

PROSE RHYTHMS IN THE AUTHORIZED VERSION

N. Sebastian Desent, Ph.D., Th.D., D.D.
Pastor, Historic Baptist Church, Rhode Island.

NSD 1/12/10

The *Authorized Version of 1611* (also known as the *King James Version of the Holy Bible*) was uniformly and diligently translated considering the sound and sense of the passages. The forty-seven translators not only translated the scriptures accurately – being the best-learned men of Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster – but they also were careful to make sure the flow of the translation was conducive to reading, quoting, and memorizing. They were careful to convey from the original tongues the meanings, tones and styles of the writers. They accomplished this by wording the English in such a way that the choice and sounds of words complimented each other, and the rhythm of words reflected the divine inspiration of the very words of God.

The care taken by the AV translators to arrange the perfectly-translated words show their reverence and love for the word of God – they gave this Bible an accuracy, beauty, and melody unmatched by any other translation of the Bible. Not only is the AV the perfect English Bible, but it is the prime example of beautiful metrically-written English. Not even the writings of Chaucer or Shakespeare come close to the majesty and beauty of the *Authorized Version*.

Understanding and identifying the different rhythms in the Authorized Version will help a student of the Bible, and a preacher of the word, to better emphasize the truth, speak more pleasing to the ear, and improve his homiletic delivery.

An article in *The British Weekly* for December 27, 1956, referring to *Certain Rhythms in the English Bible* by Dr. Lane Cooper (Cornell University Press), it stated: “If preachers, orators and writers would spend a little time noting the rhythms of that version, they would grow discontented with the sentences that please them now.”

The prose in the *Authorized Version* can be defined by these styles and rhythms: dactyls, anapests, spondees, iambus, feet, trochees, etc. The translators were also able to preserve the intent, styles, connotations, etc. of the original inspired words. I will describe the rhythms and other forms below and give some examples for the reader. My hope is that through identifying and studying these things the reader will gain a greater appreciation for the *Authorized Version*.

Definitions and Examples

Prose: Comes from the Latin *prosa*; meaning straightforward. It describes direct and unadorned writing, usually used to convey facts. Prose lacks formal structure of meter or rhyme. It is considered to be the use of plain words, but it also can be complex, elaborate, and figurative.

Prose, although once considered ordinary, dull and unimaginative, has developed in meaning to describe well-written pieces of literature. One should still consider *prose* to mean *without metrical structure*.

Merriam-Webster defines the word as follows:

prose

Pronunciation: \ˈprōz\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Latin *prosa*, from feminine of *prosus*, *prosus*, straightforward, being in prose, contraction of *proversus*, past participle of *provertere* to turn forward, from *pro-* forward + *vertere* to turn

Date: 14th century

1 a : the ordinary language people use in speaking or writing **b** : a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech

2 : a prosaic style, quality, or condition

Allegory: A symbolic narrative with a secondary meaning. Obviously, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a perfect example of an allegory. The Bible uses many allegories in the Old and New Testaments. The prophets many times used allegories. Jesus spoke in parables.

Example: Nathan before David when he told of the poor man's lamb. (2 Samuel 12)

Alliteration: The repetition of sounds, especially at the beginning of words.

*Example: The **prophets** prophesy falsely, and the **priests** bear rule by their means; and my **people** love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jeremiah 5:31)*

Anapaest or Anapest (short-short-long): A metrical foot of three syllables, two short (or unstressed) followed by one long (or stressed). The anapest is the reverse of the dactyl.

*Example: They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, **I am he**. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. (John 18:5)*

Assonance: The repetition of a similar vowel sound in a sentence.

*Example: Beareth **all things**, believeth **all things**, hopeth **all things**, endureth **all things**. (I Corinthians 13:7).*

Caesura: A natural pause or break in a line, usually near the middle.

Example: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)

Connotation: Associations made by a word that goes beyond its meaning.

Example: A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. (Galatians 5:9)

Consonance: The repetition of similar consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words.

Example: He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30)

Couplet: A pair of lines that are the same length (sometimes rhyme) and form a complete thought.

Example: Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. (Proverbs 26:4, 5)

Cretic or Amphimacer (long-short-long): A metrical foot of three syllables, one long (or stressed), followed by one short (or unstressed) and one long (or stressed).

*Example: Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be **swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:** (James 1:19)*

Dactyl (long-short-short): A metrical foot of three syllables, one long (or stressed) followed by two short (or unstressed). As in, “verily.” The dactyl is the opposite of the anapest.

*Example: Jesus answered and said unto him, **Verily, verily,** I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)*

Denotation: The actual and specific meaning of the word.

Dialogue: The conversation between characters.

Example: Probably best illustrated by the Book of Job when Job and his friends speak back and forth.

Diction: The choice of words used by the speaker. One can tell whether the speaker is of a certain area or background by the words he uses. For example, Paul’s writings compared to Peter’s.

Enjambment: A run on line that does not end in a stop or complete written thought.

Example: Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -- ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. (Exodus 32:32).

