

## *The Prophets as Poets*

### *Poetry in the Prophets*

- As modern people, we do not always have a great appreciation for it, poetry is a dominant form throughout the world and especially in the ancient world
- In part, because poetry makes story-telling and other information easier to remember
  - In the ancient world, if an event or story was important, it was often described in poetic form
    - The Iliad/Odyssey, songs
- The formal style that the Prophets give most of the oracles in is a poetic prose
- And contains:
  - Rhythm
  - Balance
  - Structure
    - Though this is not always closely followed
- Making the oracles easier to remember
- Since most people in the ancient world could not read or write
  - Nor could they afford private ownership of written documents
  - Putting oracles in poetic form made sense to be able to make them as accessible as possible
- All the Prophetic books contain a substantial amount of poetry
  - With several being exclusively poetic
    - Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

### *The Features of Hebrew Poetry*

- Hebrew poetry does not rhyme phonetically like English poetry often does
- Instead it ‘rhymes’ ideas using a form called parallelism
- There are 3 main types of parallelism
  - Synonymous Parallelism: “A form where the second and subsequent lines repeat or reinforce the sense of the first line”
    - Ex.) Isa. 44:22a  
“I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud  
and your sins like mist;”

- *Antithetical Parallelism*: “A form where the second and subsequent lines contrasts the thought of the first line, often reinforcing the first line by the contrast”
  - Ex.) Hosea 7:14
    - “They do not cry to me from the heart,  
but they wail upon their beds;”
- *Synthetic Parallelism*: “A form where the second and subsequent lines add to the first line in any manner that provides further information”
  - Ex.) Obadiah 21
    - “Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion  
to rule Mount Esau,  
and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s.”
- The alignment of parallelism is not always direct
  - *Chiastic Parallelism*: “When lines have parts that correspond, but in reversed order”
    - Small scale example: Ps. 124:7
      - “*We have escaped* like a bird **from the snare of the fowlers;**  

<i>A</i>	<b>B</b>
<b>the snare is broken,</b>	<i>and we have escaped!</i> ”
<b>B</b>	<i>A</i>
    - Large scale example: Joel 3:17-21
      - A - God dwells in Zion (v. 17a)
      - B - Jerusalem is holy (v. 17b)
      - C - Foreign invaders are banished (v. 17c)
      - X - The blessings of the Kingdom (v. 18)
      - C - Foreign enemies are destroyed (verse 19)
      - B - Jerusalem and Judah are preserved (v. 20–21a)
      - A - God dwells in Zion (v. 21b)