

Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Lecture 3

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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, *Water 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, *water heavy, water brief, water frail, water deep*, the pattern of questions, successive questions, leads us with each line to expect a question for the next line. And we can look at patterns on very small scale and patterns on a very large scale. In talking about biblical poetry and looking at a great deal of what appears to be maybe mental stutters, that is, the poets seem 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. And 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. And 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 *A, B, B, A*. So the first line is *A* and the second line is *B*, ends with a word that sounds like, that we'll call *B* and goes *A, B, B, A*, and that pattern is repeated.

So, the first and fourth lines sound alike, the second and third lines sound alike, and then the fifth and eighth and etc. Well, in English poetry, rhyme is therefore often an organizing method. It's a tool that can be used to organize a poem by showing us which lines go together.

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

What is this? Well, this is 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 can 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 Luth 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. That's very rare.

Usually, it's two, sometimes three. And Luth said there are three kinds of these relationships between lines. Sometimes they're saying the same thing, like these examples in Psalm 1. In fact, that's 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 father's grief, mother's grief, sorry.

So, the same, you know, the two lines contrast with each other. The contrast in 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. And then there are many cases in the Bible where there is no parallelism.

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.

In Hebrew, they're quite short. So in Hebrew, the average number of words per proverb is 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 believe in 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 consist of two parallel lines. So verse three, let us tear their fetters apart and let us cast their cords away from us.

Verse four, and verse five, do 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.

And 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 we've come to the end of a 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. And 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, and 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 this 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 when we read a poem, 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? And part of that submission is to learn to think the poet's thoughts after him or after her.

Let me change venues for just a moment. Let's say that you're going to lead a Bible study or preach a sermon or 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, I don't remember the order that I gave those verses 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, 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. 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 single sentences. 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, okay, down here, the name of the Lord is to be praised. Ooh, those things are parallel.

And look at the two middle lines, two B and three A, 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? You see what he just did? He just took this idea that God should be praised everywhere and always.

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 think, 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 or a chiasm.

Because when you arrange it in a certain way and draw lines connecting things, it makes the letter chi, which in Greek looks like our X. And so, people call something like this a chiasm or 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, do 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.

Like that iambic. It will be arranged with a certain logical structure of eight lines that set forth a problem, a question, or a situation and six lines that resolve it or explain it. Or 12 lines, the other kind of sonnet, 12 lines that set forth a problem and two lines that kind of encapsulate it or 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 right, the same length, otherwise it doesn't sound right, 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 decide to write a sonnet, and submit themselves to that torture? Well, part of it is, that 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.

If you look at Psalm 114, it's a short psalm, with 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 to 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 mountains 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 skip like rams, hills like lambs. Tremble earth before 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, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language doesn't say the house of Jacob went forth from a 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 when Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob scurried out by midnight after the plague of the death of the firstborn from a people of strange language. He doesn't say that. He just says went out.

Or Judah became his sanctuary. Israel 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 that's, you know, 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 supplied a verb in the second line. So we look at this, and we look at this psalm a little more, we see that verses three and four are reflected in verses five and six.

So, in verses three and four, the sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back, the mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like lambs. What ails you? What's with you? See that you flee, see, goes back to 3a. 5b goes with 3b, 6a and 6b go with 4a and 4b.

And they're, 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 Loth's, Bishop Lowth, or Archbishop Lowth's terminology, the terminology is not really the point. In fact, sometimes that 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 in 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 $a + b = \text{either } a, b, \text{ or } c$, something new. But instead, it's a single statement that is comprised of two parts.

So, 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 the parallel, 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 biblical text, 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, whatever else it might be.

So, we're trying to ask, what is the relationship between these? What does the second line add to the first line? Or what does the first line, 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, or I'm mixing my metaphors, 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 even, 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, 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 the other, 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 a people of strange language, the house of Jacob from Egypt? Is there 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 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 not 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 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. So, if you go back to 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, they're 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, okay, 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 cop out, folks. We can't say that. Because poets don't do things arbitrarily.

I think that sometimes we can 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 this is 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 and line length and structure? And she says, Well, you know when a poet works, it's actually the right brain and forming 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 that are in fact integral to the nature of the meat of the poem's meaning because they're part of its structure.

And remember, we're thinking about structure because we want to think the way the poet thinks 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 two, 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. Well, there are other things that then break verse four, because if you read on, you say that 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 and etc. 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, okay, 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 A B B A 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 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 of 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. And verse three, four, five, go on to a different kind of parallelism where it's just it would if we did the verb, the subject-verb object thing, it would just be A B C, A B C, A B C, they're just they're the same.

There's no more chiasm. The accident? No, no. The poet knew exactly what he was, we may not know exactly why he was doing it.

But he was doing it very, very intentionally. And you see, that's part, part of reading a poem is just to say, Whoa, that's really cool. That's a legitimate response to poetry.

And then to start and then we say, why is it cool? And 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 what might underlie this. Let me

show you one more kind of repetition, and then I'll move on to, to little 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. And what these psalms all have in common is that they have the word Hallelujah, which means praise Yah, which is a short word 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 parallel. I mean, it is parallelism because they're parallel, but it's actually repetition, which means 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 ends, bless the Lord, O my soul. Why would the poet do that? Think about this.

The first time, or when we read Psalm 113, 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 gives 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 meaning, 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 songs of

praise, these psalms 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 that say, 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. What God has done for me, what God has done for us, that's why we praise him.

Sometimes it's because of creation, the work of creation. Much of the time, it's actually the work of salvation or deliverance. And 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. And 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. Some are written in Hebrew and some are written in Greek, but it's all one.

So, we look at the relationship between lines in order to talk about, in order to force ourselves, 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, combine them, to say that. And remember that we don't separate them. We don't just read one line like, 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 a higher profile than they do if they're just standing by themselves. And shows us the consequences, not just of one kind of behavior, but of both.

In the same way in Psalms, the things that we read that are in parallel to each other, combine to give us a meaning greater than the meaning of either one, or both of them taken individually. Now, when we look at structures, if we were to go through and analyze, and 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 Psalms that start off with, in translation, usually, O, Lord, or O, God, or O, my God.

That call, basically, calls 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 forever.

So, 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 enemies 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 shaken. It's not exact parallelism, but it's very close, and 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, 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 really long one. That's part of the function of long lines is to close things off. So, in 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 say, I will sing to the Lord because he's dealt bountifully with me, dealt well with me. And in the space of six verses, gone through this outline from an address or invocation, an invocation is to call someone, to call to someone, to invite them, to a plea for help, to his reasons for the plea, why God's 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 brethren, in the company of my brethren concerning the Lord's goodness to me.

So, all sorts of promises, all sorts of... 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? 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 to one of the values of even noticing outlines like this. And that is we can compare two or three psalms that have the same pattern.

And we noticed that in one psalm, the reasons, and the motivation are five or 10 verses long. In another psalm, the complaint is the part that's 10 verses long. In another psalm, the promise at the end goes on and on and on and on and on.

All the things the 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. And 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 it, Oxford has published a nice little book called *The Book of Sonnets*. If you were to get it and read through it, and you 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? Why? 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.

And 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 at the beginning of Psalm 2. Well, that's how poetry communicates. 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 are 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.

Well, Psalm 150 has a different emphasis than Psalm 148, where the emphasis in Psalm 148 is on who's doing the praising. 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 see that we don't just have 150 Psalms, but we actually have 150 poems that fall into general types that let us then look at each other, look at them individually in light of each other within that type and see how each one of them functions, 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.