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Ted Hildebrandt

Dr. Fred Putnam, Introduction to Psalms Lecture 1 of 4

A. Introduction [00:07-01:09]

Dr. Fred Putnam will be presenting four lectures on the book of Psalms. Dr Putnam is a graduate of Philadelphia College of the Bible with a Master's from Biblical Theological Seminary and a PhD from the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, later known as the Annenberg Research Institute. His latest publication is *A New Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* published by the University of Sheffield in 2010. He's also published a *Cumulative Index to the Grammar and Syntax of Biblical Hebrew* with Eisenbrauns in 1996. He has taught for over two decades at Biblical Theological Seminary and is currently on the graduate faculty of Philadelphia Biblical University. It is our privilege to have Dr. Fred Putnam present for lectures on the book of Psalms. Dr Putnam.

B. Titles for the Book of Psalms [01:11-2:16]

Hello. Welcome to our library. My name is Fred Putnam. I'm a glad to be here with you for this course on the book of Psalms. I've been teaching Hebrew and Old Testament for over 20 years and I'm looking forward to spending these couple of hours together with you. When we talk about the book of Psalms, what are we really discussing? Well, it has different names. We think of it as the *Psalter* perhaps, which

actually comes from its Greek title from the Septuagint a translation made about 250 years before Christ. But there's another title. In Hebrew *Tehillim*, means "praises." And so both of those Psalms or Psalterion, which means, poems that are sung to the music of psalter or a sort of small harp, is how the Greeks interpreted it; and praises is how the rabbi's thought of it. Those two titles give us a rough idea of what we have.

C. Various Numberings of Psalms and Verse variations [02:16-03:57]

There are about 150 poems written over a period of several hundred years and that are made up of various types of poetry. I say about 150, because in some people's opinions, some of the poems such as Psalms 9 and 10 or Psalms 42 and 43 really belong together. They're really a single poem. They're not separate songs.

If we look at other translations such as the Latin Vulgate or the Greek Septuagint, we find that they divide the Psalms differently as well. So it's important to know when you're looking at a commentary or if you're surfing the web, to know if somebody is talking about the Vulgate. For example, if you're reading the Catholic encyclopedia, the Psalm numbers might be different. So they're talking about a verse and you think that's not what this says. You're right, it's not what the verse that you're looking at if you're looking at a Protestant Bible. So be aware of your sources and how they're thinking about the Psalms.

Another aspect of that, just in terms of reference works is that in the Hebrew text, the title, now this isn't the title that some translations give like a prayer for help and praise for its answer or something like that, but the title that says "a Maskil of David" or by "the sons of Korah" or something like that, that are in most English translations is actually verse one. So all the verse numbers are one off from their English numbering. So again, if you're looking at a commentary or some other reference work, it's important to know, are they talking about the English first verses or the Hebrew verses, because otherwise it can be rather frustrating, as you can imagine.

D. Types of Psalms [03:58-07:35]

Now, what do we have in these poems? Well, although we may think of the Psalter as a hymn book or a book of prayers, actually only about 90 out of 150 are our prayers addressed to God. The other 60 are prayers about the Lord, but they don't really address him. Sometimes there are about five or six where the first 10 verses will be about God, and then the very last verse "and you will Lord confirm the work of our hands" or something like that. Mostly, but about 60% of the Psalter, is made up of prayers. The other 40% are reflections or meditations or exhortations to us to praise the Lord, to worship him, but are not actually prayers in the sense that they're addressed to him.

There are three general types. We're going to talk about this a bit later, in more detail, but there are songs that we could say are happy psalms of worship and praise like Psalm 29,

Ascribed to the Lord, the sons of the mighty,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength,
ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.

It's a psalm of praise. Or Psalm 93 or 96 or 98, which is actually what "Joy to the World" is based on. Psalm 100, which maybe you have sung in churches as Old One Hundredth. "All people that on earth do dwell, sing unto the Lord with cheerful voice." There are about, oh, probably a little over a third of the Psalms are like that.

Then there are a bunch of songs that we could think of as kind of sad poems, that is, sad in the sense that they start out with the Psalmist in a lot of trouble and asking God to save him whether from enemies or sickness or some other kind of problem. So that Psalm 10, for example, says,

"Why do you stand far off?
Why do hide yourself in times of trouble?
In pride, the wicked pursues the afflicted,
let them be caught in their plot."

And so the Psalmist says, "Lord, I'm in trouble. Help me." And then he usually argues

with the Lord a little bit, says, "here's why you should help me," and then at the end, he comes around and says, "thank you that you have saved me and I will pay the vows that I promised and I'll testify to your goodness." Probably a third of the Psalter is like that. About 50 to 55 of the psalms or the poems might be considered these sad or prayerful poems.

Then there's another fairly large group that are neither happy nor sad, but they're just someone thinking about something. So Psalm 1, for example, a very familiar Psalm, is not really calling on people to worship. It's not really a plea for help. It's about the Lord. It's not addressed to him. Instead, it seems to be a poet musing on, thinking about, the relationship between, the righteous and the wicked and what makes the difference between them. So he writes a poem in order to explore that idea. There are quite a few poems like that. Psalm 2 is sort of the same thing. Psalm 19 is a very famous poem about the word of God and Psalm 119 is like that as well. Psalm 121 also, which we'll look at in a bit. So we have sort of these reflective or meditative or instructional maybe is how we might want to think of them in that way.

E. Psalter as a Book/Collection [07:36-08:23]

Now when we look at the Psalter, it's pretty, tempting I think in our culture to look at the chapter divisions that is the psalms themselves as a self-contained contained independent units. But when we look at the whole Psalter and look at the titles of the songs that I referred to a minute ago, when we look at the types of songs that there are, we begin to see patterns that show that the Psalter was actually conceived as a book and written as a book. It was not broken up into just 150 poems that somebody found and stuck together and said, "okay, we'll keep these and make that into our Psalter".

F. Five Books of the Psalter 08:24-08:57]

Now traditionally the Psalter's divided into five books. Psalms 1 to 41, Psalms 42 to 72, 73 to 89, 90 to 106 and 107 to 150. Almost any translation that you look at, we'll say before, say Psalm 43, it will say Book 2. That's what they're referring to. Those

divisions go back, we don't know how far back. They're referred to by the rabbis in the time of Christ and even before the time of Christ. So those are very old divisions.

G. Psalm Titles [09:00-11:03]

When we look at those divisions, we find out that they themselves are not haphazard. So that for example, in Book 1 out of 41 psalms, 38 of them, the titles are ascribed to David. Now let me just back up a minute and talk about that word "ascribed." In many of the translations, you'll see the phrase "A Psalm of David," "A psalm of the sons of Korah," or "of Aton" or "Solomon" or someone else or "the prayer of Moses." We don't really know if that was originally thought of as meaning "written by" in the sense that we might say T. S. Eliot wrote *The Wasteland* or if it means "in the style of David" or "dedicated to David" or "commissioned by David" or "authorized by" him or "authored by" him. It's the preposition that's used there. In Hebrew it can be used, it's by far the most common preposition in the Bible, and it can be used in many, many different ways. It's just like if you ever have the opportunity to look up the word "to" (to) in the an English dictionary, especially if you look it up in something like the Oxford English Dictionary, the entry goes on for pages and pages and pages because the word "to" can mean so many things in English. Now we use it without thinking about what all those possibilities. We just talk, speak the language. In the same way, the preposition that is translated "a Psalm of David," the "of" is this translation that the preposition that's usually translated "to" or "for." The preposition in Hebrew is usually translated "to" or "for" in our English Bibles. But in order to make sense out of what this means, a Psalm to David, a Psalm for David, by or whatever else. In light of the tradition, the old tradition, that this preposition is actually being used to show authorship.

H. Book Arrangement [11:04-19:25]

We can look at these psalm titles and get some idea for how the book was actually arranged because it's almost certain that it wasn't arranged by the original authors since some of the psalms come from well into the time of the United Monarchy under David

and Solomon. Some of them come from after the exile, hundreds of years later. So the book must have been put together gradually over a period of time. In fact, we have a very strong clue to that at the end of Psalm 72, verse 20, it says, "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended," which seems to indicate that they thought they'd gotten them all, although in fact a whole bunch of psalms later show up that say "a song of David." So it shows that the process of accumulating it took place over probably quite a lengthy period of time. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls help us see that because we look at the manuscripts of the book of Psalms and some of the manuscripts have the songs in the same way. Well, first of all, there are no manuscripts that have the whole Psalter. It's little pieces that we can find but where we can identify which psalms they are and what verses of which psalms. We find that the order sometimes is the same and sometimes is not the same as the Psalter that we have. Generally speaking, the earlier in the Psalter the manuscripts are, that is, Psalms 1 through, say 72, the first couple of books especially, the more consistent their arrangement is. As we get later in the Psalter the arrangements are different. Of course. I do have to say, we don't really know that those were scrolls of the Psalter. We can't know that unless we find an entire scroll. They may have just been like a hymnbook, for example. It would be illegitimate to pick up a hymnal in any of our churches and say, "Oh, these are all the Christian hymns of the 20th century." Of course not, somebody went through, chose them, chose what order to put them in, how to arrange them, et cetera. But it's a selection and maybe that's what these scrolls, even from the Dead Sea caves represent. It's very, unclear. I know that probably seems like kind of the scholars way of not committing themselves to anything, but frankly, I'd rather be cautious than to jump out and just say, this is the way it is because we really don't know that that was the function of those of those scrolls.

Well, when we look at the books, these five books of the Psalter, we find that, out of the first 72 psalms, 55 of them are ascribed to David. They say this "of David" or "to David" or "for David" or whatever. But in the next two books, Psalm 73 to 106, only three Psalms are ascribed to David. In the last book, 107 to 150, there's a group of three

Psalms 108 to 110. and then at the end of the book, 138 to 145 that are also ascribed to David. So there are two little collections of Davidic Psalms in the last book. But basically, the Davidic Psalms 55 out of the 73 Psalms that are assigned to David, are found in the first two books, which suggests that those, and since they end with the phrase that "the prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" at the end of the Psalm 72 suggest, that that was a collection unto itself. Then the other songs were collected sometime later.

On the other hand, we look at books two and three, and between Psalm 43 and 89, 13 of those are written by the sons of Korah, one of the choir leaders that we read about in the book of 1 Chronicles, which again, they're a little collection. They all come in a row or maybe there's one the Psalm in the middle that interrupts them, but as a rule, there's a group of psalms and they'll all start "the sons of Korah," "the sons of Korah," "the sons of Korah," which shows that somebody sat down and decided that these songs belong together because of this title.

Then we find the same thing in Book 3 and other big chunk is that they are written by Asaph, a Psalm of Asaph. So that actually, in that third book, the Sons of Korah and Asaph, 15 out of 17 psalms whereas David only writes one. Whereas he wrote the bulk of the first couple of books.

We also find that the Psalter is shaped by author in that there are only, three anonymous Psalms in the first book. That is, they're called orphan Psalms because they don't have a title that says "a Psalm of David" or something like that. They're called orphans. There are three. They're Psalm 1, Psalm 2, and Psalm 33. There are four orphan Psalms in Book 2. There are none in Book Three. Then in books four and five, there are 42 orphan songs. It's 14 in Book 4, 28 in Book 5. So we find that Psalms with authors are in the beginning and songs without authors become more common toward the end.

Another interesting aspect of the arrangement of the Psalter, is that if we go through and talk about happy or sad Psalms, let's say, or prayers and praises or something like that, we find that in the first three books, the majority of the psalms, over 50 of them,

are these petition prayers: God help us, we're in trouble, God rescue us, Lord, please save me from my enemies. Only a few, about 20 or so are happy or songs of praise like Psalm 29, for instance. But in the last two books we find that 40, that is two thirds of the psalms are happy ones, psalms of praise and worship, confidence and adoration. Only about 15 of them are these psalms that are asking God for help. So that there's a movement in the Psalter as a whole from prayers asking the Lord to save the poet to songs of praise for God's works of creation and of salvation or redemption or victory. What's even more striking is that that same movement from desperation to confidence or from a prayer to praise is found in almost all of the psalms that are prayers. So that, for example, Psalm 18, which begins by saying, "I love you Lord my strength," and we'll look at that in a minute, goes on quickly to say "the cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of ungodliness terrified me, the chords of Sheol surrounded me" and the Psalmist is in really bad trouble. But at the end of the Psalm, he says,

"the Lord lives, blessed be my rock,
exalted be the God of my salvation,
the God who executes vengeance for me
and subdues people under me."

The end of the Psalm, David has flip-flopped flopped completely from this desperation that we find in verses four through six or even later when he talks about "the dogs who are surrounding me" and the bulls who were threatening me, to his confidence in the Lord and what the Lord has done or will do or is doing for him. So, we have a very, definite motion in these Psalms and in the Psalter as a whole. Now that's not to say there are never any exceptions. Of course, there are. It's not quite that tightly organized, but it certainly does seem that it was all organized very specifically. I'm going to come back to some conclusions that we can draw about that.

I. How was the Psalter used? [19:27-19:53]

But let me ask another question. How was the Psalter actually used in ancient Israel? How did it function in biblical times? You'll hear it called the "Prayer Book of

Israel." You'll hear it called the "Hymnal of Israel" or the "Hymnal of the Temple" or the "Prayer Book of the Tabernacle" or Temple or something like that. But in fact, although there are a number of biblical passages that talk about people shouting or singing or chanting.

J. On the Nature of "Singing" or "Chanting" [19:54-22:35]

By the way, this is just a free aside, the word is translated "song" and "sing" the noun and the verb translated "song" and "sing", but we don't really know if they mean song or singing the way we think of them. It's almost certain that it did not sound like Mozart, and may have sounded much more like a Gregorian chant. Or it may not have sounded like anything like that at all. Maybe we really do need to go to the Middle East and listened to them playing their bouzoukis and other instruments and listen to their style of music. Or probably, I think that's even a little unlikely since we're talking about a distance of 2,500 to 3000 years, we really don't know what the performance would have sounded like. And when we think of the instruments, cymbals, different kinds of trumpets and horns, metal and animal horns and some sort of stringed instruments and some indications perhaps that we have people singing at least some of the song titles are interpreted as singing at an octave, so singing sort of in unison. We really don't know what those songs would have been like. So sometimes I think that it would be much more helpful to our thinking about it if we're trying to, in reading the Bible, to enter into the world that the Bible was part of, maybe to use a word like "chant" that might be much more, still misleading, probably, but, maybe not as misleading as "singing."

