

Introduction to “Isaiah Contours”

The Book of Isaiah is primarily Hebrew Poetry. In place of rhyme, ancient Near Eastern poetry is based upon parallelism of meaning (semantic parallelism). There are couplets with two lines having similar meaning, code words or structure. At times the poetry includes multiple lines having the same meaning for added emphasis. At times the poetry has surprising couplets of opposite meaning. This too is part of the beauty of this poetry –High Contrast– of evil and good, of light and dark, and of love and abhorrence. I also love an element of this poetry called chiasmus. This is when parallel ideas are placed in pyramid structures with each taking a particular order. I know many are familiar with the chiasmus found in the Book of Mormon.

I realized that the writings of Isaiah needed to be SEEN as poetry in order to truly understand their meaning and their true sentiment. I began the process of showing this in my visual interpretation, “Isaiah Contours”. Here is my process:

1. I used the King James Version of The Book of the Prophet Isaiah. I know people have a great love for the words of Isaiah as translated by those English scholars.
2. I used "The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah" and his later book, “The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys From the Book of Mormon” by Avraham Gileadi to check that all passages or words that might be difficult to translate are interpreted correctly. These translations are in smaller black type and in parenthesis. Avraham Gileadi is a master and a true scholar. I took his class on the Book of Isaiah while at Brigham Young University in the late 1980’s. Not only was his translation of the Book of Isaiah vital to understanding the meaning of the Book of Isaiah, but his commentary on Jewish tradition and scriptural scholarship was extremely important. It is in his translation that I first began to see the poetry of the book. Some of his understandings I have added for your benefit. They are seen in my book in blue ideas/scriptures to consider. You may also hear chapter by chapter commentary on his website, “<http://www.isaiahexplained.com/>.”

I also used a scholarly book called "Understanding Isaiah" by Parry, Parry and Peterson. I love it as well for its addition of commentary related to the history and doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

There were many books I used in my research of Hebrew/Biblical Poetry. These included: “The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History” by James L. Kugel, “Handbook of Poetics” by Francis Gummere, “The Art of Biblical Poetry” by Robert Alter, “Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews” by George Gregory, and Robert Lowth, “Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated” by E. W. Bullinger and other books focused more upon The Epic of Gilgamesh my subsequent work which uses the same poetic form.

3. I created the structures you see in the visual interpretation so that the parallelism and contrasts of the poetry in Isaiah can be more easily seen.

4. I have also added words to make sentences parallel and matching, so the messages are more clear and powerful. This helps with *who or what* is being referenced.

5. I left to the side all the "ands" and some other connecting words in the King James Version. These "ands" were added by the translators because they were trying to write out Isaiah's words into sentences instead of poetry.

6. I added some of my own punctuation for continuity.

I learned that when I study any ancient work of poetry I need 3 versions:

1. The original writing in the original language.

(Like with Beowulf - The original Old English version)

Hwaet! We Gar-Dena, in gear-dagum,
theod-cyninga, thrym gefrunon,
hu dha aethelingas ellen fremedon!

2. An accurate translation - even if the poetry is not left intact.

(I use Tolkien's accurate translation of Beowulf into Modern English)

Lo! the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes in
days of old we have heard tell, how these princes did deeds
of valour!

3. But I also benefit and love a translation that tries to incorporate the poetry and feeling of the original poem.

(I use Francis Gummere's translation - It uses many Old and Middle English words and keeps the alliteration of the poetry)

Lo! Praise the prowess of People-kings,
Of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
We have heard, and what honor the athelings won!

So, I kept the King James Version, and have added translations where necessary for meaning. I hope you enjoy these chapters of Isaiah as much as I did writing them out as a visual interpretation.

I love Isaiah's prophecies because his images are so powerful, beautiful and frightening. Like C.S. Lewis said of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, "Here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron; here is a book that will break your heart...good beyond hope." This description reflects my feelings about Isaiah's writings.

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