

BIBLICAL POETRY

Things to look for in reading biblical poetry

Poetry is a form of writing where normal language is changed to intensify its impact. When done in the Bible two key features need to be understood.

Parallelism

- ☞ Synonymous – The thought of the first line is repeated in the second – Psalm 27:1
- ☞ Antithetic – The thought of the second line states the opposite of the first – Pr. 10:28
- ☞ Inverted – The order of the parts of the second line are different than they were in the first – Psalm 38:21
- ☞ Synthetic – The thought of the second line simply builds on the idea of the first – Psalm 18:36

Figures of Speech

- ☞ Simile – draws a comparison between two things that are ordinarily quite different – Psalm 1:3
- ☞ Metaphor – without using the words “like” or “as” compares two things that are ordinarily quite different – Psalm 84:11
- ☞ Personification – Giving living qualities to things that are not alive - Proverbs 30:15
- ☞ Irony – a contrast between what is actually said and what it means.
☞ Job 38:3
- ☞ Hyperbole – a deliberate exaggeration – Deuteronomy 9:1
- ☞ Anthropomorphism – Describing God as having human body parts – Psalm 5:1

- Metonymy – Using the name of one thing for something else
– Psalm 110:2

Other Devices

- Inclusio – Using the same word or phrase both at the beginning and the end of a passage – Psalm 103
- Chiasm – Similar thoughts are placed in a “mirror-image” order with the main point at the pivot point – Psalm 67
- Acrostics – The first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second verse with the second letter, etc. – Psalm 119

Why does the Bible use figures of speech?

- To emphasize the point.
- To help remember the point.
- To illustrate the point.
- To intensify the point.

- Final note

When we say that the Bible uses this type of language, it does not mean that those parts are untrue or even less important. It is only when we fail to recognize them properly or misunderstand the point they are making that they become troublesome.

Poetry communicates through image. Image is to captivate our imagination. When our hearts are captured by this arresting language, we are captured by His Word and led into experiential knowledge and vigorous living

* Keep in mind that biblical poetry desires to draw out an emotional response from the reader (like shock, empathy, fear, hope, joy, affection, hatred, peace, confidence, urgency, etc)

Therefore, we must depend upon God when reading biblical poetry for His required responses.