

OT751 Isaiah
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Essay 5: Discuss an interesting feature of the text.

An interesting feature of the text that I wish to discuss is the heavy use of poetic language. Constable commented that Isaiah could be regarded as a psalmist as well as a prophet because he included a large amount of psalms in his prophecies (Constable, 169). This portion of Isaiah is filled with songs and poems, such as the poem on the effects of sin in 24:7-20 (Constable, 164), the song of the ruined city in 25:1-5, the song of praise of the strong city in 26:1-6, the vineyard song of the remnant in 27:2-6, etc. (Constable, 162) Naturally, the language of the Hebrew text is highly poetic. The following are some examples:

רָעָה הַתְּרַעְעָה הָאָרֶץ
פֹּר רָרָה אֶרֶץ
מִוֹט הִתְמוֹטְטָה אֶרֶץ

“The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.” (Isa 24:19)

The Hebrew text of this verse consists of three completely parallel sentences, all of which have three words that end with ארץ (the earth). The first words (רעה, פור, מוט) (break, break, shake) are in the form of Qal Infinitive absolute, functioning as an emphatic verbal noun, and the second words (התרעעה, התפוררה, התמוטטה) (be broken, be split, be shaken) are Hitpael verbs of the same root in perfect tense. When paired with a verb of the same root, infinite absolute can function to express intensity. Here, this usage is repeated three times with roots that bear similar meaning of breaking and shaking. מוט is a poetic word in itself. Of the 36 times that it appeared in the OT, 24 are in Psalms, 4 in Proverbs and another 4 in Isaiah. There is beauty in the language, but it is also extremely forceful in bringing out the message of the earth’s complete destruction.

Another example of poetic language can be found in 24:23a:

וְחִפְרָה הַלְּבָנָה וּבֹשֶׁת הַחֲמָה

“Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed”

It could be literally translated as *the white will be disgraced and the hot will be ashamed*, with the “white” representing the moon and the “hot” representing the sun, both in feminine form. This verse also has a sense of musicality with all the

words ending with Qamets. The sun and the moon are regarded as gods in the ancient Near East. Here Isaiah is emphasizing the glory of God almighty in contrast to the false gods. (Constable, 167) In addition to being poetic, the avoidance of directly naming the sun and moon also reinforces the supremacy and uniqueness of the Lord of hosts, His name properly proclaimed in the second half of the verse (24:23b).

Poetic words, symbolism, repetition, parallelism and other skillful uses of the Hebrew language is a prominent feature of this portion of the text. All of which functions to bring out the contrast between the glory and might of the Lord and the destruction that follows man's pride, thus urging readers to trust in the Lord wholeheartedly in a powerful and beautifully poetic way.