

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Lecture 16

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This is Dr. Bruce Waltke in his teaching on the book of Psalms. This is session number 16, Petition Psalms, Lament, Psalm 22.

I point you in the notes where I discuss the Elohist Psalter and that's on page 332 of your notes. On page 332, I give you the data and some suggestions on how to understand it. So, I begin with the data. There are striking statistical contrasts between the use of I Am and Elohim in the rest of the Psalter, that is between Psalms 42 through 83, which is the Elohist Psalter and the rest of the Psalter.

So, for example, in Psalms 1 through 41 and 84 through 150, I Am is used in those sections 584 times and Elohim is used 94 times. In Psalms 42 through 83, the Elohist Psalter, I Am is used 45 times and Elohim 210 times. So, you can see there's a tremendous change in the use of the divine name.

Again, on page 335, given the data, most occurrences of the alternate are due to parallelism. In 1 through 44 and 84 through 150, I Am is in the A verse set, and Elohim in the B verse set. In 42 through 83, it's exactly reserved, reversed that Elohim is in the A verse set and I Am is in the B verse set.

In fact, in synoptic material, for example, if you want to see this, take a look at Psalm 14 in the first book. You could do this in several places. I'm going to give you the data there.

Psalm 14, where the fool has said in his heart, there is no God and they are corrupt. Verse 2, the Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God, and so forth. Now that was verse 2. Now turn over to Psalm 53, which is in the Elohist Psalter.

I can't find it here. 53, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt and their ways are vile.

There is no one who does good, but now note the change. God looks down from heaven. You see the change instead of I Am or the Lord in Psalm 14, now it is God.

It's that kind of change that we get that I think it's very legitimate to recognize that Psalms 42 through 83, for some reason are changing and giving priority to the transcending God over the covenant-keeping God. Now, having had that data and trying to understand what is going on, this is fairly new research on this. I turn now to page 334 and F and there are 42 Psalms and it begins with Psalm 42.

I note the number 42 figures prominently in ancient Near Eastern collections of poetry. And in this collection, there are 42 Psalms and it begins with Psalm 42. I say elsewhere in the Old Testament, the numeral 42 is used in the context of judgment, of premature death.

This would be of the Ephraimites. Oh, this is at the crossing of the Jordan. This is in the thousands.

I'm on page 334. And I'm showing that where it refers to premature death. It is used of the Ephraimites who couldn't say Shibboleth.

And I think it is 42,000 are put to death, premature death. Again, it's used of the children, 42 children. It's used of the relatives of Ahaziah.

There are 42 who are put to death. I think it has some bearing on the tribulation in the symbolic tribulation. I take it literally when you have the half year of 42 months.

I think it all fits together. I suspect, therefore, that may be, because it's going to deal with the destruction of Jerusalem. I think it may be, and it may be that behind it is the premature or the death of Jerusalem in the exile.

The other part of it is, is they're going to come out of the exile and there's going to be salvation behind it. So, I think this is very dark, it tends to be dark. Psalm 51 fits somewhat within it to say, God can forgive.

When the nation repents, God can forgive. That gives you another dimension to our understanding. Those are at least as far as I have come in my thinking about this matter.

All right. Now we're on page 188 and we're going to do another lament psalm, individual lament. So, we did the individual lament, the very first one, Psalm 3. We took a very distinctive kind of lament in the penitential psalm, lamenting sin, Psalm 51.

I thought, well, we could also combine here a messianic psalm, clearly messianic that this psalm is portraying Jesus Christ and his death. It's a psalm that Jesus took upon his lips when he was upon the cross. We are on very holy ground.

It was clearly on the lips of our Lord as he was dying. It is the fourth of the seven words of our Lord upon the cross. I give you the seven words upon the cross, beginning with, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

And ending, Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit. And in the middle, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that's the fourth psalm of the seven.

And this saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me stumbles many people because it seems as though Jesus is saying, I've lost the course.

God, abandon me. I quote here, but God in his grace has entrusted to me, I think, I don't know, thousands of students. I've been teaching since 1958 and God has entrusted to my care.

I think, who knows, I don't know all, 15 to 20,000 in the classroom. And by God's grace, I think those who have defected from the faith are less than five. This represents one of those students.

This psalm stumbled him. So, he walked away from his faith. What he was that regent, I never thought he really had faith to tell you the truth, but he had made a profession of faith and he walked away from it.

But even in class, I could tell he was somewhat skeptical. I gave you his letter and he wanted to argue with me. I think once you've tasted the things of God and you turn your back on it, I don't think there's any hope for you.

