

Lesson 2 Isaiah 1:2-9 Studying Biblical Poetry

Introduction

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| <p>² Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth;
“Sons I have reared and brought up,
³ “An ox knows its owner,
<i>But</i> Israel does not know,
⁴ Alas, sinful nation,
Offspring of evildoers,
They have abandoned the LORD,
They have turned away from Him.</p> | <p>For the LORD speaks,
But they have revolted against Me.
And a donkey its master’s manger,
My people do not understand.”
People weighed down with iniquity,
Sons who act corruptly!
They have despised the Holy One of Israel,</p> |
| <p>⁵ Where will you be stricken again,
The whole head is sick
⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head
<i>Only</i> bruises, welts and raw wounds,
Nor softened with oil.</p> | <p>As you continue in <i>your</i> rebellion?
And the whole heart is faint.
There is nothing sound in it,
Not pressed out or bandaged,</p> |
| <p>⁷ Your land is desolate,
Your fields—strangers are devouring them in
your presence;
⁸ The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in
a vineyard,
⁹ Unless the LORD of hosts
We would be like Sodom,</p> | <p>Your cities are burned with fire,
It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers.
Like a watchman’s hut in a cucumber field, like a
besieged city.
Had left us a few survivors,
We would be like Gomorrah.</p> |

That’s Isaiah 1:2-9. Isaiah writes with force and surprising imagery, using common realities, like a donkey at its manger, the relationship between father and son, or a hut in a cucumber field to create pictures in our minds, connecting those pictures in surprising ways that communicate powerful ideas. It is one thing to appreciate the sound of Isaiah’s poetry. It is another thing to understand it. Some of the ideas become clear in our minds but not all of them. And not always in a way that we can follow.

We must overcome two significant challenges to interpret Biblical prophecy: historical context and poetry. We addressed the issue of historical context in our first lesson of this series. The problem of historical context comes from the prophet’s role of delivering messages to a particular people in a particular context. And the prophets assume those people know the historical context, just like any preacher would, so they do not give a lot of explanation. And it worked. And those people did know the context. But we don’t. So, we struggle to understand a lot of the references to people, or places, or events.

Isaiah gives us some context, particularly with his references to Uzziah, Ahaz, and Hezekiah who were all three kings of Judah during Isaiah’s ministry. But with such a long book, Isaiah makes a multitude of references that we will need some help clarifying if we are to understand the point he is making.

Historical context is our first challenge in interpreting the prophets. Poetry is the second. I am going to cover Isaiah 1:2-9 in this lesson by looking at three different ways to approach Biblical poetry. I am not going to get very technical. I am not a Hebrew scholar, nor am I a poetry scholar. We do need the help of scholars. There are things that we will miss by not being able to read the Hebrew. But it is also true that Hebrew poetry continues to communicate very well in translation. Using some simple methods in our own language we can experience and understand an impressive amount of Isaiah.

There are reasons that Hebrew poetry translates so well. I’ll give you three. First, Hebrew poetry is dependent on parallel structures. The basic mode of Hebrew poetry, whether we are looking at hymns like the Psalms or wisdom literature like Job; or the prophets like Isaiah, is based on movement from one verset to the next; one phrase to the next. We will talk about that more in a bit. The point here is that the poetry is not fundamentally dependent on rhyme, or rhythm, or word play. Those can exist but that is not the fundamental mode of Hebrew poetry. The fundamental mode is

structure. And whereas rhyme is quite difficult to consistently translate from one language to another, structure can be translated well.

A second reason Hebrew poetry translates well is the use of stock phrases and bold imagery. A stock phrase is a term or phrase that gets used so often, the reader immediately understands the basic intent of the phrase. Poets can then use that phrase creatively. But the point is that the phrase itself is understood because of its regular common use. Isaiah's use of Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 9 is an example. All he has to do is state the names of those two cities and immediately we think of utter human depravity moving God to completely destroy in His wrath. A lot is said just by mentioning Sodom and Gomorrah. Along with stock phrases, powerful images can also translate well. We will consider some examples in a bit.

A third reason Hebrew poetry from the Bible translates so well is that it is true to the human condition. Biblical poetry communicates to our reality because the poets see with God's eyes. Poets want to help us see and experience something. Biblical poetry has the advantage of being inspired by God, so that the truths of the poet convict and inspire in a way that really is true to reality. You do not have to be a Hebrew from 700 BC to experience the human relevance of Isaiah.

