

Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Lecture 1

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Hello, welcome to our library. My name is Fred Putnam. I'm 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, which means praises. And so both of those, Psalms or Psalterion, which means poems that are sung to the music of a psalter or a sort of small harp, is how the Greeks interpreted it. And praises is how the rabbis thought of it.

And those two titles give us a rough idea of what we have. About a hundred fifty poems were written over a period of several hundred years and that are made up of various types of poetry. I say about a hundred fifty 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 psalms. And 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's talking about the Vulgate. For example, if you're reading the Catholic Encyclopedia, the psalm numbers might be different. And so they're talking about a verse and you think that's not what this says.

And you're right. It's not what the verse that you're looking at says if you're looking at a Protestant Bible. So, beware 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 psalm of David or by the sons of Korah or something like that, that is in most English translations is actually verse one. And 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 verses or the Hebrew verses? Because otherwise, it can be rather frustrating as you can imagine. 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 prayers addressed to God. The other 60 are prayers about the Lord, but they don't really address him.

Or sometimes there are about five or six where the first 10 verses will be about God and then the very last verse says, and you will Lord confirm the work of our hands or something like that. But about 60% of the Psalter is made up of prayers and 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 Psalms that we could say are happy, Psalms of worship and praise, like Psalm 29, ascribe to the Lord, O 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. Or Psalm 100, which maybe you sang in church as old one hundredth, all people that on earth do dwell sing to 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 Psalms 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 you hide yourself in times of trouble? The wicked in pride, the wicked pursue the afflicted.

Let them be caught in their plots. And so, the Psalmist says, Lord, I'm in trouble, help me. And then he asks, gives, 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, and I will pay the vows that I promised and I'll testify to your goodness. And probably a third of the Psalter is like that. About 50 to 55 of the Psalms, of the poems might be considered these sad or prayerful poems.

Then there's another fairly large group that is 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 a plea for help.

It's about the Lord. It's not addressed to him. And 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.

And so, he writes a poem in order to explore that idea. And there are quite a few poems like that. Psalm 2 is sort of the same thing.

Psalm 19, a very famous poem about the word of God. Or Psalm 119 is like that as well. Psalm 121, which we'll look at in a bit.

So, we have sort of these reflective or meditative or instructional, maybe, we might want to think of them in that way. 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 self-contained independent units. But when we look at the whole Psalter and look at the titles of the Psalms that I referred to a minute ago, when we look at the types of Psalms 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 just 150 poems that somebody found and stuck together and said, okay, we'll keep these and make that into our Psalter. Now, traditionally, the Psalter is divided into five books. Psalms 1 to 41, Psalms 42 to 72, 73 to 89, 90 to 106, and 107 to 150.

And almost any translation that you look at will say before, say Psalm 43, it will say book two. 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, even before the time of Christ.

So those are very old divisions. And when we look at those divisions, we find out that they themselves are not haphazard. So, for example, in book one out of 41 Psalms, 38 of them, the title says, 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 Eitan 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.

The preposition that's used there in Hebrew can be used, it's by far the most common preposition in the Bible, and it can be used in many, many different ways. Just like if you ever have the opportunity to look up the word to in 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 all those possibilities.

We just talk, and speak the language. In the same way, the preposition that is translated a Psalm of David, the of, is this preposition that's usually translated to or for in the preposition in Hebrew that's 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, and in light of the tradition, the old tradition, that this preposition is actually being used to show authorship, 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 in the time of the united monarchy under David and Solomon, and 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 Psalm 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 Psalms in the same order. 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 a hymn book, for example, that 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, etc. But it's a selection.

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 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, Psalms 73 to 106, only three Psalms are ascribed to David. And 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, 137 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 two, and since they end with the phrase that prayers of David son of Jesse are ended, at the end of Psalm 72, suggests that that was a collection unto itself. And then the other Psalms were collected sometime later.

On the other hand, we look at books two and three and between Psalms 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 Church Chronicles. Again, they're little collections, they all come in a row, or maybe there's one 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, sons of Korah, sons of Korah, which shows that somebody sat down and decided that these Psalms belong together because of this title.

Then we find the same thing in book three. Another big chunk is that they are written by Asaph, the Psalms of Asaph. So that actually, in that third book, the sons of Korah and Asaph write 15 out of 17 Psalms.

Whereas David only wrote one, whereas he wrote the bulk of the first couple of books. And we also find that the shape of the Psalter is shaped by the 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 there, Psalm 1, Psalm 2, and Psalm 33. There are four orphan Psalms in book two.

There are none in book three. And then in books four and five, there are 42 orphan Psalms. And it's 14 in book four, and 28 in book five.

So, we find that Psalms with authors are in the beginning and Psalms 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 rescues us. Lord, please save me from my enemies. And only a few, about 20 or so, are happy or praise Psalms 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 or confidence and adoration. And that 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 Psalms of praise for God's works of creation and of salvation or redemption or victory. And what's even more striking is that that same movement from desperation to confidence or from prayer to praise is found in almost all of the Psalms that are prayers. So that, for example, Psalm 18, begins by saying, I love you, O Lord, my strength, and we'll look at that in a minute.

