

Introduction to the Psalms, Part 1 (Selected Psalms)

All right, this is lesson two on the imprecatory psalms, in case you weren't here last week. What we mean by imprecatory psalms are the psalms or passages of Scripture—because they're not just in the psalms but also outside of the psalms—psalms or passages of Scripture which call down curses or judgment upon God's enemies. And we observed last week that sometimes there are imprecations, which are curses or calls for judgment, in Scripture which are not necessarily God's enemies but in some cases personal enemies for personal wrongs. There are a couple of instances like that in the Psalms. And so our question that we're trying to answer—our intention in this series is to answer the question, How are we to interpret those, how are we to handle those passages of Scripture? And so that's what we're setting out to do.

Last week was a little bit of an introduction that kind of charted the course and introduced some of the theological issues. Today I'm going to give you an introduction to the book of Psalms. In fact, this is going to be for today and for next week. This is going to be a two-parter. And the purpose for today and next week is to give you a sense of the structure and more importantly the significance of the Psalms because there is something in the structure of the Psalms which indicates the significance of it. There's a way in which individual psalms are structured and a way in which the book of Psalms is structured that indicates to us something, a theological perspective of how we are to interpret the imprecatory elements in the Psalms. So we want to understand the value and the theology of the Psalms.

So let's begin with the Psalms as theology. Maybe if you've never gone through some of the material that I'm going to go through today and next week—and by the way, if you have, then I apologize that some of this is going to be repetitive for you, but I think it's necessary in order to begin to build sort of a construct, a paradigm in which we can understand some of these elements. But if you've never gone through some of these issues relating to the Psalms, then it's possible that you think of the Psalms as sort of this collection of hymns that are quite unrelated other than having God as their theme and redemption as their theme and maybe some stuff about creation and the Word of God. It's just really a random collection of 150 hymns or songs of worship that have been collected over a couple of hundred years. And if that's your perspective on the Psalms, then I'm hoping that today, by going through some of this, you will begin to really appreciate the book of Psalms and what it has to teach us.

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The book of Psalms is an Old Testament hymnal of sorts. It was a collection of songs that the Jews would sing in the temple, in the synagogues, in their worship. There are songs of ascent that the Jews would sing on their way up to the temple for the various feasts and festivals. There are songs that they sang on particular holy days like Passover or Pentecost. There are psalms of lament. There are psalms of joy. There are psalms of praise. There are psalms of cursing. There's all kinds of variety in both the intention and theme of the various psalms. And you'll see next week more specifically that the organization and order of the Psalms is anything but random and accidental.

The Psalms teach us to worship in truth. And Jesus said, "Those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). And Jesus was very big on the Psalms. Psalm 31:5 says, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit." And the second half of that—we're familiar with the first half because Jesus quoted that on the cross—but the second half of that says, "You have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth." The Psalms present a God who is a God of truth, and then the Psalms teach us how to worship in truth, what truthful and truth-filled worship should look like.

So let's talk first of all about the Psalms and how they point us to the Word of God. Really the Word of God is the focus of worship. And you probably know this if you've been here for any period of time that our services are intended to be very Word-centered because we believe that the Word of God really is the focal point for true and genuine worship. So that any emotion that we have ought to be filtered through and be a response to the truth that is in the Scripture because the Word of God is central to that. And not only is the Word of God central to our worship in terms of our singing, but it is central to our worship in terms of our preaching of the Word of God, our teaching of the Word of God, as well as our listening to the Word of God. So this is an act of worship for me and for you because we are talking about the Word of God. And preaching is an act of worship for the preacher and for the hearer. So when we sit there and we listen attentively, we are receiving God's Word through God's appointed means, which is the proclamation of the truth, and we are receiving that and wanting to be responsive to it, giving attention to that, that is worship. So it's always wrong to say, "All right, we've gotten through the worship; now we're going to get on to the preaching," or "The preaching is something we tag on to the end of worship," or "We use worship to prepare our hearts for preaching." No, we worship in song and we worship in the proclamation of the truth. They're both acts of worship.

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So the Psalms point us to the Word of God. Psalm 1:1–2—remember, this is the entryway to the book of Psalms. We're going to look at this psalm more next week. This is the entry point to the book of Psalms. “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” In fact, you're familiar with Psalm 119:1–2, which is really entirely about the Word of God: “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.” Now not every psalm addresses the Word of God or is about the Word of God. There are psalms which are about other subjects, but we cannot escape the reality that the Word of God is a central theme to the book of Psalms because the psalmists, all of them, want us to be immersed in the Word of God and the truth of God so that it may inform our worship.

