

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEBREW POETRY

The five poetical books illustrate three kinds of poetry:

1. lyric poetry - originally accompanied by music on the lyre - often has strong emotional elements (most of the Psalms)
2. Didactic poetry - teaches principles about life by means of maxims (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)
3. Dramatic poetry - dialogue in poetic form (Job, Song of Solomon)

At least six kinds of parallelism have been distinguished in Hebrew poetry:

1. Synonymous parallelism - The second line reinforces the thought of the first line using synonyms (similar words or concepts).
 - a. Ps. 3:1; 25:4
 - b. Prov. 1:5, 32
2. Antithetical parallelism - The second line contrasts with the first line.
 - a. Ps. 1:6
 - b. Prov. 12:15; 15:1
3. Synthetic parallelism - The second line takes up a thought begun in the first line and completes it.
 - a. Ps. 23:1
 - b. Prov. 4:23
4. Emblematic parallelism - One line conveys the main point while the other illuminates it with an image.
 - a. Ps. 42:1; 103:11-13
 - b. Prov. 25:25; 27:17
5. Climactic parallelism - The clauses reveal truth in an ascending fashion.
 - a. 29:1-2; 103:20-22
6. Chiasmatic parallelism - A number of parallel lines forming an hourglass shape, often the central line is emphasized (i.e. first and fifth line similar, second and fourth similar, with the third line being the central idea).
 - a. Is. 55:8-9

Parallelism is found not only in couplets (two lines), but also in triplets (three lines) and quatrains (four lines), and sometimes whole stanzas.

Hebrew poetry is also characterized by vivid figures of speech:

1. Simile - A comparison between two things that resemble one another in some way (Ps. 1:3-4).
2. Metaphor - A comparison in which one thing is declared to be another (Ps. 23:1).
3. Hyperbole - The use of exaggeration to emphasize a point (Ps. 6:6).
4. Anthropomorphism - Assigning an appropriate part of the human body to God's Person to convey some truth about God (Ps. 32:8).

Another technique in Hebrew poetry is the Alphabetic Acrostic (Ps. 119; Lamentations).

(Information taken from Talk Thru the Bible by Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa)

The Lord Gives Wisdom When We Seek It With All of Our Heart (Proverbs 2)

1. Are we _____ God's wisdom?
2. Are we _____ to receive God's wisdom?
3. Are we _____ for God's wisdom?
4. Are we _____ God's wisdom?

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