So, we read in a number of places in the Bible about people playing these instruments and singing, in connection with the temple. So, when Hannah brings Samuel and dedicates him, she stands up and does she sing the song, or does she chant it that we find in 1 Samuel chapter two. Or when the ark of the covenant is brought into Jerusalem, described in 2 Samuel 6. David is leaping and dancing in front of it and there are musicians playing. We would assume if they're playing and dancing, perhaps there's some sort of chanting going along. There definitely is the days of Nehemiah, which you

remember is 500 years after David. So big gap of time. But in the days of Nehemiah, there is at the dedication of the wall, two choir's get up and walk around the wall along with it says "the instruments of David." Whether those instruments like a Stradivarius had survived for so many hundreds of years or whether they just mean instruments as designed by David or something like that is again, one of those questions that it would be nice to know the answer to, but it's kind of a difficult for us to know that exactly.

K. Usage of the Psalter in 1 Chronicles 16 [22:36-27:50]

We do have the one passage in the Bible that specifically tells us how the book of Psalms or how some psalms were used. It's in 1 Chronicles 16. 1 Chronicles 16 is the story that takes place, after 2 Samuel 6 verse 19. So 2 Samuel 6 verse 19 is the end of David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem and setting it up in a tent. And then the story kind of ended. Then he has the incident with Michal who made fun of him for dancing. He told her that he would not act as a husband toward her anymore. Then the story ends. But here in 1 Chronicles 16, the chronicler is much more interested in worship than the author of Samuel. So he goes into great detail about the three choirs and the choir directors and the instrumentalists, and who was playing what. It talks at great length, chapters and chapters actually, with lists of names and who was in the choir and whose son they were and whose grandson they were. But in the middle of that, in chapter 16 starting in verse eight we have a song that David told them to sing. It says. Then verse seven says, "then on that day, David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to Yahweh. Then begins a poem that goes down through verse 36. It begins,

Oh give thanks to Yahweh,
call upon his name.
Make known as deeds
among the peoples.

And you might think, well that sounds familiar. It should sound familiar because the next 15 verses are the first 15 verses of Psalm 105. They're identical. Then when we get to

verse 23 and Psalm 105 stops. Actually, he doesn't go to the end of Psalm 105, he just stops sort of in the middle. There are quite a few more verses to go. Starting in verse 23 he quotes Psalm 96 verses one through the first half of verse 13. Again, it doesn't go quite to the end. He just stopped we don't know why he stops there, but he just goes to that far. And then down in verse 34, verse 34 is the first verse of Psalm 106 and verse 35 is the last two verses of Psalm 106. Now is that the chronicler's way of saying I'm not going to write out the whole thing, you can go look it up, I'm just going to tell you they sang the first and last verse. You're supposed to understand they sang the whole thing or did they really just sing the first and the last verses. We don't really know. It's kind of intriguing though, but we don't really know. Then verse 36 is the same as Psalm 72.18.

So that what's presented in the book of Chronicles as a single poem is actually, if you'll forgive the word, a pastiche made up of pieces of a bunch of different selections from the book of Psalms. That's the only evidence that we have of how the Psalms themselves were used in Israel's worship. They were sung as assigned by David to Asaph and his brothers who were the other two main choir leaders, of the Levitical choirs in the worship that took place at the tent in Jerusalem.

Now, there are many other poems in the Bible besides those found in the book of Psalms. So, for example, we find in Genesis 49, Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons and their descendants, or Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea after they crossed the sea with Moses. Numbers 22 to 24, you have four different poems that are the prophecies of Balaam son of Beor. Deuteronomy 32 and 33 and it stretches through the whole Bible in fact. So that roughly a third of the scripture Old and New Testament together is poetry, which I'll talk about in our second lecture together.

But those are all written in relationship to the story that they're embedded in. So that is, Jacob's blessing on his son's in Genesis 49 is not taken from a psalm. Moses songs about Israel, Deuteronomy 32 and 33, are not taken from the book of Psalms. They're apparently written for that occasion or composed for that occasion and written down, written down later. So we have to say that although it will be very common in study

Bibles and commentaries to read that this song was used for this purpose and with this sort of a ceremony at the temple, we don't really know. The evidence that we have here is certainly that these songs were used, Psalms 105, 96 and 106 and perhaps 72 were used as hymns of celebration. But beyond that we don't really know.

L. Penitential Psalms [27:51-29:05]

Sometimes you'll read people talk about, for example, the penitential songs. There are seven of those. Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, Psalm 51, Psalm 102. Psalm 130, and Psalm 143. Well, we don't really know. Again, I'm sorry if I sound like I'm saying we don't really know, but that's simply the truth. People identify them and say, these are the penitential Psalms, but nobody even knows who first said that about them. Some people say Augustine was the first person. Some people say, Cassia Doris, some people say no, it was a rabbinic tradition. But there's not much evidence for that. So when we read them we can say, 'Oh yeah, I can see why these would be called penitential Psalms. I mean 32 and 51 are certainly very familiar songs after David's sin with Bathsheba. But exactly, whether or not they were ever conceived of as a group is difficult to know. That is when they were first being written, did somebody say, I'm going to write another penitential Psalm or were they just the same theme shows up more than once, which we find in the Psalter as a whole that themes keep submerging and resurfacing as we read through the songs. The same ideas keep coming up.

M. Pilgrim or Ascent Psalms [29:05-31:00]

Some people call Psalms 120 to 134 a Pilgrim Psalms or their translation in the title is usually "a song of Ascent." Well, the tricky part there is that the word that's translated "to ascend" is also used for the steps of a dial. Well, not a sun, but a sun step so that as the sun rises in the sky, the shadow changes from step to step. You remember when Hezekiah was sick and the Lord told him he was going to die and he prayed and the Lord sent him back and sent Isaiah back and said, the Lord is going to heal you. What sign do you want that he's really going to do this? Hezekiah asked that the sun would go

back six steps. Well, that's what he's talking about is a dial like that, that the sun, as the sun went back in the sky, the shadow would go up the dial. Well, maybe these Psalms 120 to 134 are really written to be read or chanted or used at different periods of the day. So there were 15 of them and you have 15 steps on a dial or something like that. Or maybe it means stairs and some people think it means they would have sung one when they stepped on the first step to go up to the temple and then the next one for the next step and 122 for the third step, et cetera. So it's a very interesting, phenomenon that somebody comes up with an idea, Oh, this is how these were used. Then suddenly that becomes our understanding, Oh, that is how they were used and we simply go on from there, assuming that that's the way they're to be interpreted. No evidence against it. But the evidence for it is also rather mixed. So when we read statements like these are the songs that were used for this purpose, we really have to take that with a pretty big grain of salt and go back and study the text of the psalm and then study even the historical books to see, is there really much evidence for that? And how can we be sure of that?

N. Conclusions: Divine Name and Hallelujah Psalms [31:01-32:43]

Let me suggest a couple of conclusions to this brief introduction. One is the Psalter is clearly an arranged book. Psalms are grouped by the name of the author, some psalms are grouped by title, and there are also psalms that are grouped by even whether which name for God is being used. So that the first, part of the Psalter, Psalms 1 to 41, and then 84 to 150 where the name Yahweh is the most frequent. Not only it's used most of the time, but in every psalm Yahweh is more common than the word Elohim for God. Then in Psalm 42 to 83, the word "God" is the word that is a most common. By the way, when I say "the Lord" or Yahweh that's the word that in your English Bible is translated all with small caps. So it's not the Lord with a capital L and then small lowercase "ord," but L and then the small cap "ORD," which is actually the Lord's name, Yahweh. So the Psalter's arranged that way as well. Or you have a Yahweh section and Elohim section, standard word for God all through the ancient Near East. And then another Yahweh section.

There are Hallelujah Psalms. The word hallelujah doesn't occur until Psalm 104. It occurs in three psalms 104, 105, and 106. Then it occurs in 111 through 117. Then it doesn't occur to 146 to 150. Pretty clearly it seems somebody who decided we're going to stick these Hallelujah Psalms together. And even the statement about "the prayers of David son of Jesse being ended" again shows us that somebody was collecting this and putting it together.

O. Conclusions on Arrangement [32:44-34:04]

Now that means that it's not haphazard. Let's think of it. Let's use a modern analogy. When a poet today or an author who writes, let's say essays or short stories, decides to publish a collection of poems or short stories or something else. They have to decide what order the poems are going to be arranged in. Are they going to be done chronologically? Which would be great if you're trying to write a dissertation because then you could study a poet's development and how he thinks about themes or she thinks about things. Are they going to be grouped by subject or they're going to be grouped alphabetically by first word, or they're going to be grouped by just how the poet felt the day that he or she wrote it? Or are they just going to take all 150 go to the top of the stairs and throw them down and wherever they land, that's where they put them in the book. Very few people would do the last, most people will come up with some reason for organizing the book. Sometimes it'll be topical as I said, or some other reason. But there will be some purpose behind the actual location of this poem at this point in the book. So it follows this and precedes this and that one in turn follows this one that we're looking at and precedes the next.

P. On Readings Psalms as a Book [34:05-39:30]

There's some perhaps even shape to the book as a whole. We've seen that that's true for the Psalter and that implies that just as when we're reading say a collection of A. E. Housman or Robert Frost, we want to look at the poems that Frost chose to put before and after the poem that we're reading because for some reason he put them together.

Sometimes we can discern the reason. Sometimes we can't, but there's some reason there. The same thing is true when we read the book of Psalms. I think that most of us are used to reading the Psalter as 150 individual poems and we just pick the one we want or need for the day or like the best and read that one and then close the book and go our way. It would be much more helpful for us to read a particular Psalm and then as we're thinking about that, to read the psalm that comes before it and to read the Psalm that comes after it. And to assume that at some point, maybe as long as almost 3000 years ago, somebody said, "No, Psalm 3 is going to come before Psalm 4 and Psalm 4 is going to become before Psalm 5, because I want Psalm 5 to come after Psalm 4. I don't want Psalm 6 there. I want Psalm 5 next to it.

And as I said earlier, sometimes we can see why they're arranged the way they are. So, for example, all the psalms that talk about, or most of the psalms that talk about the LORD Yahweh as King, occur between Psalm 91 and 100. Psalm 29 and there are a few exceptions to that but the bulk of them come in that little group of songs. So somebody said, "Yes, this is a theme and we're going to group these thematically. And in fact, if we were doing this in Hebrew, you see that there are lots more connections. It's not just the idea of the Lord is King, but those, there are about 12 psalms there that are very, very tightly interwoven thematically and all sorts of words and structures and things that we just can't go into because of time, that show that somebody gave a great deal of thought to putting this together which then suggests that we ought to give a great deal of thought to the way that we read it. And rather than see them as things that are simply compiled or assembled so that we can read them one by one to think of it as a book and to actually read it as a book. So we're asking how is this poem related to the poem before or after it admitting sometimes that's pretty hard to see. But sometimes it's very clear.

Another question we want to ask ourselves is, given the overall shape of the Psalter, so from these psalms that are basically psalms of prayer and petition and asking for help to psalms of praise and thanksgiving, how does this psalm that I'm reading fit into that overall shape? What does it contribute to that shape? Is it one of the psalms of

petition? Is it one of the psalms of praise? Is it a psalm of petition in the midst of a whole bunch of psalms of praise? Why would they put that there? Why would they interrupt one kind of psalm by just dropping a single poem in there? Those are the kinds of questions that make us think more carefully about what we're reading, make us consider it and ponder it. As I'll say at the end, I'll come back to this, at the very end of the fourth lecture, poetry is not meant to be read quickly. It's meant to entangle our minds with pictures and ideas to give us a different way of looking at some aspect of reality, to affect our thoughts.

Maybe the actual propositional content of the poem, that is, the statement "the Lord is King," for example, is not really the point. Maybe instead we're supposed to spend our time thinking about how does this poem explore the idea that the Lord is King and how does that help me then maybe purge my mind of unhelpful ways of thinking of the Lord is King by replacing them with biblical ways of reflecting and meditating on that so that the poems themselves begin to not just give us theological content or moral guidance, which are, I think probably the reasons most of us read the Bible most of the time. But instead, they begin to mold our thinking.

Paul talks about having our minds washed or cleansed by the word of God. He talks about, in Romans 12 that we don't let the world press us into its mold, but we, we rebrand new our minds. Well, how do we do that? We learn to think differently. We turn to learn to conceive of the world, ourselves and the world and our role in it and therefore the Lord himself in a different way.

Shape of Things is Ultimately Redemptive [39:31-40:31]

I think also that we, in reading the Psalter, when we read it as a book, we remember, it helps us remember, that the shape of things, let's say the universe, okay, the shape of things is ultimately redemptive. The Psalter by its very nature, by its very organization says to us that thousands of years ago, believers were already thinking this way. That these poems are put together to show us what it means for God to intervene on

behalf of his people, just as he intervenes individually. He also intervenes corporately in the life of Israel, in the work of his kingdom, in building the church. The shape of the Psalter itself reminds us of that.

Thinking about God in Different Ways [40:31-43:17]

I think there's one further implication and that has to do with what I said earlier about the kinds of poems that there are poems addressed to God, which are prayers, and poems that are basically about God or meditation's reflections or calls to praise. That is, that it's entirely appropriate for us to think about God and our relationship to him in different ways. Even the poems themselves show us that because there are different kinds. So sometimes our way of thinking about him is primarily by talking to him and in talking to him, we begin to think about this person to whom we're speaking and our relationship with him, which helps us to see our circumstances in light of who he is. That's what the prayers do.

The other way that we find that is ways of thinking about God either call for us to respond to him in a particular way by calling for praise or worship or submission or adoration by picking some little aspect of reality such as God communicates with us. What does the Psalm 19 say about that? He communicates with us through everything that's created. He communicates with us through his word. So that, Psalm 19 itself points us beyond itself. It's not simply a meditation on the word of God, but it's a meditation on the communication of God with his people and because it talks about God speaking through creation, "the heavens declare the glory of God" and so on, it speaks of God's communication universally with all beings. So that we find the poet has taken a basic idea. God communicates, okay. If you'll excuse the word, played with it, said, well, what does this really mean? Let's think about this. I'm not going to read Psalm 19. You can read it yourself. I think that you'll find that that is true.

So that the Psalms show us how to pray, and they show us how to think. So, when we read this book, we read it as a book written for our good, written poetically, from God for our blessing.

That was Dr. Fred Putnam's first lecture of four on the book of Psalms. [43:17]

Dr. Fred Putnam, Introduction to Psalms

Lecture 2 of 4

This is Dr. Fred Putnam presenting the second lecture of four on the book of Psalms. Dr. Fred Putnam.

Introduction [00:17-1:05]

In our first lecture, you probably noticed that I use the word "poem" a number of times interspersed with the word "psalm" and even spoke about biblical poets. That's a big question these days. Probably for the past 25 years there's been a debate going on about whether or not there really is poetry in the Bible. And because I think that has very large implications for the way that we read the Psalms as well as other poetic passages, I'd like to discuss that for a little bit and talk about what it is. First of all, what do we mean by poetry? And secondly, are the songs and other biblical passages really poetic. Then, finally, ask what are some implications of that?