So the Psalms teach us about the Word of God or point us to the Word of God, and the Psalms teach us theology, particularly about the nature of God. I have a series of verses from the Psalms here. I want you to just observe as we read through these what we learn about God in the Psalms. Psalm 50:6: “And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge.” I mean just that one verse, what does that tell you about God? That He is a righteous God, that He is a just God, that there is a judgment that is to come, that He will hold all men accountable, that there is some sort of either punishment or reward. There is a need for grace and mercy. If God is a judge, then I have sinned, and of course you can extrapolate a whole bunch of information about God from Psalm 50:6.

Psalm 7:9: “O let the evil of the wicked come to an end [that's an imprecation by the way, right? It's an imprecation], but establish the righteous; for the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.” So there we learn that God is omniscient, that He is omnipotent, that He sees all, that He forgets nothing, and therefore He knows everything, including the ways of every man.

Psalm 116:5: “Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate.” Now after reading about God judging evil, bringing it to an end and being a righteous judge, that is a breath of fresh air, that God is gracious and righteous and our God is compassionate.

Psalm 90:2: “Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” That is His transcendence, His

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eternality, His immortality, that God has no beginning, therefore He will have no end. There is no beginning to His existence or end to His existence, right?

Psalm 78:38: “But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; and often He restrained His anger and did not arouse all His wrath.” So God is compassionate and forgiving. He restrains His anger, so He's long-suffering. He does not arouse His wrath. He is not quick to anger. He is slow to anger. But anger and wrath are obviously a part of God's character and God's nature.

Psalm 7:11: “God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation [that is, anger against wickedness] every day.”

Psalm 48:9: “We have thought on Your lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Your temple.” God is a loving, kind God.

Psalm 17:7: “Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up against them.”

Of course, you know that I could go on and on and on with the attributes of God, which are put on display in the Psalms. So the Psalms are intended to point us to the Word of God and to point us to the nature and character of God because all of His attributes are on display in the Psalms because the Psalms call us to worship God for who He is. And so then the Psalms begin to recount and to recite the attributes of God. There's nothing more banal and useless than a worship song that makes no mention of God's attributes. Right? When we sing a worship song, I want to sing things that are true about God, not true about how I feel. That's not my primary point in worship. It's OK to talk about how I feel. It's OK to express our sentiments; the Psalms do that. But I want to sing about God, not about me. I'm not interested in that. So I want God's attributes to be put on display in what we sing and in how we sing it because we want to sing about Him.

Further, the Psalms tell us about the works of God. They recount the works of God, offering descriptions and commentary. Think of how many Old Testament events are covered in the Psalms. And this may surprise you. Old Testament revelation, by the way, begins with creation. It details creation, Genesis 1. What are the last events in the Old Testament timeline? Does anybody know off the top of your head? What is the last major event in the Old Testament timeline? It is the return from the Babylonian captivity, which is in the ministry of Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel. It's the return from that captivity. That's the end of the Old Testament timeline. That's not the end of your Old Testament. It's the end of the Old Testament timeline. Then you take

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everything that is after Nehemiah and Ezra, you take all of that and you sort of plug it in to everything that's between Genesis and Nehemia/Ezra. And all of the events that come after that, the books after that, sort of fit into that timeline.

Well, the Psalms speak about creation:

6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. (Ps. 33:6–9 NASB)

Now notice the language there is not the literal language of Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1 is the literal language of a narrative. This is the figurative or the poetic language of poetry to describe creation.

The Psalms also talk about the covenant with Abraham. Psalm 105:5–15:

5 Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth,

6 O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones!

7 He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth.

8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,

9 the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac.

10 Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance,"

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12 when they were only a few men in number, very few, and strangers in it.

13 And they wandered about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people.

14 He permitted no man to oppress them, and He reproved kings for their sakes:

15 “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.” (NASB)

So there the psalmist is recounting the grace of God to Abraham and His calling of Abraham, giving him a land, to Abraham's descendants, the promise of that covenant, and the psalmist is calling us to worship God for His great works in doing that.

Psalm 105 continues with mention of the famine that took them into Egypt, Joseph being sold into slavery, the rise in Egypt, Israel going to Egypt, the slavery and Moses, and the ten plagues. That's all in Psalm 105. Look at verse 27: “They performed His wondrous acts among them, and miracles in the land of Ham. He sent darkness and made it dark; and they did not rebel against His words. He turned their waters into blood and caused their fish to die” (vv. 27–29). And I'm just going to skip through this. Notice the mention of the frogs and the swarm of flies and the gnats in their territory, hail for rain and flaming fire in their land, destruction of their vines and their fig trees with the hail, shattering the trees of their territory, locusts and more locusts, even without number. He ate up the vegetation in their land and ate up the fruit of their ground. Notice all of those references to the things that happened in the exodus, and by the way, these are all elements of imprecation. This is describing a judgment of God upon a nation, and not just your average judgment but the utter destruction and annihilation of an entire nation. He annihilated everything, and the psalmist is calling the people of God to worship God for those acts, for those works. I said this last week, and I'll say it again—you have to have room in your theology for that, that I can worship God for His righteous judgments.

