

Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Lecture 1

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Hello, welcome to our library my name is Fred Putnam, I'm glad to be here with you for this course on the book of Psalms. I've been teaching Hebrew and Old Testament for over Twenty years and I'm looking forward to spending these couple of hours together with you.

When we talk about the book of Psalms what are really discussing? Well it has different names, we think of it as the Psalter perhaps which actually comes from its Greek title, from the Septuagint a translation made about 250 years before Christ, but there's another title in Hebrew, *Tehillim*, which means "praises." And so both of those Psalms or Psalter on which means poems that are sung to the music of a Psalter or a sort of small harp is how the Greeks interpreted it. "Praises" is how the Rabbis thought of it.

Those two titles give us a rough idea of what we have: about 150 poems written over a period of several hundred years, that are made up of various types of poetry. I say about 150 because in some people's opinion some of the poems such as Psalms 9 and 10 or Psalms 42 and 43 really belong together and they're really a single poem, they're not separate Psalms. If we look at other translations such as the Latin Vulgate or the Greek Septuagint we find that they divide the Psalms differently as well. So it's important to know when you're looking at a commentary or if you're surfing the web to know if somebody's talking about the Vulgate, for example, if you're reading the Catholic encyclopedia the Psalm numbers might be different. So if they're talking about a verse and you think that's not what this says and you're right it's not what the verse that you're looking at says if you're looking at a Protestant Bible. So beware of your sources and how they're thinking about the Psalms.

Another aspect of that just in terms of reference works, is that in the Hebrew text the title, now this isn't that title that some translations give like a "prayer for help and a praise for its answer" or something like that, but the title that says a "Maskil of David" or "by the sons of Korah" or something like that, that are in most English translations is actually verse one. So all the verse numbers are one off from their English numbering. So

again, if you're looking at a commentary or some other reference work it's important to know: are they talking about the English verses or the Hebrew verses because otherwise it can be rather frustrating as you can imagine.

Now what do we have in these poems? Well although we may think of the Psalter as a hymn book or a book of prayers, actually only about 90 out of 150 are prayers addressed to God. The other 60 are prayers about the Lord but they don't really address him. Or sometimes there are about 5 or 6 where the first ten verses will be about God and then the very last verse says: "And you, O Lord confirm the work of our hands" or something like that. But about 60% of the Psalter is made up of prayers and the other 40% are reflections, meditations or exhortations for us to praise the Lord, to worship him but are not actually prayers in the sense that they are addressed to him.

There are three general types, they're actually we're going to talk about this a bit later in more detail, but there are psalms that we could say are happy psalms of worship and praise like Psalm 29: "Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength, ascribe to Lord, the glory due his name." It's a Psalm of praise or Psalm 93 or 96 or 98 which is actually what "Joy to the World" is based on. Or Psalm 100 which maybe you sung in church as "Old 100th" "All people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice." There are about probably a little over a third of the psalms are like that. Then there are a bunch of psalms that we could think of as kind of sad poems, that is sad in the sense that they start out with the psalmist in a lot of trouble and asking God to save him whether from enemies, sickness or some other kind of problem. So Psalm 10 for example, says: "Why do you stand far off why do you hide yourself in times of trouble the wicked in pride the wicked pursues the afflicted. Let them be caught in their own plots." So the psalmist says, "Lord I'm in trouble help me" and then he asks and then he usually argues with the Lord a little bit and says here's why you should help me. Then at the end he comes around and says thank you that you have and I will pay the vows that I promised and I'll testify to your goodness. Probably a third of the Psalter is like that there are about 50- 55 of the psalms, of the poems might be considered these sad or prayerful poems. Then there's another fairly large group that are neither

happy nor sad but their just someone thinking about something. So Psalm 1, for example, a very familiar psalm, is not really calling on people to worship. It's not really, a plea for help. It's not addressed to the Lord. Instead it seems to be a poet musing on, thinking about the relationship between the righteous and the wicked and what makes the difference between them. So he writes a poem in order to explore that idea, and there are quite a few poems like that Psalm 2 is sort of the same thing. Psalm 19 is a very famous poem about the word of God or Psalm 119 is like that as well. Psalm 121 which we'll look at in a bit so we have sort of these reflective, meditative or instructional maybe we might want to think of them in that way.

