

Freshening Up Your Bible Study with Dr. Jim Coakley

Repetition

Introduction

One of the ways that a biblical author can foreground a concept or a theme is to use a word or a phrase repeatedly in an account.

Repetition Description

Today's composition teachers instruct students to vary their style and their words as they write as repetition is seen as redundant and an indication of poor style. Biblical authors were under no such injunction so we must not think of such repetition as juvenile but actually a strategy that biblical authors used to cue the readers to think more deeply in a certain way. Repetitions of the same word in groups of 3, 7 and 10 are relatively common so if you observe such a cluster you are more likely to be on to something deliberate. The technical term for this in literary language is leitwort.

General Examples:

Joseph Narrative: The word "hand" is used repeatedly. His "hands" are prosperous /other's "hands" are not

Deuteronomy: repetition of "Keep/Observe/Do" along with Carefully (5:1)—Today (6:6)

Jonah "went down" 1:3 (2x), 1:5, 2:7

John 1 Several repeated words: Beginning, Word, Life, Light

Examples of multiples

Genesis 4: 7x repetition of the word brother

Pentateuch: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" 7x Ex 20:2; 29:46, Lev 19:36; 25:38; 26:13, Num 15:41, Deut 5:6

Ephesians 4:4-6 "one" repeated 7 times

John "These things I have spoken to you" 7x John 14:25; 15:11; 16:1,4,6,25,33

Matthew "my Father" 7:21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,19

So what's: Repetition has both as a rhetorical effect and a theological thematic function

- 1) Repeated words serve as a unifying element within a text.
- 2) Repeated words are used as a linkage across texts.
- 3) Specialized Repetition of words (groups of 7 or 10) seem to be even more emphatic.