It goes on quickly to say, the cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of ungodliness terrified me, the cords 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. And the end of the Psalm, David has flip-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 are 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. 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, and by the way, this is just a free aside, the word is translated as song and sing.

The noun and the verb are translated as song and sing, but we don't really know if they mean song or sing in the way we think of them. It's almost certain that it did not sound like Mozart. It 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 listen 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 3,000 years. We really don't know what the performance would have sounded like.

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 psalm 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. Sometimes I think that it would be much more helpful to our thinking about it if we're trying to, in reading the Bible, we're trying 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, and read 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 sings the song, she chants it as we find in 1 Samuel chapter 2. 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 in the days of Nehemiah, which you remember is 500 years after David. So, a big gap of time.

But in the days of Nehemiah, there is at the dedication of the wall, two choirs 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 difficult for us to know that exactly.

We do have 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 ends, then he has the incident with Michal who made fun of him for dancing and he says that he would not act as a husband toward her anymore. And then the story ends.

But here in 1 Chronicles 16, the chronicler is much more interested in worship than the author of Samuel. And so, he goes into great detail about the three choirs and the choir directors and the instrumentalists and who was playing what, and 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 8, we have a song that David told them to sing.

Verse 7 says, then on that day, David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to Yahweh. And then begins a poem that goes down through verse 36. Begins, O, give thanks to Yahweh, call upon his name, make known his 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.

And 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, he doesn't go quite to the end. He just stopped. I don't know why he stops there, but he just goes that far.

And then down in verse 34, verse 34 is the first verse of Psalm 106. And verse 35 is the last verse, 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 the last verse. You're supposed to understand they sang the whole thing.

Or did they really just sing the first and the last verses? Don't really know. It's kind of intriguing though, but we don't really know. And then verse 36 is the same as Psalm 72, 18.

So 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. And that's the only evidence that we have of how the Psalms themselves were used in Israel's worship. And 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. 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 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 sons 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 were apparently written for that occasion or composed for that occasion and written down later. So, we have to say that although it will be very common in study Bibles and commentaries to read that this Psalm 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 Psalms were used, Psalms 105, 96, and 106, and perhaps 72 were used as hymns of celebration.

But beyond that, we don't really know. Sometimes you'll read people talk about, for example, the penitential Psalms. There are seven of those, Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, Psalm 51, Psalm 102, Psalm 130, Psalm 143.

Well, we don't really know. Again, I'm sorry if it sounds 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 Cassiodorus. Some people say, no, it was a rabbinic tradition.

But there's not much evidence for that. And 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 Psalms 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. It's not like somebody saying, I'm going to write another penitential Psalm or where 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 Psalms.

The same ideas keep coming up. Some people call Psalms 120 to 134 pilgrim Psalms or their translation in the title is usually a song of assents. Well, the tricky part there is that the word that's translated assent 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. 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? And Hezekiah asked that the sun would go back six steps.

Well, that's what he's talking about a dial like that, that the sun, as the sun went back in the sky, the shadow would go up the dial. Well, maybe Psalms 120 to 134 are really written to be read, to be read or chanted or used at different periods of the day. So, there are 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 set 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, etc. So, it's a very interesting phenomenon that somebody comes up with an idea, oh, this is how these were used and 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. And so, when we read statements like these are the Psalms 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? 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 which name for God is being used.

So in the first part of the Psalter, Psalms 1 to 41 and then 84 to 150, 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. And then in Psalms 42 to 83, the word God is the word that is 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 a small lowercase o r d, but L and then the small-cap O R D, which is actually the Lord's name Yahweh. So, the Psalter is arranged that way as well.

The Yahweh section and Elohim section, the standard word for God all throughout the ancient Near East and then another Yahweh section. And there are Hallelujah Psalms. The word Hallelujah only doesn't occur until Psalm 104.

It occurs in three Psalms, 104, 105, and 106. Then it occurs in 111 through 117. And then it doesn't occur to 146 to 150.

Pretty clearly, they seem, somebody 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. Now, that means that it's not haphazard.

Let's think of it, let's use, let me 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 going 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? Are they going to be grouped alphabetically by first word? Are they 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. And 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. Houseman 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 come 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 Psalm 100. Psalm 29 is an exception to that. And there are a few other exceptions, but the bulk of them come in that little group of Psalms.

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'd see that there are lots more connections. It's not just the idea that the Lord is king, but there are about 12 Psalms there that are very, very tightly interwoven thematically in 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.

And 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, and 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 this poem explores 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 and by replacing them with biblical ways of reflecting and meditating on that. So 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. Or he talks about in Romans 12, that we don't let the world press us into its mold, but we renew our minds. Well, how do we do that? Well, we learn to think differently.

We learn to conceive of the world ourselves and the world and our role in it, and therefore the Lord himself in a different way. 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, 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.

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 meditations, reflections, or calls to praise. 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. Sometimes our way of thinking about him is primarily by talking to him. 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, or by picking some little aspect of reality, such as God communicates with us. What does Psalm 19 say about that? He communicates with us through everything that's created.

He communicates with us through his word. So, 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.

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, and, if you'll excuse the word, played with it. He said, what does this really mean? Let's think about this.

I'm not going to read Psalm 19. You can read it yourself and 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.