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

Now traditionally the Psalter divided into 5 books Psalms 1-41, Psalms 42-72, 73-89, 91-106 and 107-150, and almost any translation that you look at will say before Psalm 43 "Book 2" that's what they're referring to those divisions. We don't know how far back they're referred to by the Rabbis in the time of Christ even before the time of Christ so those are very old divisions. When we look at those divisions we find out that they themselves are not haphazard so that, for example, in Book One, out of 41 psalms, 38 of them the title says are ascribed to David.

Now let me just back up a minute and talk about that word "ascribed." In many of the translations you'll see the phrase "a psalm of David," "a psalm of the sons of Korah," or "of Absalom," or Solomon or some else or "the prayer of Moses." We don't really know if that was originally thought of as meaning written by, in the sense that we might T.S. Elliot wrote "The Wasteland" or if it means in the style of David or dedicated to David or commissioned by David or authorized by him or authored by him.

The preposition that's used there in Hebrew (by far the most common preposition in the bible) it can be used in many many different ways. Just like if you ever have the opportunity to look up the word "to" in an English dictionary, especially if you look it up in something like the Oxford English Dictionary. The entry goes on for pages and pages and pages, because the word "to" can mean so many things in English. Now we use it without thinking about all those possibilities we just speak the language, and in the same way the preposition that is translated "a psalm 'of' David," the "of" is this translation that the preposition in Hebrew is usually translated "to" or "for" in our English Bibles. But in order to make sense out of what this means, a psalm "to" David, a psalm "for" David, "by", or whatever else and in light of the tradition, the old tradition, that this preposition is actually being used to show authorship. We can look at these psalm titles and get some idea for how the book was actually arranged because it's almost certain that it wasn't arranged by the original authors since some of the psalms come from well after the time of the united monarchy under David and Solomon and some of them come from after the Babylonian exile hundreds of years later. So the book must have been put together gradually over a period of time.

In fact, we have a very strong clue to that at the end of Psalm 72 verse 20 it says the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended, which seems to indicate that they thought they gotten them all, although in fact, a whole bunch of psalms later show up that say, "a psalm of David." So it shows that the process of accumulating it took place over probably a quite lengthy period of time, and even the Dead Sea Scrolls help us see that because we look at the manuscripts of the book of Psalms and some of the manuscripts have the psalms (well first of all there are no manuscripts that have the whole Psalter just little pieces we can find) but where we can identify which psalms they are and what verses of which psalms we find that the order sometimes is the same and sometimes is not the same as the Psalter that we have. Generally speaking the earlier in the salter the manuscripts are that is Psalms 1 through say 72, the first couple of books especially, the more consistent the arrangement is as we get later in the Psalter the arrangements are different. Of course I do have to say we don't really know that those were scrolls of the

Psalter we cannot know that unless we find an entire scroll, they may have just been like a hymn book for example. It would be illegitimate to pick up a hymnal in any of our churches and say “these are ALL the Christian hymns of the 20th century” of course not! Somebody went through chose them, chose what order to put them in, how to arrange them, etc. But it’s a selection and maybe that’s what these scrolls even from the Dead Sea caves represent, it’s very unclear.

I know that probably seems like kind of the scholars way of not committing themselves to anything. But frankly I’d rather be cautious than to jump out and just say “this is the way it is” because we really don’t know that that was the function of those scrolls. Well when we look at the books, these five books of the Psalter, we find that out of the first 72 psalms 55 of them are ascribed to David. They say this “of David” or “to David” or “for David” or whatever. But in the next two books Psalms 73 to 106 only three psalms are ascribed to David, and in the last book 107 to 150 there’s a group of three Psalms 108 to 110 and then at the end of the book 137 to 145 that are also ascribed to David. So there were two little collections of Davidic psalms in the last book. But basically the Davidic psalms 55 out of the 73 psalms that are assigned to David, are found in the first two books which suggests that those two, and since they end with the phrase “the prayers of David son of Jesse are ended” the end of psalms 72, suggests that that was a collection unto itself and then the other Psalms were collected sometime later. On the other hand we look at books two and three, and between psalm 43 and 89, 13 of those are written by the sons of Korah, one of the choir leaders that we read about in the book of 1 Chronicles. Again they’re little collections, they all come in a row, or maybe there’s one psalm in the middle that interrupts them. But as a rule there’s a group of psalms and they’ll all start “the sons of Korah.” Which shows that somebody sat down and decided that these psalms belong together because of this title. Then we find the same thing in Book 3, another big chunk is that they are written by Asaph—“a Psalm of Asaph.” So that actually in that Third Book, the sons of Korah and Asaph write 15 out of the 17 psalms whereas David only writes 1 whereas he wrote the bulk of the first couple of books. We also find that the Psalter is shaped by the author in that there are only three

