

Lecture 5 – How to Read & Apply Biblical Poetry, III

*There are six things the Lord hates,
Seven that are detestable to him:
Haughty eyes,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked schemes,
Feet that are quick to rush to evil,
A false witness who pours out lies
And a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19*

Key Terms

Parallelism, specification, focusing, concretization, dramatization, importance of poetry

Lecture Objectives

- *Describe parallelism and its various functions in Hebrew poetry.
- *Describe how parallelism helps to correctly interpret and apply poetry.

Preliminary Questions

- *Why do you think that God planned to have so much poetry in the Bible? What sorts of things about God, His people, and His work does poetry communicate that other sorts of writing cannot?

How to Read and Apply Biblical Poetry, III

I. How to Read and Apply Biblical Poetry

- A. “Literary competence” and interpretation
- B. What is the essence of biblical poetry?
- C. The debate over parallelism (cont.)
 1. Lowth’s three types of semantic parallelism
 2. Reaction to Lowth’s scheme
 3. Kugel’s redefinition of parallelism: a “seconding sequence”
 - *4. Alter’s contribution
 - Similar contributions to Kugel, but arrived independently of him
 - a. Alter’s Theory of Dynamic Movement
 - 1) Not stasis, but dynamic movement from 1 verse to the next
 - b. Alter’s Qualification (of Kugel)
 - c. Heightening as the heart of semantic parallelism

See Long handout on parallelism (page 2 of Appendix 1)

- 1) Specification
- 2) Focusing
- 3) Concretization
- 4) Dramatization
- d. Toward a balanced approach
5. Evaluation of contributions of Kugel & Alter
 - a. Pro’s
 - b. Con’s

Compare and contrast Alter and Kugel, then evaluate each approach to parallelism. What critiques (if any) would you offer for these approaches?

D. The importance of poetry in the OT

1. Why is it important to recognize poetry?
 - a. Leaves matters ambiguous
 - b. Nature of poetry
 - c. Kinds of truth claims it makes
 - d. Recognize more emotive than prose
2. Why is there so much poetry in the Bible?
 - a. Emotive
 - b. Addresses the whole person
 - c. More memorable
 - d. Shows God's creativity

Example: Ps. 19:1 vs. Prose description

See handout: Psalm 1 (Appendix 2), look for heightening or intensification and outline it.