What is Poetry? [1:06-6:15]

So the first question: what is poetry? Well, you can define it in about as many ways as you find writers. Robert Frost said, for example, "the good reader of a great poem knows the instant he has read it, that he has taken an immortal wound, that he will never recover." Emily Dickinson said, "you asked me what is a poem or how do I know that it's poetry? I answer that if I feel as if the top of my head had been removed or if I were so cold that no fire could warm me. I know that is poetry is there any other way?" There are lots of other definitions like that which, you notice, put the emphasis on the effect that the poem or the text has on the reader. That's kind of one approach to defining a poem. It makes me feel like it's a poem. Then it's a poem.

A second way of defining it is by asking about the author's intent. So we read some poems, I think more commonly in modern poetry probably since the time of the new criticism, T.S. Eliot, since the first world war. They just seem to be prose that has been rearranged, so it looks a little different on the page. In fact, there is a famous baseball announcer. I'm from new England, so I don't cheer for the Yankees. But the Red Socks are more my speed. But, Phil Rizutto was a play commentator for the New York Yankees. About 10 years ago, two men took the transcripts of his play by play commentary and snipped out little sections and rearranged it on the page and sold it as a book of poetry. Now, Phil Rizutto is not speaking in poetry. He had no intention of creating poems or being a poet or anything else. So the question is, does that make them a poem because somebody says this is a poem. Does that make it one? So the second point is, or the second approach is, it's in the intention of the author. When the author says, it's a poem, it is, no matter what we may think of it. First is, how does it affect us?

The third one, third way of defining poetry, which tries to be a little more neutral, and maybe, scientific, if that word should be applied to poetry. It says that, we recognize a poem because it uses rhetorical devices, we'll talk about that a bit later, that are used in all language, but poetry uses them a lot. So poetry is compressed language. It's language where every single word is chosen, not just for what it means, but for what it suggests, for how it sounds, for how it fits the other words, maybe for how it fits the mood of the poem. So that at every point in a poem, the author is choosing which word best fits in here.

In fact, a very interesting experiment is to go online. There's a website dedicated to the poetry of Wilfred Owen who was a World War I English poet. When you read his poetry, it sounds just like, it is prose kind of rearranged little bits and pieces of it sound kind of poetic, but it just sounds like paragraphs that have been sliced a little bit and diced. But when you look at the manuscripts and the website actually has photographs of his manuscripts, you realize that he wrote lines, crossed them out, and some lines he wrote three, four, five, six times. So that even though it sounds like he's just writing

prose, he's very clearly struggling to find just the right word to go in each spot. So when we look at the way that he's chosen the words and see how densely he has packed his writings, we realized, yes, these are poems in a way that even poetic sounding texts are not. So some people would say that, the end of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address where he says "with charity toward all, with malice toward none, with strength, with a determination to do the right as God gives us strength to see the right." You know, that. Or Winston Churchill, "nothing to offer but blood, sweat and tears" or "we will fight them on the beaches, we will fight them in the lanes. We'll fight them in the villages" is that poetry? Well, it certainly sounds very poetic, but they're not intending to write poems. The piece as a whole, the whole speech or the whole essay or whatever else it may be is not a poem. It's neither presented as one, nor is it written as one.

Poetic Function of Language – Jakobson [6:17-8:56]

So we find this interplay really of three factors. One is the effect on the reader. One is the intention of the author. And the third one is the way that the language itself is being used. In fact, Roman Jakobson, who is a famous literary critic and structural philosopher, talked about poetry or the poetic function of language, as he said, the seventh functioning. He identified seven basic functions of language to communicate, knowledge, to motivate someone to do something, to make someone feel a certain way, and so on. But he said the poetic function is the focus upon language for its own sake. So the poet chooses a word far more deliberately than someone who's writing a paper. I know we all choose words deliberately. That's true and Jakobson knew that as well. He's not talking in that he doesn't mean only poets choose words carefully. But in poetry, the significance of those choices goes up and becomes far more important. We have to remember the significance is not simply what the word means or what the phrase or sentence means, but what it connotes, that is, what are the other associations that come in because he used that word.

Let me give you a quick example. If someone invites you over to, or if you invite someone over to your house for dinner, you could say, "why don't you drop by our

place?" Or you could say, "Hey, come on over and visit our new castle." Or you could say, "well, it's kind of a hovel, but you're welcome anyway." Now, place, castle and hovel are three very different words with three very different associations. Probably when you say, if you use the word "castle," the person you're speaking to thinks, you're joking. They know you don't live in a place, that is built of stones, surrounded by a moat with dragons and dungeons and all that. But they get the idea that you've just bought maybe a big new house. You're proud of it, you're excited about it or you've changed something. But if you say, my hovel, well, that certainly does not have very positive overtones for most of us. We think, do I need to take some Sani wipes with me or do I need... Do I dare go there? Do I want to eat anything that this person serves? Whereas the term "place" is very innocuous. It doesn't really have many connotations at all. It's probably has the least associations, the fewest associations.

A Poem by Christina Rossetti – What are heavy [8L57-12:14]

So, poets are constantly choosing words for their association. Let me read you a very brief poem. This is written by a 19th century, Christian poet, Christina Rossetti. This is four lines. It is from a book called Sing Song, which is a book of children's poems that she wrote.

"What are heavy? Sea-sand and sorrow.

What our brief? Today and tomorrow.

What are frail? Spring blossoms and youth.

What are deep? The ocean and truth," by Christina Rossetti.

What has she done? Well, first of all, that doesn't really sound like a poem for children to me. Maybe for very thoughtful children or children whom you want to be thoughtful. She's done a number of things. First, each line has the same pattern of question and an answer. Each answer has the same pattern. Two different nouns. Each line starts with the same two words, "What are." There's a rhyme, sorrow/tomorrow, youth and truth. There's a meter "What are heavy? Sea-sand and sorrow. What are brief? Today and tomorrow," et cetera. There are these images. Notice this sea-sand is a physical thing. Truth is not.

Today, we know that today exists because we're here. We don't know anything about tomorrow. Spring blossoms are physical things. Youth is not. It's quality. The ocean also is a physical thing. Truth is not. She's put all these things together, the sound, what we call anaphora, which is when a number of lines start with the same word or expression, the repetition, in other words; the pattern, the question with a two-word answer, the meter, the image. She's put all those together to take a very simple idea and make it far more, make it resonate far more deeply than it would if she just said something like, you know, sorrow can be really difficult. Life is brief, actually, and kind of frail like youth. The ocean is really deep. I mean, or truth is really deep. Could she have said that? What's the difference? Well, the difference is that the patterning of the language, the compression of it, the pictures that she uses, change it from a series of pretty banal or even boring, trite statements into a way of thinking that affects us and communicates far more deeply than any four-point outline would have.

Prose and Poetry in Judges 4 and 5 [12:15-21:38]

Here's another example. We talk about the difference between poetry and prose. If we turn to the book of Judges, we find in Judges 4 and 5 a very familiar passage. Judges 4 is the story of Deborah and Barak and the war with a Sisera or Jabin who's the King of Canaan and Sisera his general. And in chapter five, we've have a poem about the same incident, a song that a Deborah and Barak chanted on that day. I'm just going to read a couple of verses from these, from these two chapters and see if you can tell which is the poem and which is the prose narrative. This is when a Sisera, the general, fled from the army and he's fleeing for his life and he sees a tent. He goes to a woman named Jael and asks her for help to protect him.

So, this is starting in Judges 4.18 "he turned aside to her into the tent." She covered him with some sort of cloth, a rug or a blanket or something, and he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink because I'm thirsty." So she opened a container of milk and gave him a drink. Then she covered him and he said to her, 'stand in the doorway of the tent and if anybody comes and asks you and say, "is anyone here?" You

shall say, "No." But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg, put a hammer in her hand, went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple and it went through into the ground for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died." That's one account.

Here's the other account. "Most blessed of women is Jael. The wife of Heber the Canaanite, most blessed is she of women in the tent. He asked for water. She gave him milk, in a magnificent bowl, she brought him curds. She stretched out her hand for the tent peg, and her right hand took the workman's hammer. Then she struck Sisera. She smashed his head, she shattered and she pierced his temple, between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay between her feet. He bowed, he fell, where he bowed there, he fell destroyed." They don't quite sound the same. They describe the same incident, but in two very different ways of even thinking about what's going on.

So we say, "well, what should we call them?" The people who argue about whether there's poetry in the Bible want to say. "Well, the second one is what we'll call that high language." If you're going to give it a term, high language is you may as well call it a poem because it certainly sounds a lot more poetic. At least it has some of the same characteristics of poetry. This compression, this use of images. In Hebrew, this repetition, which is very standard as we'll see, is very normal for biblical poetry.

Yet we might ask, which one is a more accurate picture of what went on? Surely the narrative tells us the real story. The poem just gives us an artistic interpretation of it. You know, I think that's sometimes one of our hesitations about thinking of the Bible as having poetry in it is because we hear the word poetic license or Shakespeare, who has his character saying several times "all poets are liars." And we have this sneaky suspicion that poets don't really deal in quite an upright way. We want the facts, like Dagnet. But when we look at them, if we were to read all of Judges 4 and all of Judges 5, and if we were to highlight the things that they have in common, they have hardly anything in common, that is, actual statements. Most of the things that they have in common are proper names and places and things like the article "the" or "an" or something in English translations. Very few of the incidents are described in the same way, or even described

in one and not completely left out of the other. So at the end of chapter five, the poem, we have this story about Sisera's mother wondering where her son is and her servant girl saying, "Oh, don't worry, he'll be back and he'll bring lots of booty and spoil with him. Then we'll get our choice of whatever we want." Well, that's not in chapter four at all. Did it really happen or did Deborah and Barak just make it up?

First of all, we say we can trust the Bible. So, our assumption is if they describe this, then the Lord revealed it to them or they captured a Canaanite and he said, "yeah, that's probably what's happening back at the palace right now," or something like that. However, they got their information, we can't know, but we say, "Okay, yes, this happened." But the differences between the two stories, which is the more accurate account? Which one tells us what really happened? The answer is that they both do. It's just that they look at the same events in two very different ways. This is not a fair comparison.

Okay, so please don't misinterpret what I'm going to say, but it's the difference between somebody writing a history textbook about the reformation and a student studying the textbook and the same student going to watch the movie, Martin Luther. Now the movie communicates some of the same things. Now, of course, I realize in a movie there's license, artistic license and see that's what makes us nervous about poetry too. It's the same thing, right? Where you can't really trust that. And you're right, everything in movie they even tell you some of this stuff is made up. It's fictitious. The conversations are made up. We can't know all that stuff. But what happens? The book, the textbook, communicates in one way. Its goal is to get across XYZ amount of information in as few words as possible so that the textbook publisher can make as much money per book as possible. Right? Short, but with all the information, so the student has what he or she needs to pass the test to graduate, to get a job, et cetera. The movie is made so that you will sit through the whole movie and not leave the theater and ask for your money back. You're going to want to watch it and you're going to enjoy it. You're going to walk away maybe even thinking about what went on. The textbook doesn't really

care about how you feel. The goal of the textbook is you need this information, I'm going to give it to you. The movie says, I'm going to entertain you.

Judges 4 says, "Okay, here's an account of the battle." The focus is on Barak's role and his obedience or his hesitation to obey and Jael's role. Here's a poem about the same battle. The focus in the poem is on the way that the tribes of Israel did or did not join the war. So there's a long catalog which goes back and forth and says "from Ephraim, they came down, Benjamin came down, Makir, Zebulun" but then goes on and says, "wait a second, Reuben didn't come. The tribes of Gilead stayed on the other side of the Jordan. Dan stayed where they were. Asher stayed where they were, but Zebulun and Naphtali risked their lives." There's no account of that. All you read in chapter 4 is the Barak went up Mount Tabor and all these men came after him. That's all it says.

In the same way in chapter five, we find this, that the stars themselves fought from heaven. Now, in chapter four, it does say, "the Lord routed Sisera and his chariots and his army with the edge of the sword before Barak and Sisera got down from his chair and fled away." But we don't know how he did it. But chapter five suggests that the brook, the Kishon, which is actually a fairly small stream, overflowed its banks, got the ground muddy, so that all these chariots, these 500 iron chariots, bogged down and were no longer an advantage, but actually a disadvantage to the Canaanites. If they were counting on using their chariots to overwhelm the foot soldiers of the Israelites, all of a sudden their advantage is gone. So, their strategy for the battle falls apart and Sisera, being a smart commander, looks out, knows its disaster and runs for his life. But we don't get that from the prose account.

So, the poet, the singers, the chanters, Deborah and Barak, give us a view of their experience of these events that's very different from the view of the author of the rest of the book of Judges. The two accounts complement each other. They work together and they work on us in different ways.

E. The Poet and the Making of a Golden World [21:39-22:53]

That points up another aspect of poetry and that is that a poem, this theory goes

back maybe 600 years to Sir Philip Sidney's defense of poetry. He said the poets actually create a golden world. You know, if you're a mathematician or an astronomer or a chemist, you don't have any choice. You have to work with what you've got. You can't make up stars or chemical or elements or other things. You've just got to work with what's there. But a poet, he gets to create a golden world. And the poem then invites the reader to enter this world that the poet has created. Now the poet knows that this is not the whole universe. It's a different separate world. So, the poems communicate truth, but they communicate truth in a different way than expository prose or logical sense of sets of propositions. So that no one poem ever tries to tell the whole truth.

Psalm 121 as Poetry [22:54-25:18]

You know, we read a psalm, and we'll look at this in a few minutes in quite a bit more detail, but if we read a psalm like Psalm 121, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from?" Et cetera. It will be easy to come away from that psalm thinking to ourselves, this promises that nothing bad ever happens to anyone who belongs to the Lord because that's what he says. "He who keeps you won't let your foot slip, he won't slumber. He's your shade on your right hand. He will protect you from all evil, he will keep your soul, guard your going out, you're coming in from now and forevermore." It sounds like nothing bad can possibly happen to anyone who belongs to the Lord.

But the poet has no intention of describing the whole of theology. He's only working in eight verses or 15 lines. So, he's not trying to encompass everything. Instead, he says, let's think about the relationship between the Lord and his people this way. Yes, all those other things exist. You're right. All those other things exist and there are lots of psalms that talk about the troubles that happens. I mean, there's no reason to ask for the Lord to rescue you from disaster if you're not in the middle of a disaster or the poet saying the water is that going to put to my neck, the waters would surely sincerely swept me away et cetera. Well, he's not concerned about those things.