anonymous psalms in the first book that is they're called "orphan psalms" because they don't have a title that says "a psalm of David" or something like that, so they're called orphans. There are three there (Psalm 1, Psalm 2 and Psalm 33) there are 4 orphan psalms in Book 2, there are none in Book 3 and then in Books 4 and 5 there are 42 "orphan psalms." There are 14 in Book 4, 28 in Book 5. So that we find that psalms with authors are in the beginning and psalms without authors become more common toward the end. Another interesting aspect, of the arrangement of the Psalter, is that if we go through and talk about happy or sad psalms, let's say or prayers and praises or something like that, we find that in the first 3 books the majority of the psalms (over 50 of them) are these petition prayers (God help us were in trouble, God rescue us Lord please save me from my enemies). And only a few about (20 or so) are happy or songs of praise, like Psalm 29 for instance. But in the last 2 books we find that 40, that is 2/3 of the psalms, are happy ones, psalms of praise and worship or confidence and adoration and that only about 15 of them are these psalms that are asking God for help. So that there's a movement in the Psalter as a whole from prayers asking the Lord to "save the poet" to psalms of praise for God's works of creation and of salvation or redemption or victory.

What's even more striking is that that same movement from desperation to confidence or from prayer to praise is found in almost all of the psalms that are prayers. So that for example: Psalm 18 which begins by saying "I love you, O Lord my strength," and we'll look at that in a minute, goes on quickly to say "the chords of death encompass me, the terror of torrents of ungodliness terrified me, the chords of Sheol surrounded me" and the psalmist is in really bad trouble! But at the end of the psalm he says "the Lord lives, blessed be my rock, exalted be the God of my salvation, the God who executes vengeance for me and subdues people under me." At the end of the psalm David has flip-flopped completely from this desperation that we find in verses 4-6 or even later when he talks about, "the dogs who were surrounding me and the bulls who were threatening me, to his confidence in the Lord and what the Lord has done or will do or is doing for him so we have a very definite motion in these psalms and in the Psalter as a whole.

Now that's not to say there are never any exceptions of course there are. It's not quite that tightly organized but it certainly does seem that it was all organized very specifically. I'm going to come back to some conclusions we can draw from that but I guess another question is: how was the psalter actually used in ancient Israel? How did it function in biblical times? You'll hear it called the prayer book of Israel, you'll hear it called the hymnal of Israel or the hymnal of the Temple or the prayer book of the tabernacle or something like that. But in fact there are number of biblical passages that talk about people shouting, singing or chanting. By the way this is just a free aside, the word is translated "song" and "sing," the noun and the verb are translated "song" and "sing" but we don't really know if they mean "song" or "sing" in the way we think of them. It is almost certain that it did not sound like Mozart. It may have sounded much more like Gregorian chant, or it may not have sounded anything like that at all. Maybe we really do need to go to the Middle East and listen to them playing their bouzoukis and other instruments and listen to their style of music. The problem I think that is even a little unlikely since we're talking about a distance of 2500 to 3000 years. We really don't know what the performance would've sounded like. When we think of the instruments, cymbals, different kind of trumpets, and horns, metal and animal horns, and some sort of stringed instruments, and some indications perhaps that we have people singing, at least some of the song titles are interpreted as singing at an octave, so singing sort of in unison. We really don't know what those songs would've been like. So sometimes I think that it would be much more helpful to our thinking about it if we're trying to in reading the Bible, we're trying to enter into the world that the Bible was part of, maybe to use a word like chant, but that might be still much more misleading probably, but maybe not as misleading as singing.