I don't think you can crucify the Son of God afresh. I don't think you can come back. If we deny him, though we are unfaithful, he abides faithful.

But if we deny him or disown him, he will deny and disown us. John says, there is a prayer. I said, for a certain sin, which is where you abandon God after you accept him.

I say, don't pray for that one. That's how I understand 1 John. Well, I suspect my poor student is in that state.

So, there are certain things where I wouldn't debate. And I just see it as a lost cause. If you're going to know it's just going to start a quarrel and this is not going to do any good, the sage tells you drop the matter before it gets worse and the whole dam gets broken and you unleash a flood.

I think if you know that a person cannot be corrected and they're just going to come back, don't make it worse. So, you have to use some discernment here to know that's the case. Okay.

We're on page 190 and you can see it's a long psalm. What I'll do is the same as I did with Psalm 3 and 51 without going into all the notes. All the notes are there.

We'll just look at the psalm and comment on it as we go along. Okay. So, we begin.

It's a psalm by David. In this particular psalm, all the psalms by David speak of Christ in different ways. They speak of Christ in just by type.

He is a type of Christ. That's the king. And that's typical.

Another kind is this one. They speak of Christ. He's a type of Christ, but he uses language that is prophetic.

He uses language that transcends his own experience. The details of this psalm do not match the life of David, but they match the life of Jesus or the cross particularly. So, these are typical prophetic psalms.

There's only one psalm I think may be purely prophetic and that's Psalm 110. So, mostly it's typology. You have this one, the language is so astounding that it's typically prophetic.

He's using language that transcends his own experience. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why is it far from saving me from the words of my roaring? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer by night and I'm not silent. There's no cessation, no answer.

Yet you are the Holy One, the one enthroned on the praises of Israel. And you, our fathers put their trust. They trusted and you delivered them.

To you, they cried out and were saved. And you were, they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mortals, despised by the people.

All who see me mock me. They split open their lips. They shake their heads.

Commit yourself to I Am. Let I Am rescue him. Let him deliver him.

Sure, he delights in him. Surely you are the one who brought me out of the womb. The one who caused me to trust at my mother's breast.

From the womb, I was cast upon you. From mother's belly, you are my God. Do not be far from me for trouble is near.

Surely there is none to help. Many bulls surround me, strong bulls of shine encircle me. Lions tearing their prey and roaring open their mouths wide against me.

I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax. It is melted away within me.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue is made to stick to the roof of my mouth. And you lay me in the dust of death. Surely dogs surround me.

A band of evil men encircle me. They bore holes in my hands and my feet. I can count on my bones.

People stare and they gloat over me. They distribute my clothes among them and cast lots for my garments. But you I am, do not be far off.

My help come quickly to help me, deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Save me from the mouths of the lions. Answer me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my brothers in the congregation. I will praise you. Those who fear I am, praise him.

All you seed of Jacob, honor him, revere him, all you seed of Israel. But he is not despised. He has not abhorred the suffering of the afflicted one.

He has not hidden his face from him. But when he cried to him for help, he listened. From you comes my act of praising you in the great assembly.

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear you. Let the poor eat and be sated. Let those who seek I am, praise him.

Let your hearts live forever. May all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the Lord and all the clans of the nations bow down before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord as ruler over the nations.

May all the rich of the earth, all the rich of the earth bow down to him. Before him, all who go down to the dust will kneel, those who did not preserve their lives. May their seed serve them.

May it be told to their generation about the Lord of all. May they come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn. May they say, surely, he has acted.

I think you could see this is obviously a lament psalm. It's not a complaint. It's a true lament.

It has all the motifs again. Notice how it begins with the address, my God, my God. The lament is a mixture of lament and confidence and praise.

That runs from verses one through 10. It's a mixture. It begins with lament and then he moves into confidence and praise.

Then you have lament and he moves into confidence and praise. It's a mixture and that's in verses one through 10. Verse 11, I would argue is a transitional verse that puts that lament together with the petition that will follow.

Do not be far from me for trouble is near. Surely there is none to help. And then you get seven verses 12 through 18.

You have seven verses 12 through 18, in which he truly laments and describes his situation. Then that's followed by three verses of petition and they are united. That lament and petition are united in various ways.

That's then after verse 12, you go from verse 12 through verse 21 and you get 10 verses of this lament with petition. I think you could see you shift to praise in verse 22. I would declare your name to my brothers.