What he wants to do is think about what does it mean to think of God as a Watchman? What does it mean to consider when we considered God's role in guarding

over and keeping us, what does that look like? And so that's what he meditates on. So we have to read pretty carefully. We have to then read looking for all the ways that the poet has compressed his poem or compressed his message and how he is packed that poem with meaning. But at the same time, we have to be careful not to assume that the poem tries to tell us everything about anything. Instead, it's playing with, as I said in the first lecture, some aspect of reality, the Lord, our relationship to him, the world, our relationship to others, something like that.

F. Features of Poetry [25:19-28:10]

So when we think about poetry in English, and I'm using English for a moment because, I've just found in teaching that if you start talking about poetry with biblical poems, everybody wants to argue with theology, they don't want to talk about the poetry. So I'd rather talk about the poem first and then we can talk about what it actually means. But think about English, we recognize a poem because it has rhythm, rhyme, by its layout on the page by its being broken up into stanzas. There may be sentences, but the sentences don't stop at the end of a line. They might keep on going. So all sorts of things.

In biblical poetry, there really isn't any rhythm. People argue about that all the time, but there really isn't rhythm in the way that we think of it in English. There really is no rhyme. Once or twice, there are places where you get words that end with the same sound, but that's very, very unusual to see any pattern to that. There really aren't stanzas. That is when you buy a book of poetry, there are blank lines in, so it might be eight lines and a blank line and eight lines and a blank line. I mean you'll see those in your English Bible, but that's the editor's decision. That's not done that way in the manuscripts that we have. That's just that either the translator and editor or in some cases the editors of the Hebrew Bible and the translators are just following that.

We find that in biblical poetry line sentences tend not to go from one line to the next and continue down the page. They tend to be, each line tends to be, its own clause or its own sentence. There are a few exceptions, but as a rule, that's true. So those are pretty big differences between English and biblical poetry.

But at the same time, there are basic similarities that are what makes them both poetic. That compression, the idea that the language, the words used, are very deliberately chosen. Almost we could talk about manipulated language. I don't like that word. It makes people nervous to think about the Bible being like that, but the words have been chosen and the language is being used in ways that are pretty striking.

You know, it's interesting that if you study Hebrew, all right, maybe I should say it this way, when you study Hebrew, you can think in terms of reading biblical stories and by the middle, by the end of your first semester in the middle of your first semester, you should be able to begin to work your way through story of Joseph or Abraham or something. But then you say to yourself, wow, this is so much fun. I think I'm going to read a psalm and you turn to the book of Psalms and it's like a different language. All of a sudden there are things that should be there, aren't there, and the things that are there don't quite look or sound like they're supposed to.

G. Poetry as the Other Use of Language [28:11-30:12]

Well, did you know that, if you open up the Encyclopedia Britannica to the article on poetry, it says, "poetry is the other use of language." And some critics even talk about poetic language as a language of its own, within the language of its culture. So there's the English language, then there's the language of English poetry. And by that they don't just mean the choice of words like using, "ere I saw you" or you know, words that sound archaic or old or "oft in the eve" sort of thing. They don't mean that. They mean the whole way of using the language of organizing thoughts, of organizing sentences, of putting pictures together is different than what we find in books of history or philosophy or organic chemistry. So, poetry really is a very different language because it's language that's self-consciously manipulated, that is self-conscious on the part of the poet.

We also find other things in both that are common to both so that what's called paronomasia we think of them as puns. But using words that sound alike, or using the sounds that reflect each other. English poetry does that a lot. That's what rhyme is, right?

Sorrow and tomorrow, youth in truth. Hebrew poetry does that as well. Of course, we lose that in translation. That's just the cost of translation. There's a lot of repetition in both. That's fairly common. Both of them are organized line by line. So even in English poetry where a sentence goes across the lines, the question is, why does the sentence go across the line? Why does it stop and start where it does? Both of them rely very heavily upon imagery.

H. How to Read a Poem [30:13-31:45]

In fact, there's a marvelous little book by a woman named Molly Peacock called *How to Read a Poem and Start a Poetry Circle, Portrait Reading Circle*. I'm not sure of the subtitle, she says that a very helpful key when we're struggling with a poem and trying to figure out what it's saying, she actually she says three different things at different points in her book. One time she says is to just go through the poem and list all the nouns. Write out a list of all the nouns in order through the poem. Do that for a psalm sometime. You'll be quite surprised, I think. Another thing is to list all the verbs in the poem because the verbs tell us what's happening. So, the nouns tell us what it's about. The verbs, tell us what's happening. List all the verbs. And again, sometimes in some poems the nouns will help some poems. The verbs will help. And then the third thing she does is go through a poem and list all the images that are in the poem. The important thing is to list them in order because that's the way the poet arranged them. So we think our way through the poem in terms of his or her nouns, his or her verbs, his or her images, because that's how the connection goes. That's how the logic of the poem actually works. Because that's what we mean when we talk about self-conscious language. In fact, the poetry in the Bible is just as self-conscious.

I. Pros and Cons of Technical Poetic Analysis [31:46-33:51]

Now, some of you, I can almost hear this coming right through the camera are saying, "Oh, wait a second, this is going to get technical. You're going to start using words like synecdoche, metaphor, simile and, anaphora and things like that, aren't you?"

Well, yes, some of them. But you know, what does it mean to use technical language? If you're watching the Super Bowl and the commentator says, "They're using a quarterback draw." That's technical language, isn't it? Or if you're watching the Olympics and they talk about and hear, I don't know what I'm talking about, a double axle, I mean, I know that means they jumped up in the air and went around twice versus a double something else. That's technical language, isn't it? Yet we're not intimidated when it comes to sports or even to music. Perhaps, depending on what your interest is? So, we can say that, the adagio was a little too slow or the forte was a little too soft or the fortissimo was quite loud enough. Thank you very much. We're using language that helps us understand what we're talking about. It gives us a common language, which is really where jargon and insider talk comes from anyway. We have a need to communicate things without using all the words that we need to explain them to someone else. We have to figure out some way to say this in short compass. So rather than say, that the poem "What is heavy," begins with four lines, each of which begin the same way. We can just say, "Oh, the whole poem is anaphoric." Save words, save space. We know exactly what we're talking about because we're using, when I say each line begins the same way, you might say, what does that mean they begin with a capital letter? Does that mean they begin with the same word? Well, anaphora tells us what we're talking about is identical expression. So sure, we used some technical language, but that's the way of studying anything.

J. On Reading a Poem [33:52-37:43]

And in fact, technical language gives us a way of thinking about even biblical poems in a way that maybe we've never thought of them before. So that we realize, in a psalm like Psalm 113, which again is anaphoric, "Praise Yahweh, praise servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh. Praise, starts the same again. And the question then we ought to ask ourselves is, "Oh, there's an anaphora. Why would the poet do that? What's the purpose of that? What's its function in relationship to the meaning of the poem? How's it actually working?"

Part of this, you've probably noticed already, is that I'm very interested in helping

us, helping myself, helping you, learn to read poems carefully. Thinking of ways to force ourselves to pay attention to what it says by thinking about why it says it that way, how it says it and why it uses that particular method. T. S. Eliot, in a very famous essay on reading poetry, said that we run into or we kind of walk a tight rope. On the one hand, there are people who read a poem once and they say they come away with an impression of it and they say, "Oh yeah, okay. that poem is about XYZ." So, somebody reads Psalm 23 and says, "Oh, that's comforting," and they walk away. The other kind of a approach is to analyze everything that can be analyzed. How how many words are in each line? How many syllables are in each line? How many lines are there? Why is it, how is it listing all the nouns, all the verbs, all the images, and analyzing everything in assigning a technical label to everything.

Now Eliot points out a problem with both of those. First, the casual impression is often wrong. I can tell you, I just heard many sermons where I could tell the person that was preaching based on a casual impression. They hadn't really studied a text, but they were looking for a sermon or a message. So, they read something and it made them think of something else. So, then they just kind of used that passage, that psalm like a diving board and went springing off into what they really wanted to talk about. Oftentimes it had nothing to do with the Psalm itself. So, we can misread because we don't take the text seriously enough.

On the other hand, we can subject the text to our analysis to such an extent that we forget that we're reading somebody else's text. We analyze it in such a way that it becomes merely a specimen to be pinned to the board and displayed. I was on an ordination committee for quite a number of years for my denomination and we got papers from students and I can remember papers on Psalms by students who were obviously very capable based on their grades and even on the things they said in the paper, who described everything in the psalm, every poetic aspect of the psalm that you could possibly want to comment on was noted, annotated usually in Hebrew and English, sometimes even in Greek if they were really ambitious. But then they kind of forgot to

tell you why any of that mattered and even sometimes what the poem was about. So that the analysis became the end. Quintillion, an early orator, a Roman orator said, the danger is becoming stuck in the analysis. T.S. Eliot says that's one problem.

K. Factors that Influence our Reading of a Psalm [37:44-42:40]

On the other hand, if we're reading Scripture, we want to be sure that we're actually reading what the Bible says. You see, one of the challenges that you and I face, if we've been going to a church or even Bible study or college or seminary and studying theology or religion or the Bible, is that we've heard lots of people tell us what Psalm 119 means or what Job 6 is really about or any other passage. So when we come to the text, we almost can't read Psalm 1 anymore. It's sort of like taking off our real glasses and putting on a pair of sunglasses and then putting on another pair of mirrored sunglasses and then maybe some of those funny glasses, the eyeballs that fall out and trying to read through that. That's a little exaggerated. But we do let everything get in our way. So we're reading and we're hearing the voice of the preacher. We're hearing the voice of the commentary. We're hearing the voice, even of the bull session in the dorm. So one of the goals, or not goals, one of the motivations, the reasons for trying to be very careful and read and pay attention to everything in the poem is that I really want to read Psalm 113. I don't want to walk away with just an impression of it and I don't simply want to read it through what everybody else has said. They may all be right, that's fine, but poetry is meant to be read, to be thought about, to be played with in our own minds, just as the poet plays with ideas in writing the poem.

You know, in our approach to Scripture, I think very often we run into the idea that the purpose of the Bible is to communicate information and that's certainly true. We've got lots of information through the Bible we wouldn't know any other way. Who was Hezekiah's father, for example. No other way of knowing that. Who was his son? Who was his descendant? Well, it's good that we have the Bible so that we know things like that, but we do have to ask a question: Why would God, working within very limited scope, I mean the Bible, this is a fairly big Bible and edition. This is about 1600 pages.

Well, I have copies of Shakespeare here in my library that have more than twice that number of pages with much smaller print. If I were to pull down all the writings of Winston Churchill, there are many times that many pages. The Bible really is, in the scope of world literature, a fairly small book. So, we ought to ask ourselves perhaps, why would God choose to use poetry for one third of this book if his purpose is to communicate? Let me suggest then that the reason is that poetry communicates some things better than any other way. And if that's true, that is, if the use of poetry is deliberate, divinely inspired, which since it's in scripture, I think we would have to say, then God used poetry to communicate with us. Again not just that. In the book of Psalms, all through the Bible all the way into the book of Revelation, in fact, because poetry says best what he wanted to say, and perhaps here's the important thrust of that. If poetry is another way of using language and if poems are another way of thinking about reality, then we need to learn how to use that language as well. We need to learn to use the conceptual language and the words and the images and the way of putting things together that we find in biblical poems. So that when we pick up the book of Psalms, we say, I'm not just getting a statement about God the Lord is King. Okay, I've got the point. If that's all they wanted to say, that's all there would be, but he doesn't stop with that one sentence. Instead, he goes on for 12 or 13 or 15 or 30 verses because he's wants us to think about what that statements means.

L. Thinking in the Language of Poetry [42:41-45:41]

And when we talk about the technical aspects of poetry such as anaphora, Psalm 13 "How long the Lord will you be far from me? How long will you hide your face? How long will I have ...? How long?" Well, part of understanding any poem is appreciating the artistry with which it is created. The person who best appreciates a Mozart sonata is the person who's actually tried to play piano or violin or whatever else it might be. The person who best appreciates that quarterback draw on the Super Bowl is the person who maybe has at least played a little touch football on Thanksgiving with his family. The person who best appreciates any poem is the person who understands the language of

poetry.

You know, and with this I'll close, in the Encyclopedia Britannica, they cite this fact, which is so well known they don't even footnote it. If you try this experiment yourself, go to the streets of whatever town or city you live near with two pieces of paper, one of which has a short poem, one of which has a short paragraph. Stop ten people and ask five of them say, would you please read this poem out loud? And after they've done that, ask them to read the paragraph. The other five people ask them to read the paragraph first and the poem and that's all you say. "Would you please read this poem? Would you please read this paragraph out loud?" Don't say anything beyond that and you tell them you're doing an experiment. This is what you will find in many more than 99 out of 100 cases. The person who when they know that they're reading a poem, their voice will change. Their posture will change the way they pronounce the words will change. The thoughtfulness with which they read the text will change.

Now ask yourself, when was the last time that in a worship service, I heard a psalm read with the same care as I heard Dr. Putnam read "What is Heavy?" When was the last time I read a psalm, or any biblical poem for that matter, with the same thoughtfulness that I might read "Stopping by a Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost? I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. That's not the goal. It's instead that if these things really are poems, we need to teach ourselves again to think the language of poetry, that we might appreciate them because appreciation for a poem is part of understanding it.

This was Dr. Fred Putnam in his second lecture of four on the book of Psalms. [45:48]

Dr. Fred Putnam, Introduction to Psalms Lecture 3 of 4

Poetic Patterns [00:07-3:20]

This is presentation number three by Dr. Fred Putnam on the book of Psalms, Dr. Putnam.

In the second lecture, I read a brief poem by Christina Rossetti, "What Are Heavy?" And that poem also illustrates something else that is true of poetry in general. And that is the idea of pattern. And by pattern we mean that things are repeated or they're put together in certain ways so that the overall effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts. So in that poem, "What are heavy?" "What are brief?" "What are frail?" "What are deep?" The pattern of successive questions leads us with each line to expect a question for the next line. We can look at patterns on a very small scale and patterns on a very large scale.

In talking about biblical poetry and looking at the book of Psalms, one of the things that we find is a great deal of what appears to be maybe mental stutters, that is, the poet seemed to repeat themselves. They say one thing, then they say it again. They say one thing, they say it again. They say one thing. So Psalm 2, "why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devise a vain thing?" Well, those kind of mean the same thing, don't they? "The Kings," verse two, "the Kings of the earth take their stand. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed." So, "they take their stand, they take counsel together." It's the Kings of the earth, the rulers. Let us tear their fetters apart and let us cast away their cords from us." Those sound almost exactly identical. Verse four "he who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them," Verse five, "Then he'll speak to them in his anger, and he will terrify them in his fury." Well, the fifth one is a little bit different. It's not exactly the same difference between speaking to someone and terrifying them. That too points out something that often the second line ups the ante a little bit makes it a little stronger. But the point is that we find in biblical

poetry, this constant interplay where the poet says something and then says something that's very closely related to it but not exactly the same way.