Now, there are other events that are also in the Psalter. The flood is described in Psalm 29:10; Melchizedek in Psalm 110; the exodus and Israel plundering the Egyptians in Psalm 105; the parting of the Red Sea in Psalm 106; the giving of the law at Sinai in Psalm 68; the provision of quail, manna, and water in Psalm 78 and 105; the sacrificial system in Psalm 50; Israel's coming into Canaan in Psalm 105 and 106; Israel's monarchy in Psalm 18 and Psalm 45; the covenant with David in Psalm 89; Israel's disobedience in Psalm 74, 78, 79; the captivity in Babylon in Psalm 137; and the return from Babylonian captivity in Psalm 126.

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Now, what did I say was the very first event recorded in the Old Testament? Creation. What is the very last event talked about in the Old Testament in that timeline? It's the return from the Babylonian captivity. So what you have in the Psalms is worship of God for all of the events between creation and the return to the Babylonian captivity. In other words, the entire Old Testament is in the Psalter. All of the major events are in the Psalter. They are described in the Psalter. They are recounted in the Psalter. They are described poetically. We are asked to worship God. We are expected to worship God and to know Him for all of His works, everything in the Old Testament. All of the timeline of the Old Testament is put right into the book of Psalms. It's all there. So to study the book of Psalms and to know what it is describing is to study the entire Old Testament. This is what makes this book so unique. Everything from Genesis through Malachi is described in the book of Psalms. I mean, not every little event, but all of the major events that deal with God's plan of redemption for His people is described in the book of Psalms. All Old Testament history is woven through that book. It is a book of Scripture, and by the way, it is the only book of Scripture written over thousands of years. Keep that in mind. The Psalms are the only book of Scripture written over thousands of years. It's the only book of Scripture that details all of God's redemptive plan. It's the only individual book that details all of God's redemptive plan and describes it from creation all the way through to the end of the Babylonian captivity.

The implication is that if we are to study the Psalms, we are going to be familiar with the entire Old Testament. And therefore, we worship God on the basis of all of that revealed truth. That's what the book of Psalms tells us. God has to be worshiped on the basis of all of this truth and all that He has done, all of His works.

Further, the Psalms give us an inspired perspective on God, an inspired perspective on God. The Psalms are a commentary on who God is. His nature is explained, and His nature is applied to us. We are called to meditate upon God, His character and His works. His character is the subject of our thinking, our emotions, our worship, our mindset. All of that must be driven by God and His character and His nature. The Psalms are also an inspired commentary on the works of God. As His nature and deeds are described, Psalms gives us an inspired commentary on the significance of those works, like Psalm 89, for instance, which we'll look at in more detail sometime in the future—I forget which lesson it's in—but Psalm 89 just recounts the covenant that God made with David. Actually, now that I say that, I think it's next week. It recounts the covenant that God made with David and that work that God did in choosing David and what He promised to David. And then that psalm becomes a commentary on how we feel about

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God's promises, how we feel when we are in doubt. The Psalms teach us how to think about the works of God as God comments upon His own works in the Old Testament. The Psalms are an inspired commentary on who God is and what He does, and we are summoned to reflect upon that. The Psalms are filled with truth that must inform our worship, not just what we do in worship but also what we feel in worship and what we think in worship. That's what the Psalms do. And we are called to worship God for all of His works.

So now here's a question. Is God's judgment upon the wicked one of His works? It is. Now if we are called to worship God for all of His works, and His judgment on the wicked is one of His works, and what He does is always good, it is always just, it is always right, it's always perfectly wise and benevolent, then are we not called to worship God for His righteous acts of judgment? We are. That is one of the works that God does that we are called to worship Him for.

