

# Chiasmus: Unique Presentations of the Lord's Word

Chiasmus is an inverted parallelism; it is a presentation of a series of words or thoughts followed by a second presentation of similar words or thoughts, but in reverse order. There are hundreds of chiasms of various sizes in the Old Testament; more than one hundred exist in the book of Isaiah alone. Chiasmus size varies; many are as small as four lines, and others comprise entire chapters (e.g., 1 Kgs. 17–19). The ancient prophets often used chiasmus *to reveal the lord's words* unto individuals, peoples, and nations. The prophets also present many of their *prophecies of Jesus Christ* in chiastic form.

An example of a simple chiasmus is Isaiah 5:20, where the terms *evil* and *good* are presented once and then again in reverse order. Isaiah 5:20 then presents two other simple chiasms: *darkness/light/light/darkness* followed by *bitter/sweet/sweet/bitter*. Another example is

Isaiah 6:10, where the words *heart*, *ears*, and *eyes* are presented and then repeated in reverse order.

Chiasmus serves a variety of purposes: (1) its structure encourages and enhances learning or memorization of the chiasmus, because scriptural students can memorize the first presentation of words and then the same again in reverse order; (2) the repetition of the key points or concepts in a chiasmus naturally serve to emphasize certain points; and (3) each chiasmus lends an artistic or poetic quality to the text that makes it aesthetically pleasing to the reader.

The chiasms presented in the chart could easily be multiplied. The following seven examples are formatted (including underlining key expressions) to make them more readable and pleasing to the eye.

## 1. The Lord's Glory and Light

A **Arise**,

B **shine**;

C for thy **light** is come,

D and the **glory**

E of the **lord**

F is **risen** upon thee.

G For, behold, the **darkness** shall cover the earth,

G and gross **darkness** the people:

F but shall **arise** upon thee,

E the **lord**

D and his **glory** shall be seen upon thee,

C and the nations shall come to thy **light**

B and kings to the **brightness**

A of thy **rising**. (Isa. 60:1–3; translation by the author)

## 2. A Messianic Prophecy

A Yet he **opened not his mouth**:

B he is brought **as a lamb** to the slaughter,

B and **as a sheep** before her shearers is dumb,

A so he **openeth not his mouth**. (Isa. 53:7)

## 3. The Lord's Supremacy and Greatness

A For **my thoughts** are not your thoughts,

B neither are your ways **my ways**, saith the lord.

C For as the **heavens** are higher

C than the **earth**,

B so are **my ways** higher than your ways,

A and **my thoughts** than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8–9)

## 4. The Lord Saves Ancient Israel

A He caused the **waters to flow out**

B of the **rock** for them:

B he clave the **rock** also,

A and the **waters gushed out**. (Isa. 48:2)

## 5. An Atonement for the Soul

A And the priest shall make an **atonement** for the soul

B that **sinneth ignorantly**,

B when he **sinneth by ignorance** before the lord,

A to make an **atonement** for him; and it shall be forgiven him. (Num. 15:28)

## 6. The Elijah Narrative (1 Kgs. 17–19)

A The lord directs Elijah to go to Transjordan (17:2–7)

B Elijah travels north of Israel (17:8–24)

C Elijah returns to Israel (18:1–2)

D Obadiah and Ahab travel (18:3–6)

E Dialogue of Elijah and Obadiah (18:7–15)

F Meeting of Elijah and Ahab (18:16–20)

G Baal's prophets are not successful in calling down fire (18:21–29)

G Elijah successfully calls down fire (18:30–40)

F Meeting of Elijah and Ahab (18:41–42)

E Dialogue of Elijah and his servant (18:43–45)

D Ahab and Elijah travel to Jezreel (18:45–46)

C Elijah flees Israel (19:1–3)

B Elijah travels south of Israel (19:3–18)

A The lord directs Elijah to go to Transjordan (1 Kgs. 19:19–21)

## 7. The Lord's Revelation to Moses

A And the Lord said unto Moses,

B The man shall be surely put to death:

C all the congregation shall stone him with stones . . .

C all the congregation . . . stoned him with stones,

B and he died;

A as the lord commanded Moses. (Num. 15:35–36)