In English poetry, rhyme is a way of organizing a poem. So, if you can remember back this far, when you studied sonnets, you know that the rhyme scheme is that ABBA. So the first line is A, and the second line is B ending with a word that sounds like what we'll call B. It goes A, B, B, A. and that pattern is repeated. So, the first and fourth line sound alike, the second and third line sound alike, and then the fifth and eighth and et cetera. Well, in English, poetry rhyme is therefore often an organizing method. It's something that can be a tool that can be used to organize a poem by showing us which lines go together.

The Parallelism Pattern 3:20-5:44]

Hebrew poetry doesn't use line rhyme. Instead, it uses what's come to be called parallelism. That is the idea that one line reflects the line before it. Or we could say it the other way around. A line reflects or anticipates the line that comes after it.

What is this? Well, it's a very quick summary. At one point the rabbis said God would never repeat himself. So, therefore, the two lines must mean something very different. And they try to figure out as many differences as they could between the two lines. So how can we distinguish "nations" from "peoples"? How can we distinguish "being in an uproar" from "devising vanity or something empty"? And that's possible to do.

But then maybe in the 17th century, Archbishop Lowth, gave a series of lectures. He was really arguing about something else. But along the way he said that biblical poetry can be described as made up of parallelism. So that lines are parallel to each other. And usually it's two lines. Sometimes it's three or four, even five, but that's very rare. Usually it's two, sometimes three. And Lowth said there are three kinds of these relationships between lines. Sometimes they're saying the same thing, like these examples

in Psalm 1 fact that's the most, probably the most common kind of parallelism in the book of Psalms. In the book of Proverbs, on the other hand as we might expect, because you have a contrast between wisdom and folly, the normal kind of or the usual kind of parallelism is a contrast where they say sort of the opposite. So, "the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish woman tears it down with her own hands." Or "a wise son makes his father happy, a foolish son is his mother's grief." So, the two lines contrast with each other. The contrast and the second one by the way, isn't between father and mother. It's between the effect that the son's behavior has, the type of son and the effect of his behavior on his parents. That's Proverbs 10.1. Then there are many cases in the Bible where there is no parallelism.

Line Length Pattern and Breaking Patterns [5:45-9:49]

Now again, our translations and the general way I'd say that scholars look at it is that there must be a parallelism somewhere. But instead it seems that what we have are just lines that are different lengths. Most of them are fairly short and in Hebrew they're quite short. So, in Hebrew, the average number of words per proverb is about, between seven and nine. When you translate it into English, it balloons to 13, up to about 28 depending on what they have to do. So they don't even sound like proverbs anymore. And the same thing is true in the book of Psalms where, you know, once they start translating, things get stretched out and have to get moved around because the languages are different. But nonetheless, we can see that if we read through Psalm 2, and I'm not going to reread those verses, I'll let you read them on your own, when we come to verse six, verse six is actually a single sentence, unlike the five verses in front of it. Verses one through five each consists of two parallel lines. So "let us," verse three, "let us tear their fetters apart, and let us cast their cords away from us." Verse four, verse five are the same thing. Verse six consists of one line. It's twice the length, actually it's more than twice the length of any of the lines that have come before it, all of which are usually three words, sometimes four words in Hebrew. This has seven words in Hebrew, a lot more than that in English, of course. That is a fairly standard way in biblical poems of showing the

reader that we've come to the end of a section. Sometimes the line that signals would come to the end of the section will be very short, one or two words. Usually it's much longer than the preceding lines.

The big question is, or the big clue really is that the poet sets up a pattern and then he does something that breaks the pattern. So we read in the first five verses of Psalm 2, three words, three words, three words, three words, et cetera, et cetera, and then suddenly seven words. So we ought to say then to ourselves, "Wow, what's going on here?" Not just what does it mean, but why has he done it this way? Because, in fact, starting in verse seven, verse seven begins a new section of Psalm 2. This is a Psalm now in which the Psalmist goes on to quote the Lord and we have this discussion of their relationship verses seven through nine. Then in 10 through 12 is a summons to those Kings who in verses one through three were rebelling. The Psalmist in verses 10 through 12 summons them to submission and obedience. And we find, in fact, in each of those cases that we have some sort of discontinuity within the poem itself. In English, we do that a lot of times by leaving a blank line, which is also true in my version of Psalm 2, for example. There are blank lines after verses three, six and nine. But again, they're not original. They're added by editors. In English, we also do it by means of rhyme. Hebrew does it by means of the style of the parallelism, the type and the length of the line.

So that when we read a poem or a psalm, we find that paying attention to how it's constructed, that is how the pieces are constructed, actually becomes a clue as to how the whole psalm is constructed.

They might say, isn't that kind of pedantic? Why do we want to worry about how the whole poem is constructed? Because isn't our goal in studying the Bible to submit to what it says? Part of that submission is to learn to think the poet's thoughts after him or after her.

Poetic Order [9:52-11:03]

Let me change venues from just a moment. Let's say that you're going to lead a Bible study or preach a sermon or you going to give a Sunday school lesson on Psalm

113. So you say, well, my first point is in verse five. My second point is in verses two and three. My third point is in verse nine and my fourth point, the conclusion is verse one. What's the problem with that? Well, I think the real problem is the poet didn't write it that way. He wasn't thinking in terms of, I don't remember the order that I gave those versus in, but he wasn't thinking five, four, three, two. He was thinking one through nine. Well, the verse numbers weren't original, but he was thinking of it in the order that it was written. He wants us to read it in that order so that when we come to verse nine whether we think it's the most important verse or the second point or whatever we may think of it, we come to verse nine, having read verses one through eight, having thought our way through what verses one through eight are saying.

Chiasm (ABBA) – Ps. 113 [11:04-16:18]

The same thing when we talk about parallelism, we say, Oh, I have two lines here. How are these two lines, we always ask ourselves, how is each line related to the next line? Because that's the way the poet wrote it. Each line reflects or contrasts with or steps away from the line before it. So we read Psalm 113 verse two, "Blessed be the name of Yahweh, from this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of Yahweh is to be praised." Wow. Those are two long verses and in fact they are very long. They're a single sentence so there's no parallelism within the verse, but instead the two verses as a whole are parallel to each other. So, we have at the beginning, this is really cool. You look at this in your Bible, verse two for line A "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Verse three, line B, down here "the name of the Lord is to be praised." Those things are parallel. And look at the two middle lines 2B and 3A "from this time forth and forever," "from the rising of the sun to its setting." Time and space, East to West that's talking about not time. So, isn't that cool? Do you see what he just did? He just took this idea that God should be praised everywhere in all ways and he didn't just say that. Instead, he kind of turned it inside out and asked us what might that look like or how can we even think about that?

And so it takes a very abstract idea and makes it a little more concrete rather than

saying "always and everywhere" "from this time forth," "this time" I know what this time is and "forever," I don't quite know what that means, but it goes on for a long time. And from East to West, I know what that is. And putting those two things in the middle, putting the other on the outside in a very common biblical pattern that's come to be called a chiasm because when you arrange it in a certain way and draw lines, connecting things that makes the letter Chi, which in Greek is the letter it looks like our X. So people call something like this, a chiasm. We don't really know why they wrote things as chiasms. There's no manual of Hebrew poetry from the 10th century BC, which I'd love to discover that, but we know that they did it many, many, many times. Sometimes it's used, for example, in Proverbs where you have contrasting lines and so the words will be flipped in their order and that goes right along with the contrast in the meaning of the lines. Other times, like here, the two lines mean the same thing, but it's reversed.

It seems to be, well, maybe it's like, did you ever think of this when a poet sits down to write a sonnet, he or she has decided to communicate in 140 syllables broken into groups of 10 syllables, every 10th syllable of which will fall into a particular rhyme scheme and that will follow a particular meter da-dah, da-dah, da-dah like that iambic. And that it will be arranged with a certain logical structure of eight lines that set forth a problem or a question or a situation in six lines that resolve it or explain it. Or 12 lines, the other kind of sonnet, 12 lines that set forth the problem in two lines that kind of encapsulate it. More often in Shakespeare, turn it on its head, turn it upside down. What's the poet done? Well restricted him or herself greatly. C. S. Lewis wrote a sonnet once and said it was so difficult he would never write another one. That's actually not true. He did write a few more, but it's very difficult to do. Why would someone do that?

Why would someone say, I'm going to write poetry in a chiasm so that the lines have to be about the same length otherwise it doesn't sound right. It doesn't fit. You have to have words that correspond with each other in some way. You have to have concepts that fit into this. We'll talk about praise, time, space, praise or blessing so that we get this pattern that shows up in the words and the ideas. Well, we don't really know. Why would

somebody decided to write a sonnet and submit themselves to that torture? Well, part of it is it's a form that's recognized and so it's a form that's used. It's the way that they wrote, just like parallelism is the way they wrote poetry. They didn't write limericks. There are no limericks in the Bible, but they wrote lots of great poems that are very carefully put together and structured as we'll see in our fourth lecture together.

Poetic Analysis of Ps. 114 – How the Lines Relate [16:19-24:10]

If you look at Psalm 114 it's a short Psalm, eight verses. Every line reflects the line in front of it and there is some very close repetition. So, it says,

When Israel went forth from Egypt,
 the house of Jacob from a people of a stammering tongue,
 Judah became his sanctuary.
 Israel his dominion.
 The sea looked and fled.
 The Jordan turned back,
 the mountain skipped like rams.
 The hills like lambs.
 What's with you? (It's kind of hard to translate) sea that you flee,
 Jordan that you turn back,
 mountains that you skipped like rams,
 hills, like lambs?
 Tremble earth before Yahweh/the Lord,
 before the God of Jacob,
 who turned the rock into a pool of water,
 the flint into a source of water.

Every line reflects the line before it and in fact so often do they reflect the line before it that usually or several times they just leave the verb out of the second line. So "when Israel went forth from Egypt, that house of Jacob from a people of strange language." It doesn't say "the house of Jacob went forth from the people of strange language" or

"stammering tongue." Well that's pretty common. The poet wants us to supply the verb from the first line into the second line. You see, it's a very clever way of making us pay attention, isn't it? I have to recall enough of the preceding line to make sure that I'm inserting the verb that he intends into the second line. Not some verb I feel like, like "when Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob scurried about, scurried out by midnight after the tenth plague of the death, the firstborn from a people that strange language." It doesn't say that. It just says "went out." Or "Judah became his sanctuary. Israel" it just says, "Israel became his dominion." Now a lot of times our English translations will put the verb in the second line or they'll put something in there because they think it might be too hard for us to understand. But if it's not there, that's because it's not there. And that's because the poet is writing in a way that actually binds those two lines together more closely than if he'd supplied a verb in the second line.

So, we look at this and we look at the Psalm a little more. We see that verses three and four reflected in verses five and six. So, verses three and four, "The sea looked and fled. The Jordan turned back, the mountain skipped like rams the hills like lambs. What ails you, what's with you that you flee?" See it goes back to 3A, 5B goes with 3B, 6A and 6B go with 4A and 4B. And there, in fact, 4B and 6B are identical in Hebrew identical because there are no question marks in Hebrew. Sorry I know that disappoints you but they're added. So it just says, "hills like lambs." And we understand though from the context that the first one is a statement, the second one is a question.

Well, in looking at parallelism we ask ourselves each time, what is the relationship between these two lines? Now whether we come up with Lowth's, Archbishop Lowth's a terminology, the terminology is not really the point. In fact, sometimes the terminology can get in our way so that people have all sorts of terms to describe the relationship between lines. Whole books, big books, have been written on describing and analyzing parallel structures and parallelism and biblical Hebrew. The real issue that we're dealing with is: when the poet wrote, he did not actually write two separate sentences that then we are supposed to somehow stick together like A plus B equals either A, B or C,

something new. But instead it's a single statement that is comprised of two parts.

So that reading the first line of a verse without reading the second or third if there is one, is illegitimate. It was never meant to be understood as a single isolated statement. Reading the second line of a verse without reading it in light of the first line is also illegitimate. The verse was intended or I shouldn't say verse because parallel lines can extend across verse divisions because remember again, verse borders, verse boundaries, are much later than the original text. The parallel lines together, all of them together, create a statement, make an assertion, ask a question, offer a prayer or whatever else it might be.

So that we're trying to ask what is the relationship between these? what does the second line add to the first line? Or, how does the first line help us understand the second line? Because after all, if we read it consecutively, which we don't have any choice about, I mean that's the way language works, right? One word at a time. So, we read from one line to the next, I read this line that now becomes the basis for understanding the next line, which is almost as we could say, built on top of it. So, in order to understand the building, we have to understand the foundation, I'm mixing my metaphors and I know that's problematic. But we're asking how are these things related? And what is he saying by putting these two ideas together. So why does he want us to know that Egypt is somehow identified with a people of a stammering tongue or a foreign or strange language, in verse one of Psalm 114? Why not just say from the land of the Nile? I mean there are lots of ways to describe Egypt: the land of the Pharaoh, the land where Joseph was second in command. We could use lots of things, but why did he choose that particular term or that particular idea in order to parallel what he said in the first line? And we could even ask from the beginning why choose that word in the first line? Why say when "Israel went forth from Egypt," why not say, "when Israel went forth from the people of strange language, the house of Jacob from Egypt." Is there a significance to that?

Ah, you see that is part of the whole question of authorial choice in a poem. So, if

you're writing a sonnet, you can't use 142 syllables. You can't do it. You have to find another word. You have to fit the rhyme scheme. You like this word but it doesn't rhyme. Sorry. You've got to get rid of it. Go get another one. Because you've chosen to communicate in a certain way. In order to really communicate that way, you have to follow the rules, the conventions of that method of communication. And in biblical poetry, the normal convention is that lines will be parallel.

Now, as I said earlier, not all lines are. Our translations make it look that way because very, very rarely will a translation actually write out a whole line of text as a single sentence all the way across the page. Instead, I'm not sure the reason for this and I'm impugning motives. Part of it is the move to double column Bibles, which makes it just more difficult to have long lines or impossible to have long lines. A second thing though, it seems to me is, the conviction on the part of a scholarship in general that biblical poetry has to be parallel. And so we're going to get two lines even if they aren't there. We'll just choose a place to break it where it makes sense, break it after the verb and put the object in the second line or something like that.

Pondering Psalm 2 and Parallel Lines [24:10-30:13]

So if you look at, Psalm 2, what we looked at just at the beginning of this lecture, we see in Psalm 2 that it says this,

Why are the nations in an uproar,
and the peoples devising a vain thing?

Verse one, very parallel, peoples/nations, uproar/devising a vain thing.

The Kings of the earth take their stand,
and the rulers take counsel together.