Further, the Psalms are quoted in the New Testament. In fact, the Psalms are the most quoted book from the Old Testament in the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles cited the Psalms frequently. And this is some indication of just how often the Psalms were used and how. Jesus used the Psalms to silence His opponents—Psalm 8, 118, and 110. Peter quoted the Psalms to justify replacing Judas. He quoted the two most significant examples of imprecatory psalms, Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, both of which we're going to study in a later session. Peter and Paul proved the resurrection from the Psalms by quoting Psalm 2 and Psalm 16. Paul taught justification by faith from Psalm 32. Peter instructs believers on how to handle persecution and evil treatment from Psalm 34. And Hebrews quotes the Psalms to show the superiority of Christ—Psalm 2, Psalm 97, Psalm 104, Psalm 45, Psalm 102, and Psalm 110. And it has been argued, and I think the case can be made, that the book of Hebrews is an expository treatment, an expository sermon, on Psalm 110. Really that is the backdrop of the entire book of Hebrews, Psalm 110, which is why we have gone back to that over and over and over again for the last number of months, years.

Further, the Psalms are the most quoted—there is one psalm that is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. In other words, if there's one chapter of the Old Testament that is quoted more than any other chapter, it is Psalm 110. “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’ The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, ‘Rule in the midst of Your enemies’” (vv. 1–2). And this one, of course, we are familiar with from the book of

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Hebrews: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (v. 4).

So the Psalms then are a theologically rich treasure trove of truth which the Spirit of God expects should inform our hearts, our minds, our thoughts, our affections, our desires, our worship, and our lives. It is a treasure trove of theological truth that really encapsulates the entire Old Testament revelation of God. You find it all boiled down in the book of Psalms. Are you starting to understand and appreciate the theological significance of that book? Are there any questions before we go on to the Psalms as poetry?

OK, good, because we're running out of time and not out of material. The Psalms have a unique form. Now I want to talk a bit—this is not necessarily tied into the issue of imprecation, but since we're talking about the Psalms, I'm trying to give you an appreciation for it. I want to talk about the form that psalms take often so you have a little bit of an appreciation about what you're reading and how you're reading it. You might see some things in the Psalms now that you never saw if you have this sort of background and understanding.

Hebrew poetry is not like modern Western poetry. Modern Western poetry has its force because the words rhyme at the end of every line, right? Either a sight rhyme or an actual auditory rhyme. Except for—I should say, English poetry does that. Modern poetry not necessarily. Modern poetry is I type a few words, I hit return, tab, type a few more words, hit return, tab. And if you took out the returns and the tabs, you basically have a running commentary on something that just, that any fifth grader could have typed up. That's modern poetry. But standard poetry, the poetry that I grew up with, the Shel Silverstein and the tale of Robert McGee or whatever the guy was who froze in the barge and then they warmed him up by—Sam McGee, yes. That type of poetry is a lost art in our culture. By the way, how many of you have heard of the—is it the tale of Sam McGee? “The Cremation of Sam McGee,” thank you, yes. We have some fellow people who understand good poetry here. Man, this is great. I feel like I'm among my people now. *[someone comments]* What's that? “The Spider and the Fly”? Does it rhyme? Does it rhyme? OK, then it's a beautiful poem. I'll take your word for it. If it doesn't rhyme, then . . .

OK, so Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme the sounds, the words. Hebrew poetry rhymes the lines. Rhymes the lines. Notice how that rhymes, right? Rhymes and lines. Hebrew poetry rhymes the lines. *[someone comments]* What's that? *[jokingly]* It's close enough,

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Joe. Get off me. It's closer than anything that passes as modern-day poetry. All right, so Hebrew psalms, Hebrew poetry is structured around parallelisms, parallels. And there are seven of them that I'm going to highlight for you here. I have examples of them. You don't need to remember all of these, but your homework is going to require that you read some psalms and identify some of these.

All right, the first kind of parallelism is synonymous parallelism. Synonymous parallelism is where the phrase is repeated or restated in different words. So the second line restates or repeats in different words what the first line says. "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?" (Ps. 2:1) The nations and the people; uproar and devising a vain thing. It's simply a restatement of what is in the first line. Do you notice how the ideas run parallel to one another? It is what is called a synonymous parallelism.

Another example of that is Psalm 24:1–2: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it [all it contains, who dwell in it]. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." It's simply restating the same thing in the second line that the first line says. That's a synonymous parallelism. This, by the way, is all the way through the Psalms, these kinds of parallelisms. This is the nature of Hebrew poetry. So you read the Psalms, you're going to see synonymous parallelism all the way through that. Notice that it is not the words that rhyme, it is the lines that rhyme.

Second, there is antithetical parallelism. And this is where the propositions of the two lines contrast with one another. They state opposite ideas, but the ideas are still parallel, like "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps. 1:6). The idea of God knowing something in the Old Testament is to know intimately in a favorable way. He knows the way of the righteous in that way, but the way—that is, the path—of the wicked perishes. So notice the opposites, the righteous and the wicked, and the perishing and the Lord knowing or protecting or looking with favor upon someone. That is an antithetical parallelism.

