Poetry Of The Bible

Intro: Oriental poetry (which includes Hebrew or Biblical poetry) is very different than the type of poetry to which we as Americans are custom—Western poetry. The result is that many never see the beauty of Biblical Poetry. Our poetry consists primarily of rhyme and meter (For example: Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow, and everywhere Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.). Biblical poetry consists mainly of parallelism (sometimes called, thought-rhyme or logical rhythm). In this lesson we want to consider the various types of Parallelism. The importance is seen in that, according to some, 1/3 of the Old Testament is comprised of Poetry.

I. DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARALLELISM (BASIC FORMS)

A. Synonymous (also called Cognate)
   1. First line says something.
   2. The second line says the same thought in differing words.
   3. Example:
      a. Psa. 15:1 “1 LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?”
         (1) Abide is the same as dwell.
         (2) Tabernacle is the same as holy hill.
      b. Psa. 36:5 “5 Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.”
         (1) Mercy (lovingkindness) corresponds to faithfulness.
         (2) Heavens corresponds to clouds.

B. Antithetic
   1. First line says something.
   2. The second line states the opposite or a contrasting thought.
   3. One is often stated in positive terms while the other in negative terms.
   4. Examples:
      a. Pro. 10:1 “3 A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”
         (1) Wise is the opposite of foolish.
         (2) Glad father is opposite of heaviness of his mother.
      b. Psa. 20:8 “8 They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright.”
         (1) Brought down is opposite of risen.
         (2) Fallen is opposite of stand upright.

C. Synthetic (also called Constructive, Compound, or Epithetic)
   1. First line says something.
   2. The second line advances the thought or gives additional information.
   3. Examples:
      a. Psa. 85:12 “12 Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase.”
         (1) The first line gives us a principle that God gives that which is good.
         (2) The second line gives us the additional information that the land would yield its increase.
b. Pro. 15:3 “3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”
(1) The first line tells us that God’s eyes are in every place.
(2) The second line gives us the additional information that God’s eyes see both the evil and the good.

D. Chiastic or Introverted
1. Two lines contain two corresponding phrases in different words, but the order of the second line is reversed from the order of the first line.
2. Demonstrated by using a-b-b-a form.
   a. The a’s are synonymous and the b’s are synonymous.
   b. The b’s are antithetic to the a’s.
3. Examples:
   a. Psa. 91:14 “14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.”
      (1) “He hath set his love upon me” corresponds to “He hath known my name.”
      (2) “Will I deliver him” corresponds to “I will set him on high.”
   b. Pro. 23:15-16 “15 My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. 16 Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.”
      (1) “If thine heart be wise” corresponds to “when they lips speak right things.”
      (2) “My heart shall rejoice” corresponds to “my reigns shall rejoice.”
   c. 1 Tim. 3:16 “16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”
      (1) This is progressive in nature.
      (2) “God was manifested in the flesh” corresponds to “preached unto the Gentiles” and to “believed on in the world.”
      (3) “Justified in the Spirit” corresponds to “seen of angels” and to “received up into glory.”

E. Emblematic
1. This uses a simile or metaphor to convey the thoughts.
2. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two different things that actually have something important in common.
3. A simile is the same as a metaphor except it uses “as” or “like” in the comparison.
4. Examples:
   a. Song of Solomon 4:1 “1 Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.”
      (1) “Thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks” is a metaphor.
      (2) “thy hair is as a flock of goats” is a simile.
   b. Psa. 23:1 “1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
      (1) Jehovah is likened to a shepherd: a metaphor.
      (2) It immediately suggests God’s protection, guidance, and care.
      (3) Thus, we are immediately introduced to an experience of assurance and feel comfort in the midst of danger.
c. Song of Solomon 2:9 “My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.”

(1) Her beloved (Solomon) “is like a roe or a young heart” is a simile.

(2) She is depicting the speed in which he comes to her, showing his desire to see her.

**F. Climactic, Stairlike, or Gradation**

1. The thought of the first line is completed in the second line.
2. The first line is incomplete without the second line.
3. Examples:
   a. Psa. 29:1 “Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength.”
   b. Exo. 15:16 (b) “Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.”

**II. INTERNAL Versus Progressive or EXTERNAL**

**A. Internal:**
1. When it only contains two lines and nothing more.
2. For example: Synonymous Internal Parallelism

**B. Progressive or External:**
1. When it is dealing with more than two lines (might be three or a dozen).
2. For example: Synonymous External Parallelism or Progressive Synonymous Parallelism

**III. ACROSTICS**

**A. Where each succeeding line, verse, or series of verses begin with the next succeeding letter of the alphabet.**

**B. The longest and best known in the Bible is Psalm 119.**
1. It is comprised of 176 verses.
2. Each letter of the alphabet is used to begin a line 8 times.

**C. The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters:**
1. If a psalm has 22 verses or a multiple thereof, then it is a good possibility that it is an acrostic.
2. However, Acrostics do not come across in translations.

**D. Other acrostics:**
1. Book of Lamentations.
2. Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145
3. Pro. 31:10-31

**Conclusion:** These passages I have provided in this lesson is just a beginning in studying the poetry of the Bible. While we have dealt with the basic forms, sometimes writers while not writing poetry use parallelism in their writing (John often uses this as a study of 1 & 2 John shows). An understanding of the way the Bible uses poetry, can help us in our understanding of certain verses.