And he's in praise. That runs from 22 through 31. So it falls into three stanzas, one through 10, transition 11, 12 through 21, and 22 through 31.

So, you have 10, 10, 10. The point is in the midst of this horrible situation that he finds himself in, he's able to compose with great symmetry. His emotions are not out of hand in the lament.

With that broad viewpoint on it, let's look then at the first stanza, which is a mixture of lament and confidence and praise. That falls into two stanzas, verses one through five and verses six through 10. In the first stanza, he is abandoned by God.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? In the second stanza, he's abandoned by people. All who see me mock me split out the lip. And so he's abandoned by God and he's abandoned by people.

I'm a worm and not a man scorned by mortals and despised by the people. In the first stanza, he finds his confidence in God's past faithfulness to the fathers. Yet you are the Holy One, the one in verse three, the one enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you, our fathers put their trust. They trusted and you delivered them. In the second stanza, his confidence is not bolstered by God's past faithfulness to the fathers, but by God's past faithfulness to himself.

That is in verse nine. You were the one who brought me out of the womb, the one who caused me to trust at my mother's breast. So, our fathers trusted in you and now you caused me to trust.

So, we have these two stanzas that are cyclical of lament and confidence, lament and confidence. And you could see it's alternating parallelism, A, B, A' B'. And yet there's escalation where he's been abandoned by God.

He's abandoned by people. He found confidence in his fathers who trusted and now he finds confidence in himself, in God's past faithfulness to him as he trusted in him. And he never knew a moment when he didn't trust who was from his mother's womb.

Okay. So that gives the overview. You've got five.

Now I had 10 verses and now I got five and five. And if you look at it, I have two verses of lament, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then three verses of praise. And then it turns around that you have three verses of lament and two verses of confidence.

The psalmist is in total control. He hasn't lost him, his emotions have not overwhelmed him. He's totally rational and yet very passionate.

It's amazing to compose a psalm like this. And it's this one, and this is what Jesus is using on the cross. And when he picks up a word out of his psalm, you have to keep in mind the entire psalm.

So, this is his fourth word, but he is reciting, I take it, this psalm upon the cross. It all fits him precisely because they are mocking him as we find it. All who see me despise me.

They mock me. They say the Lord delighted him, let him delight in him. And they shake their heads.

And all of that is picked up exactly. Matthew describes the crucifixion scene in the terms of the psalm. But I think the psalm is predicting what really was at the cross.

So, looking then at verses one through five with these two circles, he says, my God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, but by night, and then I'm sad. In other words, it seems like all the time, I mean, this wouldn't be totally perfect with the cries, but day and night constantly I'm crying out and you seemingly have abandoned me in the midst of it. I'm saying that is normative Christian experience.

As we discussed the psalm, you find them, how long, O Lord? And you go through those experiences, as I said, where you knock on the door until your knuckles are

bloody raw. Nobody opens the door and the lights are out upstairs. And that's what he's feeling.

So, Christ has been tested at all points as we have been. One of them is the testing where you feel abandoned by God. And he went through that experience with us.

We're not alone. And while he went through it, he was tested with us, yet he did not sin. So, he gives honest expression, but you can see it's with full confidence and it's going to end with praise.

It's a doxological comment. And that's the difference. It fits it perfectly.

Verses three through five, the past faithfulness of God is a great track record. Yet you are the Holy One, totally other, the one enthroned on the praises of Israel, God is spirit. And so it's pictured as we offer up our spiritual praises, God sits enthroned on our praises.

Glorious. To you, they cried out and were saved. In you, they trusted and were not put to shame.

Now having that first unit, he now takes up himself. But I am a worm utterly that is in the eyes of other people. I don't even appear, I'm not even treated or thought of as a human being and not appear.

I don't know how to push that. But, you know, on the cross, he was so marred. He no longer looked human.

You got something of that Mel Gibson's movie, The Passions of the Christ, that he no longer looked human. He was so marred. And that's what Isaiah predicted of him.

He was so marred that he said, I'm not a man. I'm just a worm and horrible. People ask me if that's really true.

I say, I think it was even worse than what I know. There are things about the cross that I've read that I don't even want to discuss in public. It's so horrible.

And they mock him. Verse 7, they're scorned, despised. All who see me mock me.

They can't keep it in. Their betrayal has to come out. They split open their lips.

They shake their heads in mockery. Then they acknowledge he's without sin. Commit yourself to I Am.

Let him rescue him. Let him deliver him. Surely, he delights in him.

