

## **Waltke, Psalms, Session 23, Resources from Notebooklm**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Waltke, Psalms, Session 23, Rhetorical Approach, Poetic Techniques, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke focuses on rhetorical criticism and poetic techniques in the Psalms. He explains how to analyze Psalms holistically, going beyond simple genre categorization to understand the poet's unique compositional methods. Waltke highlights key literary devices such as keywords, refrains, contrasts, comparisons, and structural patterns (alternating, concentric, and chiasmic). He emphasizes the importance of understanding *how* a Psalm is constructed to grasp its meaning, illustrating these techniques with examples from various Psalms. The lecture also explores concepts like intertextuality, scenic depiction, and intercalation as crucial elements in interpreting the Psalms' deeper meaning.

**2. 23-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Waltke's, Psalms, Session 23 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms → Waltke).**



**Waltke\_Psalms\_Session23\_Retorical\_Approa**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Bruce Waltke's lecture on Psalms:

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Rhetorical Approach & Poetic Techniques in Psalms**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Waltke\_Psalms\_EN\_Lecture23.pdf"

**Date:** Lecture 23 (likely 2024)

**Overview:** This lecture focuses on moving beyond broad categorizations of Psalms (spiritual, historical, form-based) to examine the specific poetic techniques employed by individual psalmists to craft their unique message. Dr. Waltke emphasizes a "holistic" approach, inspired by the work of Robert Alter and Adele Berlin, that seeks to understand *how* a poem means before attempting to discern *what* it means.

#### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### **1. Shifting Focus: From Form to Poetics**

- Traditional approaches (spiritual, historical, form criticism) are helpful for understanding the typical features of Psalms, but they don't fully reveal the artistry of individual poems.
- Waltke introduces "poetics" - the study of the literary devices and techniques authors use to construct their composition.
- Phyllis Tribble's quote: "whereas form criticism studies the typical and so groups literature according to its genre, rhetorical criticism studies the particular within the typical." (p. 1)
- Waltke emphasizes analyzing the structure of a psalm from the smallest units (strophes) to stanzas and finally the whole poem.
- He notes that this approach is relatively recent, emerging from the 1980s with the work of Robert Alter and others who began to encourage a holistic approach over source-critical reductionism.

##### **1. Poetics and Message:**

- The poet has a point of view and a message. They communicate it through "aesthetics, through artistic forms, and artistic ways." (p. 3)

- The "message" is preferred to "idea" as it implies a moral imperative and a demand for response.
- Waltke quotes Adele Berlin: "we do not know what a text means until we know how it means." (p. 3) Understanding the building blocks of a text is key.
- Poetics is to literature what linguistics is to language. "Poetics describes the basic components of literature and the rules governing their use. Poetics strives to write a grammar, as it were, of literature." (p.3)

#### 1. Key Poetic Techniques:

- **Keywords (Leitwort):** Repeated words or roots that meaningfully connect material, revealing or emphasizing themes. Example: "Lord" and "King" in Psalm 2. "Those who attend to these repetitions will find a meaning of the text revealed or clarified or at any rate made more emphatic." (p. 4)
- **Refrains:** Repeated lines or phrases that divide stanzas, provide insight into a psalm's meaning, and emphasize the author's point. Example: Psalm 49 - "People, despite their wealth, do not endure. They are like the beasts that perish." and "People who have wealth, but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish." (p. 5, 7).
- In Psalm 49, a slight shift in the Hebrew word, 'yalin' (endure) to 'yavin' (understand), within the refrain, highlights that while all die, only the wicked die permanently. This key understanding is revealed by a close reading of the refrain. (p. 7, 8)
- **Contrast:** Juxtaposing dissimilar or opposite ideas, characters, or situations to highlight key themes. Example: the comparison between Manoah's wife and Hannah in Judges & 1 Samuel (p. 10).
- **Comparison:** Drawing parallels between different elements to develop an idea and emphasize its importance. Example: the use of the shepherd metaphor in Psalm 23 (p. 11).
- **Logic:** Analyzing the coherent development of ideas within the psalm.
- **Climax/Intensification:** The escalating nature of ideas within the text, with most Psalms often leading to a climactic moment at the end.
- **Structures:** Common patterns used in the composition of the Psalms.