Continuing on with the premise that Hebrew poetry translates well, I am going to describe for you three simple approaches to the study of Biblical poetry. All three approaches require spending time in the text and all three approaches focus on observing what the text says. Good interpretation and good application follow from good observation. This is the number one mistake I see Christians making in Bible study: trying to come up with some deep wisdom or spiritual principle from a passage of Scripture so often leads to nice ideas that have no real connection at all to the text at issue. Observe what the text says. Then observe again. Then observe again. Then take a step back and observe the text in its larger context. Only then, having looked intently at what the text says, you can begin to consider what it means. And a lot of meaning will flow naturally out of what you have seen.

The three approaches I will suggest can be used wherever you encounter poetry in your Bible. And you will encounter a lot of poetry in the Old Testament. A full third of the Old Testament is poetry. And that number increases to 45% after the books of Moses. From Joshua to Malachi, almost one half of the text is poetic verse. For this lesson, I will stick to Isaiah 1:2-9 as I give examples. I am using this lesson both as an introduction to observing poetry, and as a beginning to our study Isaiah's text.

Approach to Biblical poetry #1: Read and observe.

The first approach is to simply read the poetic passage and take note of what you see. This is the first step of inductive Bible study. Observe the text and write down your observations, because writing makes you think about what you're observing. As you read, ask the reporter questions: who? What? When? Why? Where? You want those questions to become second nature as you observe any text of Scripture.

When observing Biblical poetry, you do need to engage your imagination. Keep in mind that the study of poetry is both a left-brain and a right-brain activity. The left side of your brain processes more analytically, linear, and logical. The right side of your brain process more imaginatively, artistic and intuitive.

One year in our morning Bible time with our three daughters, we observed the Psalms together. The girl of the day would read the passage, and we all had fifteen minutes to write down observations. Then, starting with the girl of the day we went around in a circle and shared our observations. I loved the different approaches that came out naturally over that year. Julia was more likely to comment on verses that gave the bottom line or the idea of the text. She was processing more analytically. Claire was more likely to observe emotion words in the text, to feel it, processing more emotionally. Ana was more likely to see the dragons and butterflies. She can picture the images, processing imaginatively.

Poets use descriptive language so often to stir up emotion or to create a visual scene. The poet takes great care to choose just the right words and place those words in just the right order. So, in

observing poetic verse you need to intentionally engage your imagination as you observe. Ask, “What visual scene do these words and phrases create?” And ask, “What emotions are being expressed or what emotional response might the poet expect from the reader?” Try to see it, try to feel it.

So, choose a text like Isaiah 1:2-9 and read it through, then write down your observations. You may not want to do this in a linear way at first. Especially if you are a more left-brained analytical thinker. Allow your mind to skip around the text. You can come back later and put it into order. I will read our main text again and just even as you listen, what is some image that stands out to you?

<p>² Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; “Sons I have reared and brought up, ³ “An ox knows its owner, <i>But</i> Israel does not know, ⁴ Alas, sinful nation, Offspring of evildoers, They have abandoned the LORD, ⁵ Where will you be stricken again, The whole head is sick ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head <i>Only</i> bruises, welts and raw wounds, ⁷ Your land is desolate, Your fields—strangers are devouring them in your presence; ⁸ The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, ⁹ Unless the LORD of hosts We would be like Sodom,</p>	<p>For the LORD speaks, But they have revolted against Me. And a donkey its master’s manger, My people do not understand.” People weighed down with iniquity, Sons who act corruptly! They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him. As you continue in <i>your</i> rebellion? And the whole heart is faint. There is nothing sound in it, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil. Your cities are burned with fire, It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers. Like a watchman’s hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Gomorrah.</p>
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So, in this approach we are just reading and observing. I will share some observations. And I am going to go linear to make it easier for you to follow me. I notice some repeated words. For example, the people of God are referred to as “sons” and later Jerusalem as a “daughter.” So, there is familiar language I noticed. The word, “know,” also gets repeated. I also notice some similar words, not just the repeated words, like in verse 4 which describes Israel four different ways as “sinful nation,” “iniquitous people,” “evil offspring,” and “corrupt sons.”

What have they done? In verse 2, they have revolted. And in verse 5, they have rebelled. In verse 4, they have abandoned Yahweh. They have despised the Holy One of Israel.