They found no sin in him. And now his own self-confidence from his own experience. Surely you are the one who brought me out of the womb.

The one who caused me to trust at my mother's breast. I ask him in the notes how different things might've been if his mother had not been married and he drank the milk of her faith. I still remember nursing as a child.

I remember I think I was drinking not only my mother's milk, I think I was drinking her faith and her love. It became part of your being. And that's it.

You caused me to trust from the womb I was cast upon you. From my mother's belly, you are my God. So, he never knew a moment without faith.

I know many people who never knew a moment, who grew up in a Christian home, Christian faith, and never had a moment of unbelief. I don't think I ever had a moment of real unbelief growing up. There was a point where I recognized I was a sinner in need of a savior.

Now he moves to the lament itself and he uses it, and this too falls into two cycles. First of all, he describes the enemies in zoomorphic terms. 12, they are bulls, 13, they are lions.

And then after two, he comes back to his own experience. And it says I am poured out like water. My heart is turned to wax, but my strength is dried up.

And then after those verses, he turns again to this zoomorphic imagery. Now the enemy is likened to dogs. Then he turns to his own personal experience.

I can count on my bones. So, now using these terms, when he says, many bulls surround me, strong bulls of Bashan, they are extremely rich, well fed, and exceedingly strong. He's no match for strong bulls.

Can you imagine yourself being surrounded by strong bulls breathing down on you? That's how he sees the enemy all around him at the cross, the Roman soldiers, the leadership. They were like strong bulls surrounding him. They're like lions tearing their prey and roaring, opening their mouths wide against me.

And himself, I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. And this is exactly what happens on the cross.

What happened on the cross was not only mockery, but on the cross, the bones get out of joint. And because the bones are out of joint, it causes asphyxiation. A person on the cross dies of asphyxiation.

They can't breathe. And because they can't breathe and they're gasping, they're thirsting. This is a perfect picture of the cross.

So, all my bones are out of joint, the perfect picture of the cross. The metaphor is I'm like water. And therefore, he has no longer a strong heartbeat.

His heart is like wax. It is melted within me as he's going into death itself. All of this is very descriptive of a death by crucifixion, which was unknown in David's day because you stone people to death.

He's picturing something quite differently here with all the bones out of joint. He's thirsting and it's not a picture of stoning. My strength is dried up like a putt shirt.

My tongue is made to stick to the roof of my mouth as you lay me into the dust of death. So, he's going to death with these animals surrounding him, tearing him apart, so to speak, and bulls around him. As he goes all his bones are out of joint and so forth, now his strength is dried up and he can't breathe.

The only time I've ever felt that my tongue is made to stick to the roof of my mouth. Often when I'm reading scripture, I try to picture it from my own experience. I was leading a family to Iraq in the middle of the summer, July.

No time to go to Iraq. I never saw the thermometer go below 50 degrees Celsius, 120 degrees the whole time we were there. It's extreme heat.

We went out to a place called Hatra. That was the very limits of the Roman Empire in the extreme East. There they fought against the Parthians.

I was supposed to lecture on it. I began to lecture and I couldn't. My lips stuck together.

My tongue just stuck to the palate of my mouth and to everybody's relief, I couldn't talk. That's how it feels. And then he goes back to the dogs, unclean dogs, a band of evil men encircling me.

Then they bore holes in my hands and in my feet. Now there's some textual problem there, but that is almost certainly the original text. Then he describes it.

So, I can count all my bones. People stare, they gloat over me and they distribute my clothes among them and cast lots for his basic garment. We talked about that in poetry, which is exactly what happened at the foot of the cross.

This is an amazing prophecy. A person pictured dying by crucifixion and then boring holes in his hands and his feet, and then distributing his garments and nothing like that in David's life and totally fulfilled. That's why Jesus said it is finished.

He totally fulfilled the Scriptures. The Scriptures speak of him to validate our faith. Now comes the petition.

He's asking, even in the midst where God feels far off to reverse it, but you, I am, do not be far off. My help comes quickly to help me. Then what he does is he reverses the imagery of boring his hands and his feet.

He just goes backward, the sword and the dogs and the lions and the wild oxen. He just goes backward in a chiasm, tying together his petition with his lament. So, he had, I mean, his lament with his petition.

So, he had seven of these petitions with these zoomorphic images. He picks them all up into his petition and reverses it. Do not be far off to live in my life from the sword, my precious life.

