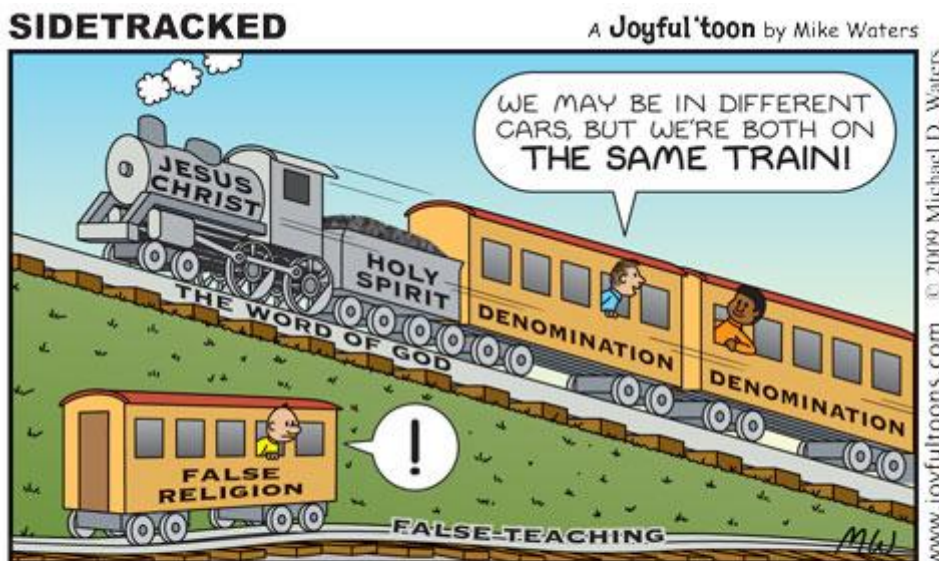
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 JOHN 1:9 NIV

Lesson 6 – New Testament Parallelism (First John 2)

Look at **1st John 2:12-14** (HCSB). Here are my ideas. Your ideas may be just as good or better.

(12) I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus' name.	(13a) I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning	(13b) I am writing to you, young men, because you have had victory over the evil one.	I am writing to you ...
(13c) I have written to you, children, because you have come to know the Father.	(14a) I have written to you, fathers, because you have come to know the One who is from the beginning	(14b) I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have had victory over the evil one	I have written to you ...
Children have been forgiven and have come to know the Father	Fathers know the One who is from the beginning	Young men strengthened by God's word have victory of the evil one.	Parallelisms

Interestingly, in the original Greek these three verses are also in the form Greek poetry, which was signified by having meter like English poetry. When reading the Bible, be aware whenever you see parallelism, the writer was waxing poetic. Expect highly figurative language.



This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

— 1 JOHN 4: 2-3 NIV

Lesson 7 – New Testament Parallelism (First John 1)

Try this kind of analysis on 1st John 1:5-10. Yes, you can do it.

Verse Text	Parallel Meaning	Structural Notes
5a Now this is the message we have heard from Him		
5b and declare to you		
5c God is light		
5d and there is absolutely no darkness in Him		
6a If we say, "We have fellowship with Him,"		
6b yet we walk in darkness,		
6c we are lying and		
6d are not practicing the truth		
7a But if we walk in the light		
7b as He Himself is in the light,		
7c we have fellowship with one another,		
7d and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.		
8a If we say, "We have no sin,"		
8b we are deceiving ourselves,		
8c and the truth is not in us.		
9a If we confess our sins,		
9b He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins		
9c and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.		
10a If we say, "We don't have any sin,"		
10b we make Him a liar,		
10c and His word is not in us.		

Lesson 7 – New Testament Parallelism (First John 1)

1 John 1:5-10

Verse Text	Parallel Meaning	Structural Notes
5a Now this is the message we have heard from Him	We bear a message from God	
5b and declare to you	We bear a message from God	
5c God is light	God is Light	
5d and there is absolutely no darkness in Him	God is Light	Antithetical
6a If we say, "We have fellowship with Him,"	If we claim goodness	Parallel to first phrases of verses 8 & 10
6b yet we walk in darkness,	But we are not good	Opposite of v. 7b
6c we are lying and	We lie	v. 8
6d are not practicing the truth	We lie	v. 8
7a But if we walk in the light	If we walk in truth	Parallel to first phrase of v. 9
7b as He Himself is in the light,	He is good	Opposite of v. 6b
7c we have fellowship with one another,	Consequences of truthful dealing with God is good	
7d and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.	Consequences of truthful dealing with God is good	
8a If we say, "We have no sin,"	If we claim goodness	Parallel to first phrases of verses 6 & 10
8b we are deceiving ourselves,	We lie	v. 6
8c and the truth is not in us.	We lie	v. 6
9a If we confess our sins,	If we walk in truth	Parallel to first phrase of v. 7
9b He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins	Consequences of truthful dealing with God is good	Notice parallel between faithful and righteous
9c and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.	Consequences of truthful dealing with God is good	3 of the good consequences of truthful dealing with God cleansing from sin. v. 7c, 9b, and 9c
10a If we say, "We don't have any sin,"	If we claim goodness	Parallel to first phrases of verses 6 & 8
10b we make Him a liar,	We don't really know God	
10c and His word is not in us.	We don't really know God	

For further thought:

It is my opinion that the entire epistle of First John is in the form of Hebrew poetry. See if you agree.