Another example of that is Psalm 37:9: "For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land." Cutting off and inheriting the land are opposites, and if you read Psalm 37, which is a psalm that wrestles with the prosperity of the wicked and why the wicked perish—Psalm 37 deals with that—you will see that throughout the psalm there is this antithesis where the righteous inherit the land and the wicked are cut off from the land and remembered no more. The righteous get an

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eternal inheritance and an eternal memory, but the wicked perish and are no more. So you notice the antithetical where they're opposites. They're still rhyming ideas, but opposite ideas, like a mirror giving you an opposite or a mirror image of something.

Then there is synthetic parallelism where the second line expands or elaborates on the first. “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?” (Ps. 24:3) What is the hill of the Lord? Specifically, it's the holy place. Hill of the Lord is kind of a general reference to this. Standing is more than just ascending to. What do you do when you get there? You're standing at some place. So notice the parallel ideas, but the second line sort of repeats but adds more detail than you had in just the first line. “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully” (Ps. 24:4). So the one who has clean hands and a pure heart—here's more detail added to it—he has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and he has not sworn deceitfully.

Then there is what is called climactic parallelism. This is where the second line completes the first by adding information or ideas. So you get halfway to your zenith of the idea, and then the second half sort of completes it. “Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength” (Ps. 29:1). You can see how the second line repeats—sorry, it doesn't repeat—adds to the first line. “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; [to add more information to that of what the author has in mind] worship the Lord in holy array” (Ps. 29:2). So we have parallelism in the structure of the psalm, but the parallelism is that the second phrase and now the fourth phrase are adding information to the first and to the third phrase.

Here's another example: “The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their pounding waves” (Ps. 93:3). Notice with each phrase of that, you're getting more information. The floods have lifted up. What do we mean by that? What are the floods lifting up? Their voice. Well, what is the voice? The voice of the floods is the pounding waves. So every phrase is adding just a little bit more detail to it, repeating the idea, but the parallelism is the adding of details as you go through the verse. Psalm 96:7: “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.” That's a climactic parallelism.

Then there is what is called emblematic parallelism, and this is where a symbol or a metaphor is placed side by side with its meaning. So you have an emblem that's being given, and then you have the meaning of the emblem that is being given to us as well. “He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water” (Ps. 1:3). In what way is a man

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who walks in the law of the Lord like a tree firmly planted by the streams of water? Well, he yields his fruit in its season, “and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Ps. 1:3). So the emblem is a man like a tree planted by the rivers of water. It's the man who walks in the law of the Lord. In what ways is that? Now look at how the emblem is explained in the parallel phrases that follow. You get that? Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants after you, O God.” There's the deer panting. What does that symbolize? My soul panting for God. So you have the emblem in the first part and then the explanation of the emblem in the second part.

Psalm 23, by the way, which I have up here, but I'm not going to go through that whole thing, Psalm 23—“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”—the rest of the psalm is the parallelism. He does this and He does this and He does this and He does this and He does this, and the rest of it just explains the emblem. The first verse is the emblem. The rest of the psalm is the parallel explanation of that. And here's the beauty of Psalm 23. Within that emblematic parallelism, which is the entire psalm, you have all of these various other kinds of parallelisms in the individual verses of the psalm, which is an emblematic parallelism. So you have parallelism within parallelism in Psalm 23. That's the beauty of Hebrew poetry.

Then there is what is called alternate parallelism. And this is where the author employs an—this is more difficult to explain, but—an ABAB pattern of thought, an alternate parallelism (line A, line B, line A, line B) where line A and A rhyme and line B and B rhyme. So now you're talking about four lines and a structured parallelism within four lines. So for instance, Psalm 103:11–12: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth”; verse 12: “As far as the east is from the west.” Notice how those are parallel ideas: Heaven and earth, east and west. And then B, which is the second phrase of each verse, also parallels. “So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him” (v. 11); “So far has He removed our transgressions from us” (v. 12). “Those who fear Him” and “us,” those are parallel. Lovingkindness and removing our transgressions are parallel. So you notice the ABAB pattern there? The A's rhyme with each other and the B's rhyme with each other; that's what's called alternate parallelism.

Another example of that—here it is within one verse, but you have the first part of each phrase rhyming with the first part of the next phrase. “You hide them in the secret place”; “You keep them secretly in the shelter”; “Of Your presence from the conspiracies of man”; “From the strife of tongues”(Ps. 31:20). So that's just one verse, it's just two

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lines, but the first half of that line, A, the first half of the first line rhymes with the first half of the second line. The second half of the first line rhymes with the second half of the second line; that's an alternate parallelism.