The only one I have, we all have just one. When the power of the dogs save me from the mouth of the lions, answer me from the horns of the wild oxen. I picture him not hanging on the horns, but these wild oxen, these bulls having their heads lowered with their horns all around them.

That's at least how I picture it. And almost with the transition of a resurrection, all of a sudden, he's praising God in the midst of it, just as suddenly. The praise falls into two sections.

First of all, he's going to praise the Lord to the Jewish people, to my brothers, and really to the believing Jews. That's in verses 22 and that's for five verses through verse 26. And then having declared the praise to the brothers, that in turn is going to echo out in verse 27, to the ends of the earth.

So, it begins with his own praise to his brothers and they're going to eat. Then that in turn will lead to all the ends of the earth. So, you have five verses of praise within the congregation, five verses of praise to the ends of the earth.

Again, you get a five and a five. So, he says, in verse 22, I would declare your name. That is the name I am, who lives eternally, who has this great action that God is not only eternal, but he's becoming by his future, by all of his saving acts, he becomes more and more clear to us as to who he is and what he does.

In the congregation, I will praise you. And so, he addresses those who fear the Lord in the congregation. That could include Gentiles, but it's mainly to his own people.

You who fear I am, praise him, all you seed of Jacob, honor him, revere him, all you seed of Israel, as he addresses his own people. That they may have him, he came first to the Jew and then to the Greek. So, he's giving his testimony to his own people.

That's how it was that he gave it when he was risen from the dead. He said to the woman, go tell my brothers. And he fulfilled it exactly.

And this praise comes from God and using the language of the Old Testament, it'd be only appropriate that they would have a meal. And probably on the cross, Jesus said, when you answer my prayer, as it were, we will all, it's going to become the Messiah's banquet. We'll all eat and be glad.

So, he says to them, let the poor eat, the afflicted and be sated. Let those who seek I am, praise him, and let your hearts live forever because of the resurrection, you have hope. Let your heart live forever.

And in a sense, we never die. Then to the ends of the earth, it's going to be in space universally. May all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the Lord, and all the clans of the nations bow down before you.

For dominion belongs to I Am as ruler over the nations. And so, it has universal application that all will hear the story of this King who suffered and triumphed. And it's going to go to all nations who will become part of his dominion as it is to the earth.

It is going to affect all classes of society. May all the rich of the earth bow down to him. Before him, all who go down to the dust will kneel, those who did not preserve their lives and not only universal in space, but universal in time.

That this testimony of what this psalmist has experienced of having gone into the dust of death and now coming out of death itself and giving praise, it's going to be passed on from generation to generation. And here we are at the end of history, as far as we've come in Houston, Texas, and we're still celebrating it. And our children will celebrate it.

May their seed serve him. May it be told to their generation about the Lord of all. May they come and proclaim his righteousness.

And we've already commented on righteousness to a people yet unborn. And what do they say? He has acted. He has done it.

That's the testimony. What a heritage we have. What scriptures we have.

A more sure word, as the hymn writer said, is a more sure word of prophecy because we see the fulfillment of it. I think the best illustration of the psalm, if you heard the story, tell me. It's the story of Duke Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo.

I'd heard the story years ago that after the battle of Waterloo, they wanted to communicate to England the battle and Wellington's victory. They communicated it by semaphore across the English Channel. So, you would have lights.

This is how they communicated those days. You would have flags or whatever, lights and candles, whatever. And they would thereby, by semaphore, put it across the English Channel and from Calais to Dover, the people in Dover would see the message.

Then they would send out messengers throughout the island. And that's how they got the news. The story is told that after the battle of Waterloo and the message was being told, what he said was, Wellington defeated and a fog set in.

That's all they saw. That was the message to the British Isles, Wellington was defeated. I actually, I was in Victoria one time in an inn.

I took a little vacation there. There was this picture on the wall and it showed a basic armory, a blacksmith with his hearth and his bellows. Then he had on his blacksmith's apron.

There was a shiny new cannon in the front that he had just made. There's a messenger there who's reading to him. You could see the astonishment, the gasping on the blacksmith's face.

So, I asked the proprietor, to tell me about this story. She told me that this is when the message went out and this blacksmith's hearing, Wellington defeated. But when the fog lifted, the full message was Wellington defeated the enemy.

And that's the story of my song. You get up through it on the cross, Christ defeated Easter Sunday, Christ defeated the enemy, our greatest enemy, death itself. I mean, we are on holy ground.

This is Dr. Bruce Waltke in his teaching on the book of Psalms. This is session number 16, Petition Psalms, Lament, Psalm 22.