- **Alternating (ABC, A'B'C')**: Like waves, where each successive element intensifies the previous one. Example: Psalm 110 (p. 12).
- **Concentric (ABC, CBA)**: A tide coming in and going out.
- **Chiastic (ABC, X, C'B'A')**: Like a rock dropped in water, with the central "X" as the critical moment. Example: 1 Kings 1-11 (p. 14)
- **Genus**: Deliberately ambiguous material that can connect to the surrounding text. Example: the shift from 3rd to 2nd person in Psalm 23 transitioning from shepherd metaphor to a feast metaphor. (p. 15)
- **Generalization and Particularization**: Moving from broad statements to specific details or examples. Example: Psalm 103 - praising the Lord generally, then detailing his specific benefits (p. 16).
- **Preparation and Foreshadowing**: Introduction of ideas and themes that are developed later in the text. Example: the initial petition in Psalm 51 that is expanded on later in the Psalm. (p. 16)
- **Summarization**: A concluding restatement of a key idea.
- **Interrogation**: Posing questions and then answering them. Example: Psalm 15. (p. 16)
- **Inclusio**: Beginning and ending a section or poem with similar language or ideas. Example: Psalm 8. (p. 16)
- **Intercalation**: Interrupting a narrative flow to insert new information. Example: in the book of Judges, between the story of the judges themselves and the introduction of Samuel the prophet, are stories about the failure of the priesthood. (p. 17)
- **Intertextuality**: Making allusions to other texts and traditions. Example: Psalm 8 and Genesis 1. (p. 20)
- **Scenic Depiction**: Using settings or imagery to enhance the message. Example: David's flight from Absalom in 1 Samuel 15-16, where the positioning of characters is highly symbolic. (p. 20)
- **Naming**: Using significant names of God to convey deeper meaning. Example: Psalm 91. (p. 21)

**1. Emphasis on the “How” Before the “What”:**

- Waltke emphasizes that understanding the poetic devices (the “how”) is crucial for discerning the intended meaning (the “what”) of the text.
- He gives the example of how his understanding of the chiastic structure of 1 Kings 1-11 helped him see that the turning point for Solomon was not his marriage to foreign women but rather when he stopped putting the temple first and built his own palace first. (p. 15)

- 1. The Importance of a Holistic Approach to Scripture:** Waltke stresses that looking at the techniques the poets use allows the reader to engage more deeply with the text. He stresses the importance of not only knowing *what* is said but *how* the message was conveyed using the artistic and literary techniques of the author.

**Conclusion:** This lecture provides a detailed framework for approaching the Psalms with greater sensitivity to their poetic artistry. Dr. Waltke urges his students to move beyond simplistic interpretations and to embrace a more rigorous analysis of the literary techniques employed by the psalmists. This approach, he argues, will unlock deeper meaning and appreciation for the inspired text.

## 4. Psalms Study Guide: Session 23, Rhetorical Approach, Poetic Techniques

### Poetics and Psalms: A Study Guide

#### Short Answer Quiz

1. What are the three approaches to interpreting the Psalms that were previously discussed before the focus on poetics?
2. How does rhetorical criticism differ from form criticism according to Phyllis Tribble?
3. What is the relationship between a poem, a stanza, and a strophe?
4. According to the lecture, what are the main focuses of literary studies since the 1980s?
5. What is a "leitwort," and what is its significance in interpreting a text?
6. How does the use of refrains contribute to the meaning of a psalm, as illustrated in Psalms 42 and 43?
7. In Psalm 49, what is the significance of the slight change in the refrain between verses 12 and 20 in the Hebrew text?
8. Name and briefly explain the three patterns of structure discussed for understanding the composition of psalms.
9. What is meant by the term "intercalation" in the context of biblical literature?
10. Provide an example of scenic depiction from either Shakespeare or the Bible as explained in the lecture.