And then, and these are in orders of ascending difficulty, then there is chiasmic parallelism, and I'm not even sure I'm pronouncing that right—chiasmic [key-as-tic], chiasmic [chee-as-tic], chiasmic [chahy-as-tic], spastic, I don't know. But Psalm 124:7, this is where the parallelism is an ABBA parallelism, so the first line and the last line rhyme, the second line and the third line rhyme. So it kind of forms a sandwich, as it were, like two beef patties between two buns; that's the picture. That's a chiasm. Psalm 124—I'm a little hungry—Psalm 124:7: “Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped.” Notice the *escaped* is at the front and the back of that and then in between are the two parallel ideas: “Out of the snare of the trapper”; “the snare is broken.” It's a chiasmic parallelism.

Psalm 145:2: “Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever.” “Every day”; “forever and ever.” “I will bless You” and “I will praise Your name” in the middle. So “I will bless You,” “I will praise Your name,” that's the meat. “Ever and ever,” “every day,” that's the bun wrapping up the meat.

So the implication, by the way, the reason I show you this is to show you how wise God is. If Scripture had been written in the English language and we rhymed words, it would never translate and have its effect into any other language in which it was translated. But God used this language with this structure so that no matter what language you translate it into, it works. It's beautiful. It's incredible. And listen, there is structure within structure within structure. In some ways the Psalms are like a fractal. Do you know what a fractal is? Remember when Jason Lisle did that? You zoom in on the pattern and no matter how far down you go you see these levels of detail and structure within that pattern, and you zoom out and you see the same thing. You're going to see tomorrow the book of Psalms has its structure, all 150 psalms. There's five books. You take those five books, and they each have their own structure. They stand alone, they also work together. You go into any one of those five books, and you can take that group of psalms, those psalms have a structure and outline for them. And then you can take any one of those psalms, and that psalm has a structure. And you can take any verse in those psalms, and that verse has a structure. Magnificent. This book could never have been written by anybody but the Spirit of God. Incredible.

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All right. Then the Psalms also engage the heart. Where are we at? Yeah, we're at a blank slate. There we go. The Psalms engage the heart, and this is one of the values of the Psalms. The Psalms engage the heart through music because they are meant to be sung. You will notice the prescript in many of the Psalms where it says, "For the choir director; to be sung upon this musical instrument," because when the individual people wrote the individual Psalms, they were intended to be sung. Psalms sometimes were accompanied by musical instruments. Psalm 21: "For the choir director. A Psalm of David." Psalm 30: "A Psalm; a Song at the Dedication of the House. A Psalm of David." Those are the prescripts that you find above many, many psalms. Not all of them, but many of the psalms have prescripts like that.

Second, the Psalms engage our hearts through language as the Psalms use metaphors and figures of speech and word pictures and graphic language. That language of the Psalms is intended to stick with you like finding a long hair in your macaroni and cheese. You're not going to get rid of that soon. That image is going to be with you. Every time you sit down at an old country buffet and dish up the macaroni and cheese, you're going to be thinking about that time that you found that black hair in that one serving of macaroni and cheese you had. The same thing with the imagery of the Psalms. The images themselves are intended to stick with us for a long period of time, to get into our heart and to always be there because the language and the metaphor and the vividness of it is so picturesque.

So Psalm 80:5: "You have fed them with the bread of tears, and You have made them to drink tears in large measure." What is another way of saying that? You've made us sad. Now if the Psalmist had just said, "We're sad"—and by the way, that's what most modern worship music would sound like. "We're sad, sad, sad. Yes, we're very, very sad. Make us glad, glad, glad. We want to be glad, glad, glad." That's the type of thought that goes into it. But with the Psalms, you don't get that. With the Psalms you get, "You have fed them with the bread of tears." That's imagery that's not going to leave you soon, sitting down to a loaf of tears, and this is what God is force-feeding you. You're making us eat the work of our own tears. "You have made them to drink tears in large measure." Did the bread make you thirsty? Guess what you get. Tears to drink. This is the emotion of the Psalms, and they're intended to engage our heart emotionally.

Psalm 45:7—he could have said, "You've made Him happy." Instead, he says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows." The oil of joy. Instead of just saying, "God made

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Him happy,” the psalmist says God poured over Him the oil of joy, which speaks of abundance and blessing and joy and celebration. That language is intended to engage our emotions when we reflect upon it.

The psalmist could have just said, “Protect me,” but instead he says in Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings.” The apple of the eye. How do you protect your eye? The minute something comes near it, you instinctively, without even thinking, close your eye to guard your eye. “[Protect] me in the shadow of Your wings.” That's poetic language, it's descriptive language intended to describe the psalmist asking God to bring him right next to His side, right next to His wing, as it were, and to protect him like a mother hen would protect its chicks and to keep him there and not let him go far away and then to, if anything threatens him, to instinctively protect him like our eyelids protect our eyes when something is coming at it.

