## Literary Structure

Often OT prophets delivered their message in verse. This made the message more interesting and easier to remember. Below are some terms used to describe attributes of these styles:

**Acrostic Poetry**
> The first letter of each new line forms a recognizable pattern (e.g. Ps.119, each new line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet; see also Ps.9/10,25,34,37,111,112,145).

**Alliteration**
> Repetition of the same sound at the beginning of two or more words in a series (e.g. "Fields ever fresh and groves ever green"). Obviously, this style is only present in the language in which the text was initially written. Once translated, the impact of alliteration is generally lost. Ps.22:4 $b^e ka\ bat^e hu...\ bat^e hu$ ('in you...put their trust; they trusted)

**Allegory**
> An allegory is a sort of extended metaphor where two different things are being compared for their similarities in an effort to clarify something about the object of the allegory. In an allegory, each element of an account represents a feature of the object of the allegory. "Thus says the Lord my God, 'Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished, and each of those who sell them says, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich.' And their own shepherds have no pity on them'" is an allegory from Zechariah.11:4. The objects of this allegory are those who participate in the destruction of Israel…that they treat Israel like a sheep herd and each element of the allegory directly applies to these people. Psalm 23:1-4 is an allegory.

**Antiphony**
> An antiphonal psalm is a responsive psalm. Someone recites a line (in modern synagogues this person is called the cantor) and the group responds (e.g. the great Hallel, Psalm 136)

**Aphorism**
> A short pithy sentence (e.g. he's as good as dead). In Isaiah 7:8, "The head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin."

**Apostrophe**
> An address directed toward an absent person or a personification (e.g. Ps.68:15-16).

**Assonance**
> A partial rhyme in which the stressed vowel sounds are alike but the consonant sounds are not (e.g. bike and light). In Micah 7:4 the word hedge, $m^e suka,$ and the word confusion, $m^e buka$ are assonant words used to change perspective from description to prediction. Isaiah describes the day of the Lord as a day of tumult, $m^e huma$, trampling, $m^e busa$ and terror, $m^e buka$ (22:5) using assonance & alliteration to make the prophecy tense and memorable to his listeners. According to VanGemeren,[1] Psalm 44:7 displays assonance. Although he focuses upon the consonant sounds, sh, ts or s, which occur in every word: *hosatanu missarenu um^e sanenu h^e bisota.*

**Chiasm** (a.k.a. chiasmus)
> An inversion of the second of two parallel phrases (e.g. do not live to eat but eat to live). Isaiah 1:19-20, "you will eat the best…but if you resist, you will be devoured," carries the chaismus, 'eat or be eaten.' Psalm 51:1a, 'have mercy...according to your love' forms a chiasm with 51:1b, 'according to your compassion...blot out transgressions'. Psalm 6:9a, 'heard...my cry for mercy' forms a chiasm with 6:9b, 'my prayer...accepts'.

**Ellipsis**
> This involves incomplete parallelism. The second phase in a parallel line silently includes a clause from the previous line (e.g. Ps.88:6; c.f. Pivot-form parallelism). Psalm 12:3, 'may the Lord cut off' belongs with both clauses but is only associated with the first clause.

**Hendiadys**

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Two words – One point.  A figure of speech wherein two sequential words or expressions make the same point (Ps.107:10 – darkness {*hosek*} and deepest gloom {*salmawet*} intensify the experience of anguish) OR (Ps.27:1 'the Lord is my light {*'or*} and my salvation {*yesa*} intensify the joy of God's loving actions).

**Hyperbole**

An exaggeration meant to emphasize a point rather than to be taken literally (e.g. The whole world is in an uproar over this teaching. OR This is as old as time) (e.g. Ps.40:12). Some people take "the lion shall lie down with the lamb …" prophecy in Isaiah 11:3-16 to be a hyperbole intended to emphasize the peace and safety of the millennial kingdom. Others take it literally.

**Imagery**

The use of simile, metaphor mythic allusions or other literary devices that conjure up mental images as they are read and pondered. These images support the point the author is trying to make.  The 1st Psalm is full of such images (e.g. sitting in the seat of mockers v.1; like a tree planted by the waters v. 3; like the chaff v.4).

Parallelism and imagery are standard features of Hebrew poetry.  Meter and rhyme, while important in Western poetry, are not characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Though they appear from time to time.

**Inclusion** (a.k.a. inclusio)

The opening and closing of a passage is the same or similar.  Inclusio serves as bookends to the entire passage between.  It sets the mood for the passage and brings it to a close (e.g. Ps. 8:1 & 9; *Hallelu-Yah = Praise Yaweh,* begins and ends Ps.106).[2]

**Merismus**

A use of words that are meant to represent the whole population (e.g. Ps.105:14 *adam* (man) and *m$^e$lakim* (kings) are used to mean anyone/everyone).  Ps. 121:2 'heaven & earth' are meant to represent every created thing.

**Metaphor**

When unlike things are compared with each other to clarify the meaning of one of those things.  A metaphor is an extended simile without the clue "like" or "as."