#### Answer Key for Quiz

1. The three approaches to interpreting the Psalms previously discussed are the spiritual approach, the historical approach, and the form criticism approach (grouping psalms by common form like praise, lament, etc.).
2. Form criticism studies the typical and groups literature according to genre, while rhetorical criticism studies the particular within the typical, focusing on the unique construction of a specific text.

3. A poem is the overall composition, stanzas are the larger sections of the poem, and strophes are the smaller units within those stanzas.
4. Literary studies since the 1980s have focused on viewing literature holistically, emphasizing how the material is put together rather than just breaking it down into its component parts using source criticism.
5. A "leitwort" is a keyword that is meaningfully repeated within a text. It acts as a leading word that guides the literature, revealing, clarifying, or emphasizing the meaning of the text.
6. Refrains, through repetition, can provide insight into the meaning of a psalm. In Psalms 42 and 43, the refrain of putting hope in God despite distress is key to understanding the psalmist's struggle and his healing process.
7. The slight change in the Hebrew of the refrain in Psalm 49 moves from describing all people as unable to endure (yalin) to focusing specifically on the fool as one who does not understand (yavin) and dies permanently, revealing that death is not the same for everyone.
8. The three patterns of structure are alternating (ABC, A'B'C'), like waves coming in, concentric (ABC, CBA), like a tide going in and out, and chiasmic (ABC, X, C'B'A'), like the ripples from a rock thrown into a pond with the pivotal point at X.
9. Intercalation is the insertion of new, seemingly unrelated material into a text. This often provides deeper insight into the overall meaning, as seen in Judges with its digressions on the priesthood.
10. Shakespeare's *Henry IV* uses a blood-red sun and howling wind to set the scene for an upcoming battle, while 1 Samuel 15-16 places David's visitors (Hushai, Ziba, and Shimei) on a mountain slope to suggest who is closest to God.

### Essay Questions

1. Analyze the concept of "poetics" as presented in the lecture. How does understanding poetic techniques enhance the interpretation of the Psalms? Use examples from the provided text.
2. Compare and contrast the role of keywords and refrains in Psalm 49 and other psalms mentioned by Waltke to illuminate how repetition helps communicate the message.

3. Discuss the significance of recognizing structural patterns such as alternating, concentric, and chiasmic parallelism in the Psalms. Provide specific examples from the lecture and explain how these patterns contribute to the overall meaning.
4. Evaluate the lecture's claim that "you do not know what a text means until you know how it means." How does this statement relate to the study of biblical poetics, and what practical implications does it have for Bible interpretation?
5. Explain Waltke's approach to identifying a "genus" within a biblical text, and discuss the significance of identifying these transitional elements. Provide examples from the text to support your explanation.



## Glossary of Key Terms

**Form Criticism:** A method of biblical study that groups texts based on shared characteristics or genres.

**Rhetorical Criticism:** A method of biblical study that focuses on the unique composition and techniques used by an author to communicate a message within a particular text.

**Poetics:** The study of literary devices and techniques employed by an author to construct a composition. It aims to describe the building blocks of literature and the rules governing their use, much like linguistics does for language.

**Stanza:** A group of lines in a poem, typically separated by a space; a larger division of the poem.

**Strophe:** A smaller unit within a stanza of a poem, often a subsection of the larger division.

**Leitwort:** A leading word, or keyword, that is repeated meaningfully within a text.

**Refrain:** A line or phrase that is repeated at regular intervals within a poem or song, providing emphasis and structure.

**Merism:** A figure of speech that expresses totality by listing extremes.

**Mashal:** The Hebrew word for "proverb," which is a comparison.

**Alternating Pattern:** A structural pattern in which elements are arranged in a sequence such as ABC, A'B'C', often with an intensification between the pairs.

**Concentric Pattern:** A structural pattern in which elements are arranged in a sequence such as ABC, CBA, forming a mirrored structure.

**Chiastic Pattern:** A structural pattern in which elements are arranged in a sequence such as ABC, X, C'B'A', with a pivot at X.

**Genus:** A transitional element that can belong to either the preceding or the following section, bridging different parts of a text.

**Intercalation:** The insertion of new material into an existing text that provides context or deeper insight.

**Intertextuality:** The relation of one text to another. This may include allusions, quotations, or echoing other sources. **Scenic Depiction:** The use of imagery, setting, and atmosphere to create a vivid scene in literature.