So we read a number of a number of places in the Bible about people playing these instruments and singing in connection with the Temple. So when Hannah brings Samuel and dedicates him, she stands up and does she sing the song, does she chant what we find in 1 Samuel chapter 2? Or when the Ark of the covenant is brought into the city of David described in 2 Samuel 6, David is leaping and dancing in front of it and their musicians

are playing. We would assume with their playing and dancing perhaps for some sort of chanting going along and there definitely is the days of Nehemiah which you remember is 500 years after David, so big gap of time. But in the days of Nehemiah there is at the dedication of the wall two choirs that get up and walk around the wall along with it says the instruments of David. Whether those instruments like a Stradivarius had survived for so many hundreds of years, or whether they just mean instruments as designed by David or something that is again one of those questions that it would be nice to the answer to but it's difficult for us to know that exactly.

We do have the one passage in the Bible that specifically tells us how the book of Psalms, or how some Psalms were used. It's in 1 Chronicles 16. 1 Chronicles 16 is the story that takes place after 2 Samuel 6 verse 19. So the 2 Samuel 6 verse 19 is the end of David bringing the ark into Jerusalem and setting it up in a tent. Then the story kind of ends, then he has the incident with Michal, who made fun of him for dancing. He told her that he would not act as a husband toward her anymore, and then the story ends. But here in the 1 Chronicles 16, the chronicler is much more interested in worship, than the author of Samuel. So he goes into great detail about the choirs, the choir directors, and instrumentalists, and who was playing what, and talks a great length, chapters and chapters actually, with a list of names and who was in the choir, and whose sons they were, and whose grandsons they were. In the middle of that, in chapter 16, starting in verse eight, we have a song that David told them to sing. It says in verse seven, "On that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to Yahweh," and then begins a poem that goes down through verse 36. It begins, "O give thanks to Yahweh, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples." You might say that sounds familiar, and that's because it should sound familiar the next 4 to 15 verses are the first 15 verses of Psalm 105. They're identical and then when we get to verse 23 and Psalm 105 stops, he does not actually go to the end of Psalm 105, he just stops sort of in the middle there are quite a few more verses to go. Starting with verse 23, he quotes Psalm 96, verses one through the first half of verse 13, then he stops. I don't know why he stops there but he just goes that far. Then down in verse 34, verse 34 is the first verse of

Psalm 106, and verse 35 is the last verse, last two verses of Psalm 106. Now is that the chronicler's way of saying I'm not going to write out the whole thing, you can go look it up, I'm just going to tell you they sing, the first and last verse, you are supposed to understand they sang the whole thing, or did they really just sing the first and last verse. I don't really know. It's kind of intriguing but literally the end in verse 36 is the same as Psalm 72:18. So what's presented in the book of Chronicles as a single poem is actually if you forgive the word apostate nation made up of pieces of a bunch of different selections from the book of Psalms and that's the only evidence that we have of how the Psalms themselves were used in Israel's worship. They were sung as assigned by David to Asaph and his brothers who were the other two main choir leaders of the levitical choirs in the worship that took place at the tent in Jerusalem.

Now there are many other poems in the Bible besides those found in the book of Psalms. So, for example, we find in Genesis 49, Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons and their descendants or Exodus 15, the song of the sea after they crossed the sea with Moses. Numbers 22 to 24, are different poems of the prophecies of Baalam son of Beor. Deuteronomy 32 and 33, and it goes stretches through the whole Bible in fact so that roughly a third of the Scripture Old and New Testament together is a poetry which I'll talk about in our second lecture. But those were all written in relationship to the story. So that Jacob's blessing on his sons in Genesis 49 is not taken from us all Moses songs about Israel Deuteronomy 32 and 33 are not taken from the book of Psalms. They were apparently written for that occasion and were composed for that occasion and written down later on so we have to say that although he will be very common in study Bibles and commentaries to read that this song was used for this purpose and with this sort of the ceremony at the Temple we don't really know on the evidence that we have here is certainly that these songs were used in Psalm 105, 96 and 106 and perhaps 72 were used as hymns of celebration. But beyond that we don't we don't really know.

Sometimes you read and people talk about, for example, the penitential Psalms there are seven of those: Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalms 38, Psalm 51, Psalm 102, Psalm 130 and Psalm 143. Well, we don't really know again, sorry if it sounds like I'm saying we

don't really know but that's the truth. People identify them and say these are the Penitential Psalms. But nobody even knows who first said that about them. Some people say Augustine was the first person, some people say Cassiodorus. Some people say, "No, it was a rabbinic tradition," but there's not much evidence for that. And so, when we read them we can say, "O yeah, I can see why they're called the Penitential Psalms." I mean 32 and 51 are certainly very familiar, songs after David's sin with Bathsheba. But, exactly whether or not they were ever conceived of as a group is difficult to know. That is when they were first being written did somebody say I'm going to write another Penitential Psalm or does that same theme just show up more than once.

