

OT751 Isaiah
Dr. Russell Mack

Essay 2: Discuss an interesting feature of the text.

An interesting feature of this portion (Ch. 1-6) of Isaiah is its heavy use of repetition and parallelism to emphasize the wrongdoings of Judah and the judgment of the Lord. When reading through the Hebrew text, the repeated appearance of the words “hoy” (הוי) and “oy” (אוי) sets a serious tone and creates intensity. “Hoy” is a cry of mourning used in funerals (Constable, 29). Similarly, “oy” is “an impassioned expression of grief and despair” (BDB 17A). Constable observes that the two related words appeared 22 times in Isaiah, more than any other prophetic book. (Constable, 44) In fact, the occurrence of these two expressions is heavily concentrated in the six opening chapters of Isaiah (“hoy” appeared 7 times in 1:4, 1:24, 5:8, 5:11, 5:18, 5:20 and 5:21, “oy” appeared 3 times in 3:9, 3:11 and 6:5), which is a feature worth noting.

There are many other occurrences of repetition and parallelism. For example, Isaiah 3:1:

כִּי הִנֵּה הָאֲדוֹן יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְסִיר מִירוּשָׁלַם וּמִיהוּדָה מַשְׁעַן וּמַשְׁעֵנָה כֹּל מַשְׁעַן-לֶחֶם וְכֹל מַשְׁעַן-מַיִם

(“For behold, the Lord God of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water.”)

The part highlighted in grey (“remove from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support”) contains 5 consecutive words that start with the letter *mem* (connected by conjunctive *vavs*). This creates a sense of force that demands attention. Furthermore, supply and support (“mash’en” and “mash’ena”) are actually the same Hebrew word which means “staff” (root: שׁען) in masculine and feminine forms. (Constable, 42) This word appears two more times in the same verse in a repetitive and parallel manner, *all supply of bread and all supply of water*. The message cannot be clearer, whatever the Judeans thought they could use as their staff will be utterly and completely removed.

A more sophisticated example can be found in 1:21-26. As Constable points out, it has a chiasmic structure with verses 23-4 as the focal point. (Constable, 32) Verse 21

laments how the faithful city (קריה נאמנה), once full of justice (משפט) and righteousness (צדק) has fallen. This is in contrast parallel with verse 26, where the Lord promises to restore judges (same root as justice in v.21(שפט)) to Zion, so that she will once again be called a righteous city, a faithful city (עיר הצדק קריה נאמנה). Verse 22 reprimands the corruption of the Judeans figuratively by saying that their silver has become dross (סיגים) and their drink diluted with water; while verse 25 is the Lord's promise to remove "your dross" (דיגך) and purify Judah. Verse 22 is also an example of synonymous parallelism where the second cola ("your drink diluted with water") is in parallel with the first cola ("your silver has become dross") and similar in meaning. The focal point, verses 23-4, is where the Lord concretely points out the evils of Judah (bribery and a failure to treat orphans and widows in fairness) and provides the only way out. He proclaims that he is "the Lord God of hosts and the Mighty One of Israel" (י צבאות אביר ישראל), an unusual case in Isaiah where different names of God are grouped together (Constable, 33). He alone will bring judgement and change to His fallen city.

There are many more examples of repetition and parallelism in this part of the text, and it is a linguistic feature that brings out the message of Isaiah in a strong, unforgettable, and beautiful manner right at the beginning of the book.