And that stands out to me: despised the Holy One of Israel. The striking contrast to the verbs for the people. They are sinful, iniquitous, evil, corrupt. Yahweh, however, is the Holy One. Maybe you notice that name for God here right away in this passage while you are observing, or maybe you would not notice it until later. As you go through Isaiah, you will notice the repetition, “Holy One of Israel.” It is going to recur 29 times. When we get to chapter 6, we will make the connection to Isaiah’s vision of God as “holy, holy, holy.” Isaiah never loses that vision that came at his initial call. He sees God as pure and holy. The people of Judah stand in stark contrast.

There are several striking images in this passage. There is so much, you will not take it all in. But with each passage take one or two of Isaiah’s word pictures and let your imagination go. What do you see? What does the word picture look like in your mind’s eye?

For example, imagine the pictures in verses 5-6.

<p>⁵ Where will you be stricken again, The whole head is sick ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head</p>	<p>As you continue in <i>your</i> rebellion? And the whole heart is faint. There is nothing sound in it,</p>
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Only bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged,
Nor softened with oil.

The head is sick and heart is faint. That's a person in pretty bad shape. Head and heart are unwell. From the sole of the foot even to the head. That is from the very bottom. But Isaiah does not even say, "the foot." He says, "from the sole of the foot." That is the underpart, the bottom of the foot, the very bottom, up to the head - there is nothing sound in it. Nothing sound. Just imagine this: only bruises, welts, and raw wounds. Picture it. It is quite repulsive. It's not just wounds; it's raw wounds. There is not any attempt to care for the wounds. They have not been pressed out, or bandaged, or softened with oil. It's almost like a leper who doesn't even recognize that their body is falling apart so they are not even trying to take care of their body. And we go back to the beginning question, "Where will you be stricken again as you continue in your rebellion?" This is where their rebellion has taken them. This is the harm they have brought upon themselves. It is hard to imagine that they could do any more damage. The whole is thoroughly beaten. This is the spiritual state of Judah.

Take another image. The one in verse 8.

⁸ The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter, Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field,
in a vineyard like a besieged city.

A shelter in a vineyard would draw up a common image for an Israelite who is used to agricultural life. The shelter in the middle of the vineyard offers a lookout point to a watchman whose job is to keep away animals or people who would steal the grapes. Close to the time of harvest, the shelter - now imagine this - the shelter is completely surrounded by the green, and the red, and purple of leaves and the grapes. The next image is similar. A hut in a cucumber field. Imagine prickly cucumber vines spreading everywhere. And there is no place to step. The ground is covered with green right up to the watchman's hut. At the end of that second phrase Isaiah gives us the point of the imagery. It's like a besieged city: the shelter in the vineyard, the hut in the cucumber field are a besieged city as the vines cover the field, like you're in the hut. All you see is green vines everywhere coming right up to the hut, so is an attacking army that is besieging Jerusalem. As far as the eyes can see the invaders will cover the land creeping like vines, like a hut in a cucumber field. So, it's such a mundane image that Isaiah uses in this surprising context, and it creates this really powerful, striking picture.

So, our first approach to the study of Biblical poetry is simply to read the passage and make observations: what is repeated, what stands in contrast, what images stand out to you. Tap into your imagination as you observe.

Approach to biblical poetry #2: Analyze the flow of thought through the passage.

Our second approach to Biblical poetry is to analyze the flow of thought through the passage. Sometimes poetry uses a standard pattern. That is true for a lot of the Psalms. We can follow the standard elements of a lament song to help us to see the structure.

We do not have a standard template to look for in Isaiah. We are on our own. The idea here in this approach is to identify the movement of thought as you go through the passage. Sometimes it is a narrative movement. That is, the poet is telling a story. Often in there is some kind of logical flow. The poet is communicating a connection of ideas. Isaiah often repeats ideas in some kind of parallel pattern, like a chiasm. So, you might be moving linearly down the text, but the text is not linear. He may begin with one idea, move to another, and then come back to the first. The movement in our present passage from verse 2 to 9 does happen to be linear.

This passage begins with a call to the Heavens and the Earth. The intent here might be to show the unnatural behavior of Judah as the child rejects the goodness of the father. We call Heaven and Earth maybe to represent the natural order. I think the call of Heaven and Earth here points back to the Covenant language of Deuteronomy. One of the elements in a second millennium Near-Eastern covenant was a call to witnesses. That is the standard element most left out of Biblical covenants because it entailed a call of numerous gods and goddesses as witnesses to the agreement made between the vassal people and the suzerain king. God, of course, is not going to call pagan gods as

witness to His Covenant with Israel. In Deuteronomy, however, Moses symbolically calls Heaven and Earth as witnesses to the Covenant. Deuteronomy 30:19-20,

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him...