## 5. FAQ on Themes from Dr. Bruce Waltke's Psalms, Session 23, Rhetorical Approach, Poetic Techniques

### FAQ on Poetic Techniques in the Psalms

1. **What is the difference between form criticism and rhetorical criticism when studying the Psalms?**
2. Form criticism focuses on grouping Psalms by genre (e.g., praise, lament) and identifying typical features within those categories, while rhetorical criticism examines the unique construction of an individual Psalm. Rhetorical criticism looks at the specific poetic techniques a poet uses, not just the common features within a genre. It's about seeing how the poet put the individual piece together to convey their message.
3. **What are stanzas and strophes in the context of poetry in the Psalms?**
4. A poem in the Psalms is composed of larger sections called *stanzas*, each with a particular theme or development of thought. Within stanzas, there are smaller units called *strophes*, which are like the building blocks of a stanza. Poetics analyzes how strophes are arranged into stanzas, and how stanzas together form the whole poem. It explores how these structural parts work together to convey a message.
5. **What is a 'keyword' or *leitwort* and how does it contribute to understanding a Psalm?**
6. A *leitwort* is a keyword or root that is meaningfully repeated within a text (or series of texts). The repetition of a keyword is intentional and should be noticed by the reader, as it helps clarify or emphasize the central theme of the Psalm. By attending to these recurring words, the reader gains a deeper understanding of the message the poet is trying to communicate. For example, in Psalm 2, the recurring keywords are “Lord” and “King”.
7. **What is a 'refrain' and how does it function in the Psalms?**

8. A refrain is a repeated line or phrase within a poem, often appearing at the end of stanzas. Refrains function to reinforce a central idea and can often serve as a key to interpreting the meaning of the whole Psalm. They provide continuity while allowing for variations in the surrounding verses. In Psalm 49, the repeated refrain "People, despite their wealth, do not endure. They are like the beasts that perish." underscores the comparison between humans and animals, which is a main theme of the psalm.
9. **Why is identifying contrasts and comparisons important when reading the Psalms?**
10. Poets frequently use contrasts (juxtaposing opposite or dissimilar ideas) and comparisons (highlighting similarities between different subjects) as a method to enhance meaning. They reveal the poet's point of view by juxtaposing ideas and subjects that show contrasting situations and consequences. By spotting these techniques, you gain insight into the main themes and the moral implications of the Psalm, how the writer uses opposites to further underscore the main point. For example, in the Psalms we see how the righteous and wicked are constantly being contrasted in terms of outcome and perspective.
11. **What are the common structural patterns found in Psalms, and how do they influence interpretation?**
12. The most common patterns are alternating (ABC, A'B'C'), concentric (ABC, CBA), and chiasmic (ABC, X, C'B'A'). Alternating patterns, like waves, build in intensity. Concentric patterns resemble tides going in and out. Chiasmic patterns ripple out from a central point, with the beginning and ending corresponding to one another. Understanding these patterns allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the text, highlighting how the poet organized their thoughts for a particular effect.
13. **What are some other literary devices used by Psalmists, beyond keywords, refrains, structure, and contrast?**

14. Psalmists employ a variety of additional literary devices, including *genus*, which act as a transition between sections by looking both backwards and forwards; generalization and particularization, offering broad statements followed by specifics; foreshadowing and preparation, when introductory statements and main petitions work together; summarizations, providing concluding assessments; interrogations using questions to prompt insight; inclusios, where ideas are stated at the beginning and end; intercalation, where unrelated material is inserted; intertextuality where other literary works are alluded to; and scenic depiction, where the historical or natural scene plays a part in conveying the message.
15. **What does it mean to say, "You do not know what a text means until you know how it means?"**
16. This emphasizes that understanding the meaning of a text is not just about identifying its literal content, but also about recognizing how the author uses language and poetic techniques to shape meaning. You must pay attention to how the text is crafted, its structure, literary devices, and poetic style. Only when you understand *how* the text conveys its message can you begin to fully grasp *what* the message is. In essence, form and structure are essential to comprehending the content.