The psalmist could have said, “They tell lies,” but instead he says in Psalm 5:9, “There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.” So that's imagery that you find in the book of Romans 3. “Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.” And the psalmist is there saying more than just they tell lies. You would forget the phrase “they tell lies.” But their mouth is an open grave. What do graves smell like? They don't smell like roses. Nothing good ever comes out of an open grave, no good scent. And so their mouth just belches forth this putrid smell of rot and putrefaction and ugliness. And they tell lies.

The wicked speak with pride. He could have said that in Psalm 73, but instead he uses this imagery. “They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high [that is their height, their proudness, their arrogance]. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth” (vv. 8–9). So we're supposed to picture this arrogant person who sits up there just belching out his arrogant statements against Heaven itself, and his tongue just marches through the earth. Everywhere his tongue goes, he's just prattling about, speaking everywhere it goes. See, that's the type of imagery that just engages your emotions. That's the stuff that sticks with you in your mind as you read through the Psalms.

Further, the Psalms engage our hearts by expressing emotion. Now listen, I'm not against expressing emotion. I'm not opposed to that. So when I sort of mock modern-day worship music, it's not because it expresses emotion; the Psalms express emotion. My problem with modern-day worship music is that it's not thought through and

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theologically robust. Some of the stuff that is being produced out there that is sung in other places could be written by a six-year-old or a twelve-year-old. It's just that it's not thought through. But I'm not against expressing emotion or having emotion. I'm not opposed to any of that. And the Psalms do engage our hearts by expressing emotion. For instance, loneliness (Psalm 25), love (Psalm 18), sorrow (Psalm 31), discouragement (Psalm 42), shame (Psalm 44), exultation (Psalm 21), fear (Psalm 2), peace (Psalm 4). Those are all appropriate emotions to express in worship. So it's not that emotion has to be absent from worship, but we don't have to choose between proper emotion and truth. We can have both of those things, and the Psalms give us a wonderful blend of all of those aspects. Further, gratitude (Psalm 35) and confidence (Psalm 27).

James Johnston says, "The Psalms wake up our emotions to respond to God and to life like we should. No other book so powerfully shapes our minds and our hearts. Through the Psalms, we can adapt our thinking and feeling to be in line with the heart and mind of God." I'm going to read that again. I want you to think about what the author is saying. "The Psalms wake up our emotions to respond to . . . life like we should. No other book so powerfully shapes our minds and our hearts. Through the Psalms, we can adapt our thinking and feeling to be in line with the heart and mind of God." That's James Johnston. That is the profound value of the book of Psalms. It helps us to emote rightly.

Now think about that. It deals with our emotions, it captures our emotions, it engages our emotions in the context of truth so that we are taught through the Psalms how to emote properly. What is a proper emotion? What is a proper sentiment? And when I have that emotion or that sentiment, what is the proper way to express that? And what is the truth then that should inform that? Which is why you have psalms like Psalm 22 where the psalmist David says, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" That's a real emotion. David felt forsaken. Now later on in the psalm, Psalm 22, David says, "Thou hast not forsaken Your servant." What he felt is at the beginning of the psalm—"Why have You forsaken me?" But then he has to inform himself in the middle of the psalm, "God has not forsaken me." That's the truth that had to inform the mind. So you have both the expression of emotion in its proper context, but then you have the information of truth.

You have in other psalms places where the psalmist will say, "Here's what I felt. I had despaired. I felt afflicted. God did this. He made me drink the bread of tears, for instance. And then I said to my soul, 'O soul, why are you downcast within me? God has

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delivered you. God has saved you. He has put me upon a rock. He will not leave me or forsake me.” That's the truth that has to inform the emotion. So the Psalms help us to see the emotion for what it is and then to think properly about that emotion and then to bring truth to bear upon the emotion so that the truth affects the emotion and forms and shapes that emotion into a God-honoring emotion if there's sinfulness or wrongness in it. That's the value of the Psalms.

So just in reading the Psalms, we get all of that. God, through His truth, gives us His redemptive picture of all of human history—sorry, not all of human history—all of the Old Testament history. He gives us this picture of redemption. Then you have these individual people who are writing psalms in the midst of that saying, “God says this, but I feel this way.” And then they take their feelings and they say, “But if God says this, this must be true. Therefore, I will make my emotions match what is true so that I can express those emotions properly and rightly and think and feel rightly about God and His works and my situation and circumstances.” That's what the book of Psalms does.