Moses said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today." That may be what Isaiah is doing right here. Even if we do not catch this connection to Covenant witness, we get the main idea. Isaiah is calling Heaven and Earth to pay attention to something. Pay attention! Look at this! Look at what? Verses 2b-4 describe Judah as "rebellious children" who have turned away from God in their wicked behavior. The description begins with an image of ox and donkey, then turns more concretely to the behavior of the Jewish people.

Verses 5-9 then describe the devastating consequences of the people turning away from God. First, we get the image of the wounded man in verses 5 and 6. That is followed in verse 7 by a more concrete description of a desolated land, with burned cities and loss of the harvest to invaders. Verse 8 provides another image of a hut in a cucumber field that pictures a besieged city. The devastation is terrible enough that Isaiah can bring in the stock images of Sodom and Gomorrah as a comparison. It is only the grace of God that has left a remnant.

What I have just done here is simply move through the text line by line, attempting to follow Isaiah's flow of thought. You want to try and be as specific as you can identifying the idea present in each verse or set of verses. Prophecy in Isaiah often sounds familiar. As we go through the chapters viewing the text generally, we encounter descriptions of sin, judgment, consequences of blessing and curse, calls to repentance, and visions of hope. We are going to get a lot of that and it's going to run together. By identifying more specifically the kind of sin, or the instance of judgment, or the particular hope promised, we can differentiate between similar passages and better see the movement within a particular passage. By identifying the specific idea present, trying to be specific, we also avoid drawing in ideas that are not yet present. We want to allow Isaiah to develop the idea of judgment, or the idea of sin, or the idea of hope as we go along, so we don't want to bring everything into the first instance, everything we know. We just want to observe what is he telling us here.

You also want to look for ideas that may be suggested, but not clarified to see if Isaiah will come back to those ideas. For example, the question in verse 5 stands out to me. "Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion?" The treatment of the Jews as children in the preceding verses causes me to think of God the Father wondering how to discipline His rebellious children. Like He wants to spank them, but there is no place on their body that He can put His hand. They are so wounded, there is nowhere else left to strike the child. The discipline does not seem to be doing any good at all. This child can take a beating without ever turning back. This child takes the consequences and plunges willfully ahead.

But it is too simple to look at the injury to Judah simply as the discipline of the Father. The pain described after verse 5 comes from an invading army. How does that work? Is it God's hand or an oppressive enemy? Or both? We will have to wait and see if Isaiah works out that. It also seems to me much of this pain comes from the behavior of the people. Sinful and wicked actions have natural consequences that can bring pain and suffering. How does that work with God's discipline? Is it directly the hand of God, or is it God giving people over to the consequences of their own behavior?

Those are some questions that come up as I observe this passage, but I should not be too eager to answer at this point of my observation. There are answers to these questions elsewhere in the Bible, but I want to know what Isaiah has to say about it. So, I'm waiting. Verse 5 raises the questions in my mind but not seeing answers here, I will wait and see whether Isaiah addresses those issues about discipline and consequences later. And maybe later I'll see that I'm not getting the passage right. So by holding on to those questions I am not jumping a conclusions that might not be there, but I might

Scholars often identify Hebrew parallelism as either synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic. The verse is synonymous parallelism if the second verset repeats or restates the same idea as the first verset. The verse is antithetic parallelism if the second verset contrasts the idea in the first verset. Synthetic parallelism is not really parallelism but rather a term for everything that is not synonymous or antithetic. If the second phrase does not restate or contrast the first phrase, we call it “synthetic.” I have posted an article I’ve written on the study of Biblical poetry that is at the observetheword.com under Isaiah resources, where I go into this a little bit more than I am doing right now, if you want to check that out.

By way of example of these types of parallelism, let’s consider Isaiah 1:2-3. We start with 2a.

² Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks

“For the Lord speaks” does not restate the idea in the first phrase, “Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth.” So, it is not synonymous parallelism. It also does not set up a contrast. So, it is not antithetic parallelism. It is not really parallelism at all. It is a logical statement. “Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth, **for** the Lord speaks.” That is why you should listen. So, we are going to call this, “synthetic.”