Well, Kings of the earth / rulers take their stand / take counsel together. That sounds all pretty parallel. But look at the last, there are actually in this particular translation, there's a third line in verse two which says, "against Yahweh and against his anointed," but in fact that doesn't work, does it? Because that's not a sentence. It's not a clause. It's just a phrase. And it really is part of the second line of verse two, but the way the translation

makes it look, it seems like, Oh, somehow this is a third line that's being added to the first two. And I need to figure out how this line relates. Well it relates, because it's just an indirect object of the verb in the second line.

So, what we actually have are three lines of three words each, and then the fourth line is seven words. And then we have another six lines that are three words, three or four words each, and then verse six seven words. So we actually have a little break in structure after verse two. And that ought to make us then wonder, if there's a break in the structure, is there a reason? Is it arbitrary? No. See that's the danger, to say he did this for poetic reasons or poetic effect. You see, that's really a copout folks. We can't say that because poets don't do things arbitrarily. I think that sometimes we can interpret things and we get to some pretty elaborate interpretations perhaps and wonder, is this really what's going on?

But let me read a brief, a very brief quote from, Molly Peacock's book. She says, "Am I making this up? Can this be real?" Well, I can't read the quote, but I can paraphrase it for you. She says, is it really possible that all this meaning is packed into these lines that is this interplay of sound and image and meaning and function in line length and structure. She says, well, you know, when a poet works, it's actually the right brain informing the left brain of what it's trying to do. So that things happen synergistically within the process of creating the poem that the poet may not even be fully aware of but that are in fact integral to the nature of the meat of the poem's meaning because they're a part of its structure. Remember we're thinking about structure because we want to think the way the poet thought. So we can think his or her thoughts after him or her.

So we say even though it sounds like, and most translations will put the break after verse three, rather than after verse two, in Psalm 2 it sounds like that's where it should be, but the way the poem is made, the break should come after verse two somehow. Verse three is set off. There are other things that then break verse four because if you read on, you say verse four is obviously talking about the Lord, whereas verse three is still talking

about the kings and the rulers of the earth who are taking counsel et cetera in verses one and two. So verses one, two and three are bound together in terms of their content, but verse three is separated from verses one and two by the structure of verses one and two.

In fact, this, I know this isn't fair, but I'm going to show you something in Hebrew that is just really awesome in Psalm 2, verses one and two. There are four verbs in the first four lines that is, verses one and two. The first verb is, let's call it a perfect, in Hebrew. The next verb is an imperfect. The third verb is an imperfect and the fourth verb is a perfect. So you see we have, we're back to that ABBA pattern again, that chiasm thing we talked about. Is that a coincidence? Did the poet not know that he was using those verb forms or did he just happen to put them in that arrangement just the way it kind of worked out? In fact, if we were, which we can't do in Hebrew, this is where it becomes a little tricky talking in translation, but if we were to actually write out the the verse and say we'll call the subject of each line A and the verb B and the predicate or the object C, we would find that the order of the sentences is in fact reversed. So that all of verse one is a chiasm and all the verse two is a chiasm and then the four verbs in verses one and two tie the two chiasms together by creating a different chiasm. And we say, is that coincidence? I think not. Verse three, four, five go on to a different kind of parallelism where it's just, it would, if we did the subject/verb/object thing, it would just be ABC, ABC, ABC. They're just the same. There's no more chiasm. Is it an accident? No, no. The poet knew exactly what he was doing. We might not know exactly why he was doing it, but he was doing it very, very intentionally. And you see that's part of reading a poem is just to say, Whoa, that's really cool. That's a legitimate response to poetry. Then we say, why is it cool? Why would he work so hard to make it look like that? There's a reason somewhere, even if we can't think about it, part of the process is to ponder, what might underlie this?

The Meaning of Repetition – Psalm 113 [30:13-34:53]

Let me show you one more kind of repetition and then I'll move on to larger structures. To go back to Psalm 113, Psalm 113 is the beginning of a group of Psalms that

go from 113 to 118 called the Egyptian Hallel, which is a song recited at Passover every year. What these Psalms all have in common is that they have the word "hallelujah," which means "praise Yah." This is a short form of Yahweh. So "praise the Lord," at the beginning or the end or both. Psalm 113 begins, "Praise the Lord, hallelujah," and ends "Praise the Lord, Hallelujah." That's not parallelism. I mean, it is parallelism because there's a parallel, but it's actually repetition, which means it's exactly the same. Now when something like that happens at the beginning of a Psalm or the end of a Psalm, why would a poet do that? Why would he say over again what he said at the first? Psalm 103 "bless the Lord, O my soul." Psalm 103 "Bless the Lord. Oh my soul." Why would the poet do that?

Think about this, the first time or when we read Psalm 113 and let's assume that we're not coming with all sorts of theological baggage. Okay? So, we read Psalm 113 and it says, "praise the Lord." What's a natural response? You may remember from when you were eight years old when your father said, "take out the garbage." What's a natural response? Why? Yes. So, when we come to the end of the psalm and we read "praise the Lord," the why has already been answered. So, you see, even though it's repeated, it's repetition, the words, the content of the words are the same, the meaning and function of the statements are very different. The first one is a summons. The second one is a summons that is at the same time a reminder because in verses four through nine, he's given us several reasons for praising the Lord by explaining how great he is and how generous and good he is to his people. So even though they're parallel, in fact, repetition, they don't have the same function, same vocabulary, same dictionary meaning, but not the same purpose. Same thing with Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord O my soul." There's a big difference between saying it at the beginning of the Psalm, starting the psalm that way and saying it again at the end 22 verses later, or 21 verses later, in verse 22. When he's gone through a huge catalog of all the good things that the Lord has done for his people. Now we know who we're blessing, why we're blessing him, what he's done for us.

This incidentally points up another characteristic of psalms of praise, these songs

of worship and praise, which is that the Psalter, the Bible never calls on us simply to praise God because he exists. Sometimes you may hear people say, "well, I don't want to praise God because of what he's done for me. I just want to praise him because of who he is." That's an unbiblical folks, I'm sorry to say it. The Bible always gives us reasons and the reasons are often our self-interest, or what God has done for me, or what God has done for us. That's why we praise him. Sometimes it's because of creation, the work of creation but much of the time it's actually the work of salvation or deliverance. What's really striking, we won't take time to turn there. If you turn to Revelation chapters four and five, there are three songs that John hears in the heavenly worship when he's taken up by the spirit. The first one is very broad. The second one praises God because of his work of creation and providence upholding his creation. The third one praises the lamb for the work of salvation. The same reasons that we find for praising God in the book of Psalms. This is another reason that we talk about biblical poetry not really Old Testament poetry because really it's all one. It's just some has been written in Hebrew and some is written in Greek, but it's all one.

On Reading Poetic Parallelism [34:54-36:03]

So we look at the relationship between lines in order to talk about, in order to force ourselves, to encourage ourselves, I should say to pay attention, to think about what these two lines together are saying and why the author would have used those two lines, combined them to say that and remembering that we don't separate them. We don't just read one line like reading half of one of the Proverbs. "A wise son makes his father happy." Okay. But that's not the whole proverb. It doesn't say everything that is to be said. "A foolish son is his mother's grief." Ah, see the contrast in that case throws the meaning of each into higher profile than they do if they're just standing by themselves. It shows us the consequences, not just a one kind of behavior, but of both. And the same way in Psalms, the things that we read that are in parallel to each other combined to give us a meaning greater than the meaning of either one or both of them, taken individually.

Poetic Genre Patterns: Prayers/Laments – Psalm 13 [36:04-40:04]

Now when we look at structures, if we were to go through and analyze, outline all the Psalms you pretty quickly starting with Psalm 3, actually, find out that there are some fairly standard outlines for Psalms. About a third of the Psalter actually looks like Psalm 13. Let me give you a very rough outline of Psalm 13. In the first, three verses, we have these questions,

How long Yahweh will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Those are addresses to God. Like many other songs that start off with in translation, usually, "Oh Lord," or "Oh God," Or "Oh my God," that basically call God for his attention or something like that. They seem to be like that, a plea for attention. I mean saying, are you going to forget me forever? That's a pretty strong way of saying I think you've forgotten me and I don't like this and what's going on? Those are followed by a request for help. In Psalm 3, here's the request. "Pay attention. Answer me. Yahweh my God, give light to my eyes" or even maybe "make my eyes shine." Something like that. That's his request. Then he gives the Lord some reasons for why he should answer that request. "Lest I sleep in death, lest my enemy say I've overcome him, or my adversaries rejoice when I'm shaken." So actually you can see the parallelism in verse four. My enemy / my adversaries, I've overcome him / lest they rejoice when I'm shaking. It's not exact parallelism, but it's very close, synonymous. That's one reason. And the other reason is "lest I die." So he doesn't just ask God, he gives him reasons for why he thinks this is a good prayer request, basically.

Then there's a statement here in verse five, "but I have trusted in your loving kindness. My heart rejoices in your salvation," which is an expression of confidence or assurance or some sort of hope, that the Lord has answered his prayer or is about to answer it, or will answer it.

And then verse six, he says, "I will sing to Yahweh because he has dealt bountifully" or "well with me." Again, notice it's the last verse in the Psalm and it's a single sentence and it's a real long one. That's part of the function of long lines is to close things off. So, and there in verse six, we find a promise, this is what I'll do. So he goes from saying, "how long will you forget me" to saying, "I will sing to the Lord because he's dealt bountifully with me, dealt well with me."

And in the space of six verses, he's gone through this outline from an address or invocation and invocation is a to call someone, to invite them, to a plea for help to his reasons for the plea, why God motivation to his expression of confidence and to his promise. Sometimes it's a promise to sing. Sometimes it's a promise to offer sacrifices. Sometimes it specifically says, "I will testify to my brother in the company of my brethren concerning the Lord's goodness to me." So, all sorts of promises.

Psalm 88 – Breaking the Pattern [40:04-43:20]

Now, a third of the Psalter looks like that, one third of the Psalms, 52 or 53 of them and always they end this way. Except I should say with one exception, Psalm 88. Psalm 88 does not end with any cheer or any promise. Instead, Psalm 88 ends very graphically by saying, "you have removed lover and friend far from me. My acquaintances are darkness." Kind of a bummer. But one of the questions then that we ask ourselves is, if there's a pattern that the poets tend to follow, why doesn't Psalm 88 follow that pattern? Was this poet just having a really, really, really bad day? Well, maybe, or is its presence in scripture merely a reminder that, we will not always see light at the end of the tunnel. I mean, at least it's still a prayer addressed to God, right? He's complaining to him, but he's at least talking with him.

In fact, that points up one of the values of even noticing outlines like this and that is, that we can compare two or three Psalms that have the same pattern. We noticed that in one Psalm, the reasons, the motivation are five or ten verses long. In another Psalm, the complaint is the part that's ten verses long. And another psalm, the promise at the end goes on and on and on about all the things that psalmist is going to do once he's

delivered. And so we say to ourselves, okay, so he's taking this idea, but in this psalm, in this poem, this lament, as they're called, he's really emphasizing this idea or this idea. Why and how does this compare and contrast with other poems of the same type? So, it's a very interesting exercise.

Sonnets have been written for many hundreds of years. If you were to take, Oxford has published a nice little book called *The Book of Sonnets*. If you were to get it and read through it and ask yourself, I know a sonnet is supposed to follow a certain sort of logic, how does this sonnet fit that and why doesn't he quite follow the same? Why does the pattern look a little different? Why does he rearrange things? So, we start to think about why a poet would take something that's more or less standardized and tweak it a little bit because the tweaking is part of the meaning of the poem. Because in poetry, the form and the content aren't just lying side by side. It's not just that the form supports the content, but the form, the shape is actually part of it. And that's why we pay attention. Remember appreciation, we talked about the cool factor. Well, that is part of wanting us to see that, "Oh look at all the work. He put this together and look what he says when he puts it together. Look what it says when you put together that package of those lines. The beginning of Psalm 2." Well, that's how poetry communicates.

Poetic Genre Patterns: Psalms of Praise [43:22-44:59]

I only have a couple of minutes. So, I just mentioned one other main type of Psalm and that is Psalms of Praise that are like 113 they always follow the same pattern. They start with a call to praise, a command, then reasons for praising and then they end with a call to praise. Sometimes one of those is longer or shorter. So in Psalm 150 the reasons to praise is basically half of one line, verse three and the last five lines are all calls to praise with all these instruments. Well, five verses, I mean. Psalm 150 has a different emphasis than Psalm 148 where the emphasis in Psalm 148 is on who's doing the praising. In Psalm 150 the emphasis is on how the praising is being done, but in each case there are reasons for doing it.

So we look at, and, well, I should say, and there are other types of Psalms as well.

There are other patterns that you will see, and sometimes the patterns are easy to discern, sometimes they aren't. But learning to look at the psalms as falling within genres helps us to compare, helps us to see that we just have 150 psalms, but we actually have 150 poems that fall into general types that let us then look at them individually in light of each other within that type, and see how each one of them functions and what each one of them does with that pattern. So, paying attention, reading carefully, and noticing how the poet wrote so that we can try to think his or her thoughts after him.

This was the third of four presentations on the book of Psalms by Dr. Fred Putnam.

[45:05]

Dr. Fred Putnam, Introduction to Psalms Lecture 4 of 4

Imprecatory Psalms [0:07-9:05]

This is Dr. Fred Putnam's fourth and final presentation on the book of Psalms. Dr Putnam.

Welcome back for our fourth session. I'd like to return very briefly to something that I sort of left hanging at the end of the third and that is the question of a number of Psalms that are quite troubling to Christians. When I was at a large church in Philadelphia, we read through the Psalter responsively, every three years. One time I just happened to notice that as we were reading through, we came to the point where we should have read Psalm 137, and we skipped it. I went to the church secretary and said, "Why did we skip it?" And she said, "Well, you know, we sing the Gloria Patri, after we read the Psalm and I didn't think we should say, 'how blessed it will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock. Glory to the father and to the son to the Holy Spirit.'" Well, I didn't want to go into a long argument with her, but I think that's sort of the Christians' response to Psalms that call for God to do pretty nasty things to their enemies. Like a Psalm 35, which asks that the Lord draws up a spear and a battle ax to meet those who pursue the Psalmist or that the Lord's angel drive them on so that their way is dark and slippery and that the Lord basically destroy them.

So we ask, what in the world or how can we pray these things? Well, there've been a lot of responses to that. Some people, very famous people, have said, these are sub-Christians shouldn't use. They're the expression of an earlier age of spirituality. C. S. Lewis was one person who said that. Other people have said, well, these are really reflections of kind of a magical world where they believed in sorcery and the words have power and they're going to affect their enemies. Well, kind of all that aside, it is a valid question. If scripture is profitable and good and helpful, useful for us, or maybe a better

way to say it is, if it's useful for God, that is a tool for him to use in us. What do we do with psalms that call for the destruction of our enemies or the psalmist's, the poet's, enemies?

