

POETIC PARALLELISM

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Ancient Hebrew used a variety of poetic devices, such as alliteration, repetition and elevated vocabulary. The primary poetic device in Biblical Hebrew is the use of parallel statements, in which one statement is intensified by the poetic statement that follows it. Biblical scholars call the use of these poetic structures parallelism. Parallelism (and therefore poetry) appears in every book in the Old Testament, but it is especially common in the book of Psalms and in the prophetic books. Ancient Israelite prophets prophesied in poetic parallelism. In fact, the first declaration in Isaiah, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth” (Isaiah 1:2), is an example of poetic parallelism. “Hear” is parallel to “give ear,” and “O heavens” is parallel to “O earth.” This kind of poetry is visible throughout the scriptures. Recognizing these passages as a kind of poetry is vital in understanding not only the books we usually think of as poetry such as the Psalms but also the books like Isaiah and Amos. Recognizing the poetic form of parallelism allows us to better understand the specific words of the scriptures.

Related verses

Genesis 2:23	2 Samuel 22:2–51	Psalms 51:1–15
Genesis 4:23–24	1 Kings 8:22–30	Psalms 82:1–8
Genesis 49:3–27	2 Kings 19:20–34	Psalms 138:1–2
Exodus 15:1–17	1 Chronicles 16:8–36	Proverbs 11:1
Numbers 23:18–24	Ezra 8:6–8	Proverbs 13:18
Deuteronomy 33:6–25	Job 3:3–16	Song of Solomon 3:1–2
Judges 5:2–31	Job 38:2–41	Isaiah 1:2–9
1 Samuel 2:1–10	Psalms 2:1–5	Isaiah 2:2–4
2 Samuel 7:12–16	Psalms 24:1–10	Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah 29:9–14
Isaiah 41:3–5
Isaiah 53:4–9
Jeremiah 1:5
Jeremiah 2:2–4
Jeremiah 4:3–7
Jeremiah 9:1–8

Lamentations 3:1–21
Ezekiel 15:2–5
Ezekiel 33:6
Ezekiel 34:3–4
Ezekiel 37:11–14
Hosea 5:1–8
Hosea 6:1–7

Joel 1:1–7
Amos 3:1–8
Micah 4:1–2
Micah 5:8–14
Zechariah 9:13–17
Malachi 3:3

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