In 2b we have antithetic parallelism. Two versets create a contrast.

“Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against me.

The action of Judah contrasts the action of God. Moving on to verse 3a we have synonymous parallelism.

³ An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s manger,

The ox parallels the donkey. Also, notice how there is no verb in the second verset. Parallelism allows for dropping out parallel elements, in this case the verb. We are able to assume the verb, to fill it in from the first verset. The first verset has a subject, “the ox”, a verb, “knows”, and an object, “its owner.” The second verset has only a subject, “a donkey” and an object, “its master’s manger.” Because both the idea and the structure of the versets is parallel, we recognize that the verb from the second verset is understood as being the same from the first, “and a donkey *knows* its master’s manger.”

The next verse in 3b is also synonymous, this time with “my people not understanding” being a restatement of Israel not knowing.

But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.

We start by observing the parallel versets in a verse of Hebrew poetry. We also need to pay attention to the relationship from one line to the next, from one verse to the other. For example, 3a sets up the idea of the ox knowing who its owner is and a donkey knowing where to get fed. Those two phrases are synonymous. Then in 3b we have another verse with synonymous phrases. “Israel does not know” is synonymous with “my people not understanding.” But then when we have considered the whole verse in 3a as compared to the whole verse in 3b, we see a shocking contrast. The ox and the donkey know. Israel does not know. The dumb animals know where to go for shelter and provision. The people of God do not.

This idea of synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism serves as a helpful introduction to Hebrew poetry. And if that is as far as you want to go right now, that’s fine. That is enough to chew on. If you can begin to see how the phrases in Hebrew verse line up beside one another and you can begin to think about how those parallel phrases relate to one another, you will have taken a good step forward in your observation of Hebrew poetry.

If you want to go further in your observation, it is helpful to recognize that verses we call synonymous are rarely truly synonymous. Robert Alter’s book, *The Study of Biblical Poetry*, has been very helpful to me seeing two principles of movement in Hebrew poetry. These two ideas are condensed in the appendix of an article I mentioned before, *The Study of Biblical Poetry* at observetheword.com.

The Principle of Incremental Repetition

The first principle is called “incremental repetition.” Incremental repetition takes notice of both the similarities and differences that exist from verset to verset, particularly when the poet is telling a story. Take Isaiah 1:15 for example,

¹⁵ “So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you;
 Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen.
 Your hands are covered with blood.

Each verset in those two lines moves us forward in a story by presenting a simple image that makes a slight adjustment to what we see. Alter compares the effect to the way animation works. You know how you can take several animation images on separate pieces of paper and when you flip through the images, you have movement. There are only small, incremental changes between each frame, but those small changes really are moving us forward.

Imagine Isaiah 1:15a “So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*.” You can form a clear image of a Jewish worshiper standing with raised hands in prayer. And it’s good. Prayer is good. The next image makes a change. “I will hide my eyes from you.” So, now God is in the frame of the picture, not just the worshiper - and God. And we see the worshiper with raised hands before Yahweh who is covering His eyes or turning away, so as not to look at the worshiper. That’s not good. “Yes, even though you multiply prayers.” So, we imagine, we have a couple of frames of imagining the prayers continuing. It is not one prayer. It is ongoing prayers. “I will not listen.” Not only has God shut His eyes: He is not moved by what He hears. Not listening implies no response. Finally, “Your hands are covered with blood.” In the first frame of our imagined series the worshipers held hands out in prayer, but we did not see those hands closely. They looked like a good act of worship. We wonder why God turns away. Why does He not listen? As the image comes into clear view, we are shocked to see blood on the hands of the worshiper.

That is incremental repetition. Like the small changes in animation frames, the frames add up to create movement, to tell a story. Slow, phrase-by-phrase observation of the text allows the poet to draw the frames kind of one by one for us in our minds.

The Principle of Intensification

Alter also describes a second principle: the principle of intensification. When we label two versets as synonymous, they are rarely actually synonymous. Hebrew parallelism is rarely making an exact restatement. It is possible. It is not usual. More often there is a slight change in a phrase that intensifies the meaning. Consider verse 4.

