

## B. Poetry

Poetry is widely distributed in the Bible. One thinks immediately of the poetical books of the OT: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles (Song of Solomon), and Lamentations. However, the distribution is even broader; over one third of the OT is poetic. For example, most of the prophecy of Isaiah is poetry. Parts of the NT also comprise poetic forms, but this is less extensive than the OT.

You should observe that since the publication of the Revised Standard Version (1952) various English versions have followed the procedure of indenting the margins of poetical sections of Scripture.

### 1. Meter

Meter has to do with rhythm of sound constituted by a pattern of accented and unaccented syllables. Whether Hebrew poetry has meter and how this meter is to be determined is the object of continuing scholarly debate. So far as I can see, the discussion has relatively little exegetical significance except in those situations in which scholars emend the Hebrew text on the ground of assumptions about the metrical structure.

### 2. Parallelism (rhythm of thought)

This is probably the most characteristic feature of Hebrew poetry. A line of poetry often consists of two members that parallel one another and by contrast or correspondence allow the interpreter to understand the words correctly.

We will identify some basic types of parallelism although it should be noted that the classifications are not always clear-cut and are themselves debated. A good introductory essay is found in the new edition of ISBE under "Poetry, Hebrew."

#### a. Synonymous parallelism (identical parallelism)

Here the first member is balanced exactly by the second member which restates the sense of the first.

Israel does-not know,	a b c
My-people do-not understand. (Is. 1:3)	a' b' c'

Let-us-burst their-bands asunder	a b c
and-cast their-cords from-us. (Ps. 2:3)	a' b' c'

Sometimes one or more terms in the first line will have no corresponding term in the second line (incomplete parallelism). Often such cases we often find that there is a lengthening of one term by way of "compensation."

He-made-known his-ways to-Moses	a b c
his-acts to-the-people-of-Israel.	b' c'
(Ps. 103:7)	