Now in the midst of that—you say, what does all this have to do with imprecatory elements?—in the midst of all of that, you have this slew of curses upon God's enemies and personal enemies. So what does the book of Psalms, what we've learned about so far, teach us about the view of those imprecations? God is teaching us in the book of Psalms how we are to think and feel about His righteous judgments and His enemies. God is revealing in the book of Psalms how He feels about the wicked and what He will do with the wicked and how the righteous should respond to that and feel about that and think about that reality. That's what the Psalms are doing. They are telling us how to think and how to emote. And in that, you have the context of God's judgment upon the wicked, and the Psalms are telling us how to feel rightly about God's judgments both past, present, and future, how we are to view them in light of truth and in light of human experience. Does that make sense? That's the value of the Psalms, to help us think and feel full of truth.

James Johnston again says, “The Psalms are as deep as the ocean, they are as wide as human experience, and they will carry us to spiritual heights.” There's so much in that book that it just boggles the mind. And if you want to know how to think and feel about God and His truth and His works, turn to the book of Psalms. That's where the emotions are engaged. That's where our thinking is prompted. That's where truth is brought to bear upon human feeling and human experience.

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Now let me—I'll ask you, are there any questions? I've got about two, three minutes here. Are there any questions about what we have covered here or observations from what we've covered before I give you your homework? [*someone asks a question*] No, [*jokingly*] I was not speaking too fast. What was the parallelism I mentioned before the antithetical parallelism? Synonymous. Synonymous parallelism was the first one, yes. Antithetical, synthetic, climactic, emblematic, alternate, and chiasmic. And by the way, if you just Google Hebrew parallelisms, you'll get, at the top of your results, either a page that gives you six of the seven or all seven of those. There's one page I found that gives you six of them and it leaves off the chiasm, but you can get—that's all seven of them.

Any other questions? Did I see a hand come up over here real quick? No? [*someone asks a question*] In the original language, does any of it rhyme? I don't read the original language, so I don't know that. It—is there? So David said yes. There are examples of it, but that's not the feature of it. There are psalms where there's rhyming at the end of them. Psalm 119—most of you maybe know this, but here's the structure within the structure. Psalm 119 is broken up into eight verses at a time, and each of those eight verses begins with the letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So aleph is first, and then the next section of eight, each line begins with or each verse begins with the next letter of that. So you have eight verses that all begin with the letter *A*, and then eight verses all begin with the letter *B*, and the author works through all of those letters of the Hebrew alphabet as he's working through the structure of Psalm 119. So there's a structure that you have in Psalm 119, but then you get down into the individual kinds of parallelism, and each of those eight sections has its own unique structure and its own theme and its own way that all of those parts fit together. The Psalms are not just people just emoting and writing stuff down. There is so much thought and so much intellect and emotion and truth that went into the Psalms. They're just loaded with good stuff.

Yes. [*jokingly*] Now you only get one. This is—now you're up to three comments today. So for the next two weeks you get nothing. But go ahead. I'll give you this one. I am gracious, yes. Who's James Johnston? He's the author of one of those commentaries that I mentioned last week, his commentary on the Psalms. I think it's the Preaching the Words series or a commentary that I mentioned last week.

All right, here is your homework for next week. Read a few of the psalms, a couple a day, if you would. They don't have to be long ones, but read the Psalms and look for these two things. You can do them at random. You can do like the first book, the second book, however you want to work it out. The last fifty, the first fifty. Pick them randomly,

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draw numbers out of a hat, I don't care, but read a couple of psalms every day and look for these two things. The parallelism that we talked about, the various kinds of parallelism—not that you have to memorize all of that, but just be looking for how are these two lines related, and then are there two or more verses that are related here, and how does verse 1 relate to this one? Is there a structure there that you can see now that you've kind of been made aware of the kind of parallelism that exists in Hebrew literature?

And the second thing to look for are the imprecatory elements. Are there descriptions in this psalm of God's justice, His judgments? Are there prayers in this psalm that request God to judge the wicked? Are there descriptions or mentions of past judgments, present judgments, or future judgments? And are there curses or lamenting of the wicked and their wickedness or calls for God to stop the wicked and the wickedness? OK, so just look for the parallelism and the imprecatory elements. I'm not going to collect anybody's homework next week, but this is just so you can begin to start thinking about and reasoning through and observing some of the things that we've talked about here over the course of the next week.

And then next week, we will look at the entire book of Psalms as a whole, breaking it down into five books, and I'll show you how all those pieces all fit together. There's a structure there. It's an incredible structure. You'll see that next week.

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