The first phrase is a rather generic criticism of Judah, “Alas, sinful nation.” The next phrase intensifies the state of Judah with more concrete language, “People weighed down with iniquity.” It is one thing to call a nation “sinful.” It adds to the charge if we imagine them as a people struggling under the burden of their sin, “weighed down with iniquity.” Isaiah keeps going with a more intense phrase, “Offspring of evildoers,” suggesting evil through more than one generation. “Sons who act corruptly,” intensifies “offspring of evildoers”. It is not only that they are born from evil parents. Their own behavior is corrupt. The next phrase continues the intensification. “They despised the Holy One of Israel.” It is one thing to act corruptly and to be ashamed of your actions, or to feel some regret before God’s holiness. These have not felt remorse in their actions. They have despised God. They have despised the Holy One. “They have turned away from him.”

Whether or not we recognize what we would call “intensification” in every verset, the effect of the whole is powerful. It is one thing to say, Judah sinned a lot and rebelled against Yahweh. That’s probably how I would say it. It is not how Isaiah would say it. “Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity.” That sounds a lot better than just saying, “Yeah, Judah was really sinful.” No, they’re a sinful nation! They’re a people weighed down with iniquity! And Isaiah goes on. He does not just leave it with that one verse. There is impact as you multiply the verses.

⁴ Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity,
 Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly!
 They have abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel,
 They have turned away from Him.

Repetition is not merely repetition, not in the hands of the poet. Isaiah builds up a heavy indictment. We feel the weight of Judah's sin and the finality of their rebellion.

The basic idea for us in this principle of intensification is the recognition that similar phrases in Hebrew poetry are not merely ways to restate the text. There is usually some development from phrase to phrase. And that movement is developed in a myriad of ways. Sometimes the verset moves from a more general statement to a more specific one. Sometimes the verset moves in the other direction, from specific to general. Sometimes we are moving from more abstract to more concrete, sometimes from concrete to abstract. Sometimes we are moving from less striking language to more striking language. When observing at the level of verse and verset, pay attention to what the change between words and phrases implies, or might imply.

Conclusion

Okay, I am ready to conclude. So, what have we said? Regarding our method, we have considered three approaches to the study of Biblical poetry. You can take these approaches separately or you can combine all three in your study. You can simply read and make your own observations of what stands out or what seems striking to you, observing both with your mind and imagination. That is a great start. You can also try to follow the logical flow of the whole passage. What are the main ideas from one set of verses to another and from one passage to another? You can also focus in closely on the phrases or versets, looking for the movement within a verse, or just from one verse to another.

I will not focus through this series on our method of studying Biblical poetry, not after this lesson. This was an introduction. But I will be using all three methods in my own study. So, you will recognize examples as we go through the text.

Okay, what have we said about the text? Where are we? Isaiah has begun with a denouncement of Judah as rebellious sons who have turned away from the Holy One of Israel. He uses the term, "Israel," but he is talking to the people of the Southern Kingdom: to Judah. They do not know their God. Isaiah declares that they would be like Sodom and Gomorrah if God had not left a remnant. How is Judah like Sodom and Gomorrah? What is really going on, Isaiah? Well, Isaiah has more to say about that in this chapter. So, we will pick that up in our next lesson. He has also inserted a tiny bit of hope. There will be survivors.

Reflection questions

1. Read Isaiah 1:2-9. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. Observe the way Isaiah 1:2-9 is formatted at the beginning of this lesson. Notice how the two phrases (versets) are set side by side on each line (verse). Notice how there are usually two lines of poetry grouped together with a similar idea or image as with 2a and b and 3a and b. Notice also the exception to the rule in verse 4. There are three lines instead of two and the third line has three phrases. Notice how the third phrase in 4c is centered under the first two phrases.
3. Compare how the text is formatted here to how the text is formatted in your Bible. Could you take the text in your Bible and format on your own like you see it in this lesson with phrases set side by side?
4. Take a couple lines of text and reflect on how the 2nd phrase slightly moves the thought forward. Notice also the 3rd phrase in 4c and 6b, how does that additional phrase provide emphasis or finality?
5. Choose one image in Isaiah 1:2-9. Imagine what it might look like. What picture is the poet drawing in your mind? How does Isaiah connect that image you just imagine to a more concrete reality?
6. Choose a second image. Take a couple of minutes to picture that image. What is Isaiah saying with that image? What is the concrete reality he is symbolizing?
7. Follow the flow of the passage. Consider first the state of Judah's relationship with the Father. How is that described? What behavior follows from Judah's relationship with God? What have been the consequences of that behavior? What is the envisioned future consequence?