

Studies in Early Israelite Poetry I: An Unrecognized Case of Three-Line Staircase Parallelism in the Song of the Sea

CHAIM COHEN
Tel-Aviv University

While it is generally accepted that climactic parallelism is a prime feature of Early Israelite Poetry,¹ the distinction between three-line staircase parallelism and two-line climactic parallelism in these early poems has not for the most part been maintained.² In fact, one important difference between the two is the existence of numerous examples of the former in Ugaritic literature, where there are few if any clear-cut cases of the latter.³ The purpose of this study is to show that a widely accepted case of two-line climactic parallelism in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1b–18)⁴ may have originally been an instance of three-line staircase parallelism unrecognized by the Masoretes.

1 See F. M. Cross Jr., *Studies in Ancient Yabwistic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1950), 23–24; W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh, 1950), 4–8; idem, *Yabweb and the Gods of Canaan* (New York, 1969), 10–28.

2 No distinction whatsoever is made in the articles referred to in the previous note. In fact, Albright in his latest work cited only the first two lines of Exod. 15:11 (a clear case of three-line staircase parallelism) and then proceeded to label them "repetitive parallelism." See Albright, *Yabweb and the Gods of Canaan*, 11–13. Most recently, this distinction has been upheld to a certain extent by S. Loewenstamm, Y. Avishur, and E. Greenstein. Only the last, however, correctly analyzes three-line staircase parallelism as a separate form, completely independent of two-line climactic parallelism. See S. Loewenstamm, "The Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse," *JSS* 14 (1969), 176–96; Y. Avishur, "Addenda to the Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse," *UF* 4 (1972), 1–10; E. Greenstein, "Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and Their Psycholinguistic Background," *JANES* 6 (1974), 96–105.

3 Greenstein, *Grammatical Parallelism*, 96, n. 48.

4 Here it should be noted that Exod. 15:21b is simply the incipit of the entire Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1b–18). The older view which still survives today (e.g. M. Noth, *Exodus* [Philadelphia, 1962], 121–26), according to which Exod. 15:21b is the original song and Exod. 15:1b–18 represents a later expansion, must be abandoned in light of both our knowledge of Ugaritic and Early Israelite Poetry and the extensive use of the incipit in Akkadian texts. In the latter, the standard method of referring to an entire composition