Well, let me give a couple of suggestions, and try to do this very quickly. A couple of quick suggestions. First, I think that these sorts of prayers for the destruction of enemies are not just found in the psalms. They're found in many passages in Scripture, including even Christ himself. Matthew 7.23, he's going to say, "depart from me, you evil doers, I never knew you." That is, he's going to consign them to hell. There are passages in the apostles and the writings of Paul where he certainly says that "may they be accursed." Even in the mouths of the souls in heaven under the altar in Revelation 6, they ask God, "how long is it going to be till you avenge our blood?" and there they are. They're in heaven. They should be perfect. Right? Well, if they're perfect, they were calling out for vengeance. That should raise almost a bigger problem than the presence of imprecations in the Psalter. I think it does show first of all that this idea of praying to God for vengeance or retribution on our enemies is biblically ubiquitous. It's everywhere in scripture. We even find it in the Lord's prayer since the coming of the Lord's kingdom will involve the destruction of those who are not part of that kingdom. So it's a concept that it's very difficult to get away from.

Let me suggest a couple of reasons or ways to think about this. One is, C. S. Lewis, although he did say that these were sub-Christian or expressions of a sub-Christian morality, also said that they show us that the biblical poets took evil a lot more seriously than we tend to. There are some evils for which we don't pray for conversion, we just pray for the destruction of the evil itself. I think that in our day and age, we need to remember that. When the mantra of our society is that everything is equally valid and there is no real right or wrong, these Psalms say, "No, there is wrong and when it's wrong, it is so wrong that it's damnable and only worthy of destruction."

A second consideration is in none of these cases do, well, there's one exception, Psalm 41.11, but in all the other so called imprecatory Psalms, the Psalmist never asks for

power for himself or for the ability to defeat his enemies or that God will help him do anything to them. He prays, yes, but then he just leaves the results with God. In each of those cases, the psalms end as we saw earlier with this expression of confidence and a promise that they will fulfill their vow or praise the Lord in the assembly or something else.

The third possible thing to consider is that when the Lord calls Abraham, he says that he will curse those who curse or who treat Abraham lightly or insult him. In the Psalms, the enemies of the Psalmist are those who are attacking the Psalmist. In each case, the Psalm has protested his innocence. He says, "they're attacking me without cause. They asked me things I don't know about." This is the outworking of the covenantal curse. That those who do evil will be confronted by their evil which they have done. The curses that the Psalm has, they're not really curses, they're prayers for judgment. What the Psalmist offers to God are requests that God will fulfill, will be true to his character and that he will maintain the cause of what is right because God is among many other things, a judge.

Also, when we look at a number of these, like I'm thinking specifically of Psalm 35 at the moment, it says "malicious witnesses rise up, ask me of things, I don't know. They repay me evil for good." And he says, "They attack, they slander me without cause." Deuteronomy 19 has a very interesting provision. In Deuteronomy 19, at the end of the chapter we read this. "If someone accuses his brother of a crime or sin, which he did not commit, then the accuser will receive the punishment that fits that crime." These people are bringing accusations against the poet. In every case, all of these psalms, there is a verbal accusation of some kind, whether we hear it in the poem or not. There's an accusation. They're accusing him. They're accusing him, he says, falsely. The covenant says false witnesses receive the punishment that the guilty gets if they're guilty of that crime. So, he's just saying to the Lord, uphold your covenant. Interesting that he's not even trying to do that himself. He's not suing them. He's just saying, Lord, be faithful to your word.

So, I think that in reading the imprecations in the Psalms, these calls for judgment, we need to remember that they are appeals to God as a righteous judge. God does not change the nature of his justice nor the relationship that he has with his people or his relationship with the wicked.

Can the people of God pray these prayers? I myself find that a very difficult question because there is so much, often when I'm tempted to pray them, there's too much of my own experience mixed up in me that I want vengeance or something for some wrong that I imagine has been done. But, they do seem to be appropriate simply because they're part of the canon. We don't ignore them or walk away from them. Instead we say at times, yes God, it is appropriate to pray these things because only you can establish the justice that needs to be done.

Metaphors, Foundational Metaphors and Psalms [9:08-26:50]

I'd like to turn on to one more main question in thinking about biblical poems and then a very briefly look at Psalm 1 and that is this question as I mentioned earlier in the second lecture, I believe about images. How do we, what do we do with these images? Let me read a couple of verses to you. Psalm 18 verse two, "the Lord is my crag and my fortress and my deliverer. My God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Bend your ear to me." This is Psalm 31 verses two and three. "Rescue me quickly, become a strong crag for me. A strong hold to save me. For you are my rock and my fortress." Is David worshiping rocks? Probably not that would make him a lithologist and we don't really have much of that commended in the Bible. David was certainly never stoned for worshiping rocks. Sorry about the pun. So what's going on here?

Well, we all know intuitively when someone uses a figure of speech. When someone says, how are you doing today? Oh, I'm beat, or I'm dead tired or I could just cry. Well, maybe you could just cry, but you're not dead if you're answering the question. And unless you have the stripes on your back, you probably weren't beaten either. So we just process those things without even realizing that we're using images what are called

metaphors. The reason that we do that is that some things, our minds find it challenging to grapple with things that can't, that are extra outside our senses, that is, we can't touch. So how do we talk about truth? How do we talk about goodness? Well, it's, it's very difficult to talk about something that's abstract and pretty soon if you ask a question, what does it mean? What does goodness mean? Try this in a conversation. Pretty soon it will come around to, is this action good or is this action bad? Or is this work of art good? Or it will become concrete very quickly because we have trouble grappling with things that we can't touch or see.

Well, one of the things that we can't touch or see is God himself. And so the Bible uses many, many images for God. And even in Psalm 18 verse two, we have all these images of crag, a fortress, a deliver, a rock, a refuge, a shield, a horn of salvation, and my stronghold, my goodness this is here. Is this a grocery list or what's going on? Well, it was a very short, and I hope, easy way to think about images. We are able to use metaphors to understand things that we can't grasp physically or see because underneath our use of metaphors like rock and fortress, and crag, is a foundational metaphor that's a lot bigger. And that encompasses all those, what we might call literary metaphors on the surface, that is, the things in the text.

So what kind of a crag is this? Well, your translation may say, "rock." This rock cannot be lifted up or moved or carried or bulldozed. It might be dynamite-able. You might be able to blow it up with dynamite, but you can't just, you can't do anything with it. Instead, it's a very high place. If you've ever seen pictures of the Dead Sea Scrolls and you see how steep those wadis are, those valleys are. Well, that's what David's talking about. If you're up on top of one of those, you're safe. You know when David stole the water jar and the spear from Saul, it says he went across the way and then he and Saul were shouting back and forth to each other. You think, wait a second, if they're in shouting distance, why doesn't Saul just send a little group of guys around to sneak up on David? Because if you've ever looked at those pictures from the wilderness of Judea, which is where David was, you see that he would have to send men way from all the way

around of this long steep valley with the walls of the valley far too steep to climb. The only way they could get into the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found was by ropes from above. They couldn't climb up. You couldn't climb up and you certainly couldn't climb up if you're carrying a bow and some arrows and a spear and a javelin and a sword and a shield. You'd never make it. They just roll a couple of rocks down on you and that would be the end. So David is over on the top of this rock. He's perfectly safe. Saul can't get to him. He's far enough away that a javelin, which has a fairly short range, because they're a pretty heavy weapon, a javelin can't reach. It's at night so nobody can shoot anyway or throw anyway, so he doesn't have to worry. Then it says when Saul did try to go to get him, David and his men slipped away. They just went off onto another crag. Well that's what he's talking about. The same thing when he talks about a fortress. It's not really a fortress in the sense of, don't think of a Crusader castle. It's a fortified place, a place that's a natural place of defense that's been built up, maybe had rocks to fill in the cracks or the one pass. It's protective level has been enhanced to use military language, so that now it's a true place of refuge, which is in fact what he says. "My God is my rock in whom I take refuge," another kind of rock. This time we're talking about a cliff and if you're on top of the cliff, nobody's going to go up after you. They can't get to you. Even a shield, if you're behind a shield, you're safe. It's only when you're out in front of the shield or beside this shield, or your shield bearer drops the shield, that's when you're in trouble. Or if you're too tall and your head sticks up like Goliath and you're also in trouble. God is also, he says, my stronghold, my citadel, some translations might say.

Well, you see what all those have in common is this really cool idea that God is a safe place? Now we even say God is the safe place or the safest place or something like that. But you see that is like a foundation and because that's true, because we can think of God as a safe place. Now all of a sudden, David can use any word that denotes a safe place: a cliff, a crag, a fortress, a stronghold. It doesn't matter, a shield. Even, in fact, we find the same image very different, but the same foundational metaphor in Psalm 131 when the Psalmist talks about being a weaned child, sitting on his mother's lap. It's a safe

place. What is your mother's lap? We think a weaned child. Why would a weaned child? Because the child wants milk? No, it's weaned. It doesn't need milk. It's there not for food, but for comfort or protection or snuggling or whatever else. It's the same foundational image. So when we look at metaphors, we want to ask ourselves, what's lying underneath this?

See, for a long time it was popular to think of metaphors in these terms. God is my rock. Okay, how is God like a rock. Well, first of all, I didn't know what kind of rock we're talking about and then how has God like that kind of rock, trustworthy, safe, dependable et cetera. Okay, those things are all true, but you see what happens when we begin thinking in terms of foundational metaphors is now we see that all these individual statements are not individual statements at all. There are branches of a tree that come out of a root and the root is what holds the whole thing together. They're the stories of a skyscraper with different levels, but the metaphor, that's the foundation.

I used to watch in Philadelphia when they were building some of what are now the tallest skyscrapers, and it was amazing how far down they had to build and how many hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these giant concrete trucks went down and just dumped their concrete and then went back up for more. It was an unending procession. Well, if you have that kind of foundation, you can build almost anything on top of it. And that's what happens. We have this idea that God is a place. Very strange to us because in our culture, of course, we think of God as a person. But think about biblical times. You never knew when the Amalekites might come across the hill and attack your home and destroy you or to destroy everything you had and take you and your family for slaves. You never knew when the Arabians or the tribes of the East might come, or the Ammonites, the Moabites, or anybody else. So, places of safety were very important, crucial to them. Not so crucial to us, we, and especially in the United States, don't live in fortified cities. In fact, we don't even have city walls anywhere except I think the only one in North America is Quebec City, at least that's the only one I know of, and that's only the old part when it was back as a French fort.

Well, the metaphor then is something we need to think about in terms not only what the words mean, but what it might've met in their culture, and then what underlies that. Because getting to the underlying thing is what gives it meaning for us as well. You see, let me, let me extend that a little bit. Think of our culture. Did you know that in any gathering of people like a church, probably at least one in four women in that church had been abused, and many times by a parent figure, a father or a step-father. Now, we may be tempted to say that somebody like that may say, I just can't think of God as my father. Sorry, I don't want to hear this. And I've read counselors who have said, that's tough. They have to get over it that's the what the Bible says, God is your father. You've got to live with it. Or God is a king and that's another father figure, authority figure. God is a judge another and they just don't want anything to do with that. What if we said instead, okay, God is a father is only one window into who God is. That's only one metaphor. It's not a literal statement. God's not a literal father like your physical father was. Now that's a window that gives us a picture of some aspects of who God is.

How about this? God is a safe place. Well, those people who need a safe place, there are some people who need a safe place a lot more than they need a father. It may be that as they come to know God as the place to whom they can go and be safe, that someday they will also come to the place, to the position of being able to say that God is also their father or their King or Lord or judge. Because the Bible uses images like these in order to help us grasp what we can't understand.

If you think of this, a metaphor is like a window, but unlike a normal window, you can't walk up to it and stick your head through and look all over the room. You can only look in from one position through a little narrow slot and through that narrow slot, you only get a very limited view of the room. Well, some rooms have five or six windows, so you can see slices of the room all over the place. You can never see the whole room. Even if you add them all up, you'll never see. You don't see the whole room. Think about this: God is an infinite room. So therefore all the metaphors in the Bible, if you read from Genesis to Revelation and wrote down every metaphor for God, you would not even

begin to exhaust the metaphorical possibilities for who the Lord is. The Psalmist's delight in exploring that so they're not just going to talk about God is a judge. Psalm 98 I said earlier in the first lecture that that's what Joy to the World is based on. What is the whole point of Psalm 98? That God comes as a judge. He's going to judge the world. So what happens? Creation responds by applauding, by worshiping and singing. We're called to respond by worshiping and singing because of what God has done, verses one through three of Psalm 98 because of what God is going to do as a judge. You say, well, wait a second, but that's not all God's going to do. He's also going to be a savior. That's right. He is going to be a deliverer. He's going to be everything the Bible says about him and much more than that beyond our wildest dreams. But that is one thing that he will be, that he is now, that he will be, just as he's also a safe place.

So, because that's true, David can play with all the kinds of safe places that he's known about and he can list them all in this, almost this symphony of safety. Part of his purpose is to overwhelm us with the idea that God is safer than anything you can imagine?

Well, we can think about there are lots of metaphors that are not just about God. I mean there are lots of metaphors about people. We're dust. We're plants. Think about all the verses like Psalm 90 where he says, the Psalm of Moses says that "In the morning, they're like grass that sprouts anew, in the morning it flourishes, and sprouts anew, toward evening it fades and withers away." People are plants. That's another metaphor. God is a safe place. People are plants. People are other things too, but people are plants. And you know what's true of plants? Plants grow. They become fruitful. They stop being fruitful, they die, they rot. Hey, sounds like a person, doesn't it? In fact, when he talks about that image of people as plants, as grass grows up in the morning and evening withers, he's actually combining two different fundamental foundational metaphors. One is that life is a day, sunrise to sunset that's all you get and people are plants. Now we could talk about, the kinds of plants in Israel that would grow up after a flash flood. They grow up and they sprout very quickly and in a week or two they're gone completely. You

wouldn't even know there've been there. They grow, they blossom, they get pollinated, they die. Well, yes, that's what he's talking about. The day there is metaphorical. But day is also a metaphor for life. So, think about this. If life is a day and at the end of the day we go to sleep, then maybe death is sleep. So, when the Bible talks about death as sleep. Jesus talking about a Lazarus in John 11 or Paul talking about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, they're not trying to soften the effects of death. That is what death is. What is death? We can't describe it. We don't know what it is. All we know is what it's not. It's not life. Right? Life stops. You're dead. Okay, now what? Well, we can't say anything more about it. So the metaphor of death is sleep gives us a handle and experience that we can tie to something that we can't experience.

Well, you understand I'm not talking theologically here. So then if life is a day, and sorry to point my finger, if life is a day and if death is sleep, when we go to sleep at night, you and I expect to wake up the next morning and the next morning then waking up is resurrection. It's a new day. In fact, we find out from Revelation, it's a new kind of day when there are going to be more nights.