"A mighty fortress is our God," is a metaphor intended to communicate the protection available to all that put their trust in God.

"I am the door," is a metaphor intended to show that Christ is the access point to God and to eternal life.

"Its teeth are the teeth of a lion and it has the fangs of a lioness," is a metaphor in Joel 1:6 intended to show the ferocity of Judah's judgment.

A **metonymy** is a simile or metaphor intended to represent something (e.g. Ps.7:10 shield; Ps.22:15-16 potsherd, dogs).

**Onomatopoeia**

The formation of a word from the sound the object makes (e.g. barking of a dog; hissing of a snake; roaring of an engine).  In Isaiah 17:12, "…the uproar of the peoples - they roar like the roaring of great waters," the 'm' and 'n' sounds in *hamon* (uproar) and *seon* (roaring) sound like waves when read aloud in Hebrew.  In Isaiah 42:14, "like a woman in childbirth, I cry out (*pa 'ah*), I gasp (*nawsham*) and pant (*sha' af*)," are grunting, guttural words reminiscent of sounds made by a woman during childbirth.

**Parable**

A parable is a fictional short story intended to communicate some truth.  Formal names are not part of parabolic writing; parables are short and followed by an explanation (e.g. In 2 Sam.12:1ff Nathan tells David a parable about an unjust rich man exploiting a poor man.  David does not know it is a parable until Nathan reveals that it is a parable about David's treatment of Uriah).

**Parallelism**

*We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow these grounds…*

Abraham Lincoln

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[2] These examples are from Longman, p.107

Parallelism and imagery are typical features of Hebrew prose and poetry although parallelism is more typical of poetry.[3] It involves the repetition and extension of the ideas in one line by subsequent line(s). Parallelism runs over us like as series of waves driving the message home. There are different kinds of parallelism:

- **Semantic parallelism** involves the repetition and extension of the ideas in one line by the next line. The categories of this kind of parallelism include:
  - Synonymous parallelism (e.g. Ps. 2)
    - ‣ Identical - Ps.24:1
    - ‣ Similar - Ps.19:2
  - Antithetic parallelism - Ps.1:6; Prov.10:1
    The thesis & antithesis are making the same point by focusing on different elements.
  - Synthetic/Constructive parallelism (everything that doesn't fit the other patterns)
    - ‣ Completion (a parallelism of rhythm rather than of meaning) - Ps.2:6
    - ‣ Comparison - Prov.15:17
    - ‣ Reason - Prov.26:4
  - Climactic or repetitive parallelism - Ps.29:1
  - Emblematic parallelism - Prov. 25:25, 11:22, Ps. 26:2, 42:1
    The use of imagery in conjunction with parallelism.
  - Pivot pattern - Ps. 98:2
    A clause is shared between two lines.
  - Chiasm (e.g. Ps1:1,6)
    The entire 2nd Psalm is a chiastic form (1-3 & 10-12)
    
    EARTH     HEAVEN
           X
    HEAVEN    EARTH
- **Grammatical parallelism** involves the repetition of the parts of speech from one line to the next, although not necessarily in the same order (e.g. *He rebukes them in his anger* {verb-direct object-prepositional phrase} *and in his wrath he terrifies them* {prepositional phrase-verb-direct object}. This serves to tie one line with another.

**Personification**

The presentation of an idea or value through its expression as a person (e.g. 'the wine he dries up, the field he mourns' Joel 1:10)

**Recapitulation**

A short summary of points previously made. "Awake drunkards and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth," from Joel 1:5 is a recapitulation intended to emphasize the nature of the audience.

**Simile**

When two unlike things are compared (e.g. she is like a summer day). The terms, 'like' or 'as' are often used in such sentences. "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses," is a simile from Joel 2:4 intended to communicate the swiftness of Israel's destruction (e.g. Psalm 1:3; 7:2; 12:6; 36:6; 64:3)

**Strophe**

One line (stanza) that is answered by another line (stanza) the 2nd a twist on the 1st.

**Wordplay**

This is a clever use of words, a malapropism[4] or a pun. In Isaiah 13:6, "…it will come like *destruction* from the *Almighty*," both words derive from the same root *sod*. The blow will be such that only God could have delivered it. Micah has an entire series of puns in his prophecy about the destruction of several cities of Judah (see Micah 1:8-15).

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[3] Most of the examples used below are from the Psalms. Meter and rhyme, while important in Western poetry, are not characteristic of Hebrew poetry

[4] A deliberate misuse of words, particularly words that sound like the words substituted (e.g. He is a legend in his own **mind** (substitution of mind for the correct word - time))

- **Paronomasia** is a form of wordplay where homonyms with different nuances are used (Ps.44:15-17 *kol* (all) and *qol* (sound or taunts).
- **Antanaclasis** is a form of wordplay where homonyms are used that have contrasting meanings (e.g. Ps.69:30-31 a song {*sir*} is better than a bull {*sor*})