

# Hebrew Poetry

## Three Main Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry

Terseness

Imagery

Parallelism

## Hebrew Parallelism

Not Rhythmic Meter, Not Rhyming sounds

But rhyming meaning- Parallelism

Second line somehow reinforces the meaning of the first

Not 2 distinct thoughts

Prov. 20:1

	Wine is	a mocker
	a	b
and	beer a	brawler
	a'	b'

Amos 8:10

I will turn	your religious feasts	into mourning	A
a	b	c	
<i>(I will turn)</i>	and all your singing	into weeping.	A'
elliptical	b'	c'	
I will make	all of you	wear sackcloth	B
d	e	f	
	and shave your heads.		C
	g		
I will make	that time	like mourning ...	B'
d	e'	f'	
	and the end of it like a bitter day.		B''
	g'		

## Types of Correspondence

Morphological- grammatical forms- e.g. same or contrasting verb types

Syntactical- Sentence structure, word order

Lexical (most common) synonyms or antonyms

Common Word pairs:

Day	Night
Heaven	Earth
Good	Evil
Righteous	Wicked
Wise	Fool
etc.	

Some pairs may say the same thing: e.g. pain and suffering

Some pairs, by saying two opposite poles, include everything in between

e.g. “from the East and from the West” = ‘from everywhere’

## Types of Parallelism

Synonymous- 2<sup>nd</sup> line restates same thought

Isaiah 44:22

I have swept away	your offenses	like a cloud,
a	b	c
	your sins	like the morning mist.
	b'	c'

Psalms 100:4

Enter	his gates	with thanksgiving
a	b	c
and	his courts	with praise
	b'	c'

Antithetical- 2<sup>nd</sup> line restates the opposite thought

Prov. 10:1

A wise son brings	joy	to his father,
a	b	c
but a foolish son	grief	to his mother.
-a	-b	c

Prov. 14:34

Righteousness	exalts	a nation,
a	b	c
but sin	is a disgrace	to any people.
-a	-b	c

Synthetic- 2<sup>nd</sup> line advances/ completes the thought (catch all)

Obadiah 21

Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion  
to govern the mountains of Esau.  
And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

Amos 1:7

I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza  
a b c  
that will consume her fortresses.  
d e

### Special Types of Parallelism

Emblematic (Comparison) –special type of synonymous

Psalms 103:13

As a father has compassion on his children,  
a b c  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;  
a' b c'

Stairstep (Repetitive) – special type of synthetic

Joel 1:4

What the locust swarm has left A  
the great locusts have eaten; B  
what the great locusts have left A"  
the young locusts have eaten; B"  
what the young locusts have left A"  
other locusts have eaten. B"

## What We Learn From Parallelism

1. Interpret the two (or more) lines as one whole thought
2. Learn concepts by the company they keep
  - a. Defines and Contrast Words
    - i. The laborer's appetite *works* for him; his hunger drives him on. -Prov. 16:26
    - ii. Above all, love each other deeply, because love *covers over* a multitude of sins. –I Pet. 4:8 cf. Prov. 10:12- Hatred stirs up dissension, but love *covers over* all wrongs.
  - b. Defines and Contrasts Concepts
    - i. *Do not answer* a fool according to his folly, *or you will be like him* yourself. *Answer a fool* according to his folly, *or he will be wise in his own eyes.* -Prov. 26:4-5
    - ii. *May all who seek to take my life* be put to shame and confusion; *may all who desire my ruin* be turned back in disgrace. –Psa 40:14
3. Learn by living in their world-
  - a. seeing according to their contemporary thought forms
  - b. seeing according to their ways of communicating.
4. Learn by looking carefully
  - a. Parallelism forces us to read slowly
  - b. Parallelism forces us to ask the relationship of lines
5. Cuts our work in half
  - a. When we see the two lines as one whole thought
  - b. We only have to deal with half as many thoughts
  - c. Helps us combine ideas into larger ideas and helps us see the bigger picture
  - d. Sometimes parallelism points out the structure/organization of the passage
6. Interpret the lines as one whole!



## Poetic Devices

**Imagery:** Word pictures

Jer. 22:19 - He will have the burial of a donkey-- dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem."

**Simile:** Comparison

Hos. 13:8 - Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them;

**Metaphor:** Comparison without 'like' or 'as'

Psa. 18:2 - The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

**Personification:** Inanimate object given human characteristics

Psa. 98:8 - Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;

Hos. 13:14 - Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?

**Hyperbole:** Exaggeration

2 Sam. 1:23 - "Saul and Jonathan-- in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

**Acrostic:** Each verse begins with the next letter of the Heb. Alphabet