So little bit of church history, trivia. The Greeks buried their dead in nekropoloi, cities of the dead, "nekros" is dead, "polis" is city, cities of the dead (nekropoloi). Christians started burying their dead and an early church father, I think it was Tertullian, I've never been able to trace this quote or this description, he said, "Christians do not bury their dead in nekropoloi. Christians bury their dead in crematoria, that is, "barracks" because Christians are soldiers who merely sleep waiting for the trumpet of their general, the Lord himself to call them to battle. And that's why Christians are buried in cemeteries, same word just taken over from Greek, not in nekropoloi. You see the metaphor of life as a day, death is sleep it's like the big dig in Boston, a tunnel that's under the city, which when it's finished, nobody will ever know it's there walking around on the surface. It's like the giant foundation of a huge skyscraper that's completely invisible, but without it, the skyscraper crumbles. The whole Bible is filled with those. And believe me, I could talk about them for hours and days, but I'm going to move on.

Psalm 1 [26:51-27:01]

I'd like to look briefly at Psalm 1. Psalm 1 I know is a very familiar Psalm and I'm only going to be able to point out a few things, but I want to show you what some of this begins to look like when we put together this looking closely at a text.

Psalm 1:1 [27:01-32:17]

Psalm 1 starts off very famously,

Bless it as the man

who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

stand in the path of sinner,

or sit in the seat of scoffers.

Let me suggest this. Those three sentences are parallel in English. They're parallel in Hebrew as well. There's a little bit of chiasm going on there, but basically they're parallel. They all use the same form of the verb. In fact, different verbs obviously.

I think that there is in this case, when we think about the metaphor that's involved in verse one, there's actually a slight mistranslation. There's a noun in the third line that's usually translated "seat." It's a noun. Moshav comes from a verb, yashav, which does often mean "to sit down." But the interesting thing about the noun is that only once or twice does it mean "seat." Almost every time it occurs in the Bible, it means a place where people live. It's usually translated "dwelling" or "dwellings." The verb that's translated "sit" can also mean "to dwell" or "settle" or "inhabit, settle down."

So what's going on in verse one? Maybe what he's talking about is this. Maybe the metaphor is life is a journey and where you end up depends on where you start out. So how do you start your journey? If you're going to take a trip tomorrow to a place where you've never been, you usually do it by, well, I guess today you go to Google and look for an online map, but we usually do it by looking up maps or asking people if you've ever been to Scranton or wherever it might be. What's the best way to get there? Well, look where this person starts or it doesn't start. He doesn't start by going to the wicked

and asking them for their advice. That's what counsel is advice. He doesn't start there. And because he doesn't start out with that kind of counsel on his journey, he doesn't end up moving along the path or the way that sinners go. When he gets to the place where he's going to settle down, he is not settling in a place inhabited by scoffers.

Now you could ask, is that really that important? I mean, what's the difference between settling down and sitting? Well, I think that sitting obviates the point of the metaphor, it blunts the metaphor. Instead, the metaphor that life is a journey reminds us that we are on a journey. You know, the reason for a foundational metaphor like life is a journey is you and I can't conceive of life, our lives. We can think of events, we can think of, hopes and aspirations and disappointments. We can think of accomplishments perhaps, but we can't really conceive of our life as a thing -- My life, your life. So instead we talk about life as a journey. We use it all the time. We say, "Oh, he took a real detour," or "that job was a dead end," or "she just hit a speed bump in her path." Or "where do you hope to end up?" "What's your goal?" "How are you going to get there?" We, the idea that life is a journey is so foundational to our way of thinking that we don't even realize it's a metaphor.

In fact, oftentimes if you read a book on poetry, which I highly recommend. I highly commend the idea of reading something that helps us read poems better. But if you read a book on poetry, they'll talk about dead metaphors. But in fact, metaphors aren't dead. That is a metaphor that's used so often we don't even realize it's a metaphor anymore. That means it's not dead. It's just submerged and the more dead it appears, the more important it is to the way that we think until the most basic ones are metaphors that we're not even aware of using.

I think that's what's happening in verse one. And the reason I think that is because if you look at verse six, verse six ends this way, or the poem ends this way, "for Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked perishes" or "is perishing" or "will perish." He's talking about a path of life. He's not just talking about a manner of life, but the actual path on which we walk. So the metaphor at the end reflects the metaphor at

the beginning. It's an inclusio just like we saw with Psalm 113 but a very different kind, isn't it? It's not the same words, it's just the same picture. It's the same foundational metaphor. But then he does something very interesting in Psalm 1 he switches and changes what he does.

Now I'm going to mix some Hebrew stuff in here. Sorry about that. It's just kind of the way it goes. Does this mean you can't understand the Psalms, if you don't know Hebrew? Well you can understand them, but I promise you don't appreciate them with the same way. So, you have life left, there's time to study, and if you think you can't do it, there are all sorts of little three and four year olds running around Jerusalem who speak Hebrew fluently. If they can do it at three and four, you can do it as an adult. So, okay, I know that's a smart aleck statement. Sorry.

Psalm 1:2 [32:18-34:06]

Verse two says, "but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night." Now, what's striking here is that he turns from what the person doesn't do to what the person does, and he does it in two different ways. That is there's a separation between verses one and two that occurs in actually three different ways. One way is just the content of the words, what we might call their semantic value there. If you go look up the words in the dictionary, the difference between wicked, sinners and scoffers and the law of the Lord. There's a big difference there. Well, in Hebrew, very often when you see the verb "is" or "was" or something like that in your English translation, there's no verb there. And that's true here in verse in line A of verse two. So we have three clauses in verse one with identical verbs, no verb in verse two that should say, "Whoa, there's a change there." Remember we talked about discontinuity, there's a break. And then when we find the verb "delights" in the second half of verse two that's a different conjugation of the verb. It's a different form of the verb. So that verse two is set off grammatically as well as by its content. Now you might also think, well, how am I supposed to know that in English, you're right, you can't know all of it in English. Some of these things are visible, some are invisible, and some of them depend on the translation

you're looking at. Different translations bring out different points. So he does tell us what this person does is to meditate or mutter or repeat or mumble or something like that. It is kind of an interesting word again to translate, but it seemed the reason it's translated "meditate" is it seems to have the idea of saying something to oneself or saying something under one's breath.

Psalm 1:3 [34:07-42:00]

But then we come to verse three and verse three gives us the outcome of verses one and two. And it does it in a very interesting way by means of a metaphor. The foundational metaphor here is that people are plants. Only this time he doesn't just call us grass. He says that that person is a tree and he's not just a tree. And again, here's a translation. It says, "you will be like a tree firmly planted" in this translation, "by streams of water." An interesting thing, the verb that's translated "firmly planted" only occurs a few times in the Bible. Almost every time it refers to taking a piece of a plant and moving it and planting it somewhere else or what we would call "transplanting," that is, deliberately moving a tree from one place to another so that it will grow. The second interesting thing about this sentence, this clause, is that the word translated "streams," or you might have "channels" or something is a word that usually is translated "canal" or it could also be translated "ditch." It's a stream used for irrigation. That is, it's not a natural stream. It's not a brook or a creek or something like that. There really aren't that many of those in Israel anyway. It's a deliberately dug trench that is put where it is made, where it is, in order to water plants. Now that suggests something.

Then I should say, he goes on, "he yields its fruit in its season, its leaf doesn't wither." So, he extends the metaphor by telling us about this tree. Whoa. Why does it yield its fruit in its season? Because it's cared for. So, notice this. The person who doesn't do those things, doesn't live the wrong life journey in verse one, but who meditates in Yahweh's law in teaching in verse two, has been transplanted into a place prepared for it so that it will grow. So that it will be safe from the changes and vicissitudes of weather. In fact, when it's there, it will yield its fruit at the right time and its leaves won't wither.

Now I see there's a bit of a cultural thing. In North America at least apple trees lose their leaves every fall, so do peach trees and I guess tangerine trees and things like that too. But if you're talking about other kinds of trees, like some citrus trees that grow in the tropics or a more tropical zone, or you're talking about most of the fruit trees of Canaan, Israel, Palestine, they stay green all year round. They don't drop their leaves. So when he says, its leaf does not wither, it doesn't mean that winter never comes. It means that it has enough water that if its leaves wither the tree is going to die, that's what it means in this culture. So, saying its leaf doesn't wither means the tree is not going to die because it's been provided for. So, the act then of meditating on what the Lord has said has the effect of transplanting a person into a place made so that they will live.

By the way, there's another foundational metaphor under there and that is the Lord is a gardener, right? That's all over the place too, right? Israel's a vine. Read the book of Ezekiel. How many times does the Lord plant a vine and he plants a piece of a cedar tree? Does it sound familiar at all that Jesus talking about himself as the vine and what is the Father going to do? "Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit will." So the image just underlies all. You see that's what I've found really exciting about thinking in terms of foundational metaphors rather than specific metaphors because the foundational metaphor suddenly lets you see way through the whole of Scripture and show how all these things that you kind of feel instinctively. Oh, they're somehow related. They are related. They're related by this foundation that lies underneath that even makes it possible to speak in those ways. And by the way, just incidentally, there's an even deeper foundational, a metaphor under God as a gardener and that is that God is a person because gardeners are people, right? So, and that goes into plays and out into all sorts of other roles as well. God is King, God is judge, God is ruler, God is warrior. God is all sorts of things.

Well let's move on a bit in Psalm 1, in verse three, it says this, and "whatever he does, he prospers." Now, I'm not going to argue about the theology of that for a moment because that's really not the purpose at the moment. You notice that in all of these

lectures, I'm really talking about trying to understand the psalm before trying to theologize or apply it. If our theology and if our application doesn't rise out of a sympathetic understanding of the text and in poetry, a really a self-conscious delight, I think in the text itself, that is even the way it's saying things and appreciation, then I think we're apt to misapply and miss theologize because we haven't really wrestled with what it's saying. We've sort of taken away an impression. It's clear to go back to T. S. Eliot's, balancing act.

But here in verse three, very interesting, Hebrew has a whole bunch of ways of making verbs. I don't know how to explain this quickly but in English we use helping verbs. So we say we can say, "John threw the ball to Bill" or "the ball was thrown to Bill by John." So we want to make something passive "was thrown." We take the verb to be and stick a form of it on, in front of the other verb. That's real crude. But that's kind of the idea. Hebrew doesn't do that. Instead they kind of, they change the vowels a little bit and we do that a bit in English. So we say "run" versus "ran" or "swim" versus "swam." We change the vowel, but we do it to change the verb tense. Hebrew does it, and this is very unfair, so if you know Hebrew, you'll know that I'm cheating, but Hebrew does it by changing the function of the verb by changing the vowels and adding letters on the front and the back. Well, all of the verbs in Psalm 1 except one are the same, what we call, stem. That is, they have the same basic pattern of vowels. The exception is this verb at the end of verse three. And the reason, and this name doesn't really matter, the point is we have one verb that stands out from all the rest by virtue of its form. And that verb happens to come at the end of the first section of the psalm, which has been describing this blessed man. That's another kind of discontinuity that is, I admit, invisible in English, but very obvious in Hebrew. That shows us that the break between verses three and four, what we know is verses three and four is intentional, deliberate. It says it's actually built into the very fabric of the grammar of the psalm, of the poem itself.

Psalm 1:4-5 [42:01-42:48]

Then the poet goes on and he again picks up the idea that people are plants by

talking about the wicked as chaff. The other kind of plant, the thing that you don't care about, you want the wind to drive it away. You don't want it on you because it's sticky and itchy. If you've ever stood behind a wheat combine, you know just what it's like.

And then he says, "the wicked won't stand in the judgment or sinners in the assembly of the righteous." And here you see, we have to guess a little bit. We don't really know. Does that mean when is he using the word "stand" does he actually mean to stand up? Does that mean if you're innocent, you stood up in court? But at least what he's saying is he switching metaphors now to say that there is a judge, maybe God is a judge and maybe people are the accused.

Psalm 1:6 [42:50-44:06]

And then at the end, as I said, we come back to this picture. "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked perishes." And again, in Hebrew, this verse is another, one of those chiasms. It says, "for he knows, the Lord, the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked perishes". So the verb/verb and in fact what is so cool this is almost inexpressible. The verb form that he uses at the beginning of verse six is a participle, which sounds like this O-ey. Those are the vowels. O-ey The verb that he uses at the end is a verb that says tovade (perish), same vowels, but not a participle though. So why does he use a participle? In fact, that's only the second participle he's used in the whole psalm. In fact, it's the only predicate participle that is used as a verb in the whole psalm. Why does he use a participle there instead of an imperfect or something else that he could have used and why he does use it in the last verse. Is there some difference the way God's knowing and the perishing? Or is it that he wanted the sound to be the same. I'm on shaky ground here because you know, the vowels are added much later, but at least we ought to think about that. It's so carefully arranged. There seems to be, I think we have to say, there's some purpose to it.

Patience in Reading a Poem [44:11-48:07]

Well, let me close. I have about two minutes. Let me close by saying this. I had

intended, I thought I'd have a little more time, but I had intended to read a poem to you and then tell you that I spent three years thinking about this poem before I began to understand it. I'm not going to read it to you. That poem was by William Butler Yeats there are some others by Gerard Manley Hopkins, another wonderful Christian poet of the 19th century that I have read many, many, many times in order to try to understand them.

Here's a question. What is the role of patience in understanding the Bible? The presence of poetry says, slow down, think, reflect, imagine. God communicates with us this way because he knows first of all, that it's just a better way to communicate some ideas. Secondly, it's a better way to communicate with some people. But he also knows that he can communicate in this way for our good. It forces us to spend time thinking.

That is in the long run, you may say, "well, I can't remember all these things you've been talking about parallelism, structures and genre or I just can't." Okay, don't worry about any of it. Just do this. Write out the poem on a sheet of paper with a blank line between every line and then just look at it. Read it out loud every day, two or three times a day for a month or a week, if you don't have the patience. Then start making notes every time you see, Oh, this word sounds like that word use colored pencils. Start drawing lines. Start seeing connections and what will happen and is that you all see that the beauty of the text is the beauty also of its message. That's the blessing, the great blessing, of being privileged to read and study and seek to understand the word of God. Thank you.

This is poem that I have spent about three years reading on and off before I finally began to understand it, and actually, only then when I'd memorized it. I don't have it in memory anymore. "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats.

Turning and turning and the widening gyre
 The Falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all resolution, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the second coming is at hand.
 The second coming! Hardly are those words out,
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi,
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert,
 A shape with a lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Real shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

William Butler Yeats.

This was Dr. Fred Putnam's fourth and final presentation on the book of Psalms.

[48:08]