Foot: Two or more syllables that make up a rhythm. An iamb is a foot that has two syllables (short-long or unstressed-stressed). An anapest is a foot that has three syllables (short-short-long or unstressed-unstressed-long).

Hyperbole: A figure of speech in which deliberate exaggeration is used for emphasis. Hyperbole is the opposite of litotes.

*Example: Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, **let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease.** (Lamentations 2:18)*

Example: Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. (Song of Solomon 6:6)

Iamb (short-long): A metrical foot of two syllables, one short (or unstressed) and one long (or stressed).

*Example: For **God so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

Irony: A contrast of what is said and what happens or is expected to happen.

Example: For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14)

Literal language: Writers and speaker mean exactly what their words denote.

Example: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Litotes: A figure of speech in which a positive is stated by negating its opposite. This type of speech is used many times by Luke.

*Example: For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought **no small gain** unto the craftsmen; (Acts 19:24)*

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which two things are compared, by saying one thing is another.

*Examples: And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the **Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David**, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. (Revelation 5:5)*

*Example: Dan shall be a **serpent by the way, an adder in the path**, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. (Genesis 49:17)*

Meter: The arrangement of a line by the number of syllables and the rhythm of accented (or stressed) syllables. These are also described as these:

Iambic Pentameter: A type of meter in which there are five iambs to a line.

Monometer: A line of poetry that has one metrical foot.

Dimeter: A line of poetry that has two metrical feet.

Trimeter: A line of poetry that has three metrical feet.

Tetrameter: A line of poetry that has four metrical feet.

Pentameter: A line of poetry that has five metrical feet.

Hexameter: A line of poetry that has six metrical feet.

Heptameter: A line of poetry that has seven metrical feet.

Octometer: A line of poetry that has eight metrical feet.

Rising Meter goes from unstressed to stressed.

Falling Meter goes from stressed to unstressed.

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which one closely related word is used in place of another. For example, Alpha and Omega represent first and last, or beginning and ending.

*Example: I am **Alpha** and **Omega**, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1:8)*

*Example: Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the **light** of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)*

Narrative: Telling a story.

Example: Much of the Bible is narrative: Genesis through Ester; Gospels through Acts.

Onomatopoeia: A figure of speech using a word to imitate sounds.

*Example: The Jews then **murmured** at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. (John 6:41)*

Oxymoron: rhetorical antithesis, bringing together two contradictory terms.

Example: Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23)

Parable: A brief story that illustrates a moral lesson.

Example: The Good Samaritan. (Luke 10)

Parody: A mocking representation of someone's work or behavior.

Example: And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. (1 Kings 18:27)

Personification: A figure of speech in which a thing is given human attributes.

*Example: And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately **cry out**. (Luke 19:40)*

Point of View: The angle of vision from which a story is narrated.

Example: John's view of heaven in Revelation chapter 5.

Pyrrhic (short-short): A metrical foot with two short (or unstressed) syllables.

*Example: **It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house. (Proverbs 25:24).***

Refrain: A phrase or line that is repeated throughout a Psalm, usually after every stanza.

Example: Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness.... (Psalm 107)

Rhyme: The matching of the final vowel or consonant sounds of words.

*Example: Beareth **all things**, believeth **all things**, hopeth **all things**, endureth **all things**. (I Corinthians 13:7).*

*It is not good to eat much **honey**: so for men to search their own glory is not **glory**. (Proverbs 25:27)*

Rhythm: The recurrence of accent or stress in lines of verse.

Example: A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. (Proverbs 26:3).

Setting: The time and place that established the context.

Example: I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, (Revelation 1:9, 10)

Simile: A figure of speech in which two things are compared using “like” or “as.”

Example: As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. (Proverbs 25:25)

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)

Spondee (long-long): A metrical foot of two syllables, both of which are long (or stressed).

Stanza: Two or more lines that form a division. They usually follow the same pattern or meter.

Example: Psalm 119 is a very good example. It has 8 verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Stress: The prominence or emphasis given to particular syllables.

Style: The way the writer chooses and arranges words to describe ideas.

Subject: What or whom the writing is about.

Symbol: An object or action that stands for something other than itself.

Example: The image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (Daniel 2).

Synecdoche: A figure of speech in which a part is used to designate the whole or the reverse. God refers to the tribes of Joseph and Ephraim simply by their names.

*Example: Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of **Joseph**, which is in the hand of **Ephraim**, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. (Ezekiel 37:19)*

Syntax: The grammatical order of words, sometimes rearranged for effect.

*Example: And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)*

Theme: The idea of a literary work.

Example: The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; (Proverbs 1:1)

Tone: The implied attitude of the writer or speaker toward a subject or person.

Example: Jesus called Herod a fox. (Luke 13:32)

Trochee (long-short): A metrical foot of two syllables, one long (or stressed) and one short (or unstressed).

Trope: A figure of speech in which words are used in a figurative sense (sometimes a metaphor or a metonymy).

Verse: A single metrical line of poetry.