We find in the Psalter as a whole, that themes keep submerging and resurfacing as we read through the psalms. The same ideas keep coming up. Some people call Psalms 120 to 134, Pilgrim Psalms, or their translation title is usually Songs of Ascents. Well the tricky part there is that the word that is translated "ascent" is also used for the steps of a dial. A sun step, so as the sun rises in the sky the shadow changes from step to step. Remember when Hezekiah was sick and the Lord told him he was going to die and he prayed, and the Lord sent him back, and sent Isaiah back and said the Lord was going to heal you. What sign do you want that he is really going to do this? And Hezekiah said that the sun was going to go back six steps. Well that's what he is talking about, a dial like that. That the sun, as the sun went back in the sky the shadow would go up the dial. Well maybe these Psalms, 120-134, were really written to be read or chanted or used at different periods of the day. So there are fifteen of them and there are fifteen steps on a dial or something like that. Or maybe it means stairs, and some people think it means they would've sung one when they stood on the first step to get up to the temple and the next one for the next step and 122 for the third step etc. So it's a very interesting phenomenon that somebody comes up with an idea, "O this is how these were used," and suddenly that becomes our understanding. "O that is how they were used" and we simply go on from there assuming that that's the way they are to be interpreted. There is no evidence against it, but the evidence for is also rather mixed.

So when we read statements like, "these are the Psalms that were used for this

purpose.” We really have to take that with a pretty big grain of salt and go back and study the text of the Psalm and study even historical books to see if there really is much evidence for that.

How can we be sure of that? Let me suggest a couple of conclusions to this brief introduction. One is, the Psalter is clearly an arranged book. Psalms are grouped by the name of the author, some songs are grouped by title, and there are also Psalms that are grouped by even which name for God is being used. So that the first part of the Psalter, Psalms one to 41 and then 84 to 150, the name Yahweh is the most frequent, not only it's used most the time but in every Psalm Yahweh is more common than the name Elohim for God. And then in Psalms 42-83 the word God is the word that is used most common. By the way when I say the Lord, or Yahweh, that's the word that the English Bibles translate all with small caps, not the Lord with a capital “L” and then a small lower case “ord,” but L and small cap “ORD,” which is actually the Lord's name, Yahweh. So the Psalter's arranged that way as well, a Yahweh section, an Elohim section, standard word for God all through the ancient Near East, and then another Yahweh section. There are Hallelujah Psalms, the word hallelujah doesn't occur until Psalm 104, it occurs in three Psalms, 104, 105, 106, and it occurs in 111 through 117 and doesn't occur until 146 to 150. Pretty clearly it seems, somebody decided that they were going to stick these hallelujah Psalms together, and even the statement about “David son of Jesse being ended” again shows that somebody was collecting this and putting it together. Now, that means that it's not haphazard.

Let me use a modern analogy. Would a poet today or an author who writes, let's say essays, or short stories, decide to publish a collection of poetry or short stories or something else, they have to decide what order the poems are going to be arranged in. Are they going to be done chronologically? This would be great if you are trying to write a dissertation because then you could study a poet's development and how he thinks about things or how she thinks about things. Or, are they going to be grouped by subject? Are they going to be grouped alphabetically by first word? Are they going to be grouped just how the poet felt the day he or she wrote it? Or are they just going to take all 150 go to

the top of the stairs and throw them down and wherever they land that's where they'll put them in the book? Very few people would do the last. Most people will come up with some reason for organizing the book. Sometimes it will be topical as I said or some other reason. But there will be some purpose behind the actual location of this poem at this point in the book. So it follows this and precedes this, and that one in turn follows this one that we are looking at and precedes the next. There is some, perhaps even shape to the book as a whole. We've seen that that's true for the Psalter, and that implies that just as when we're reading say a collection of A. E. Housman or Robert Frost we want to look at the poems that Frost chose to put before or after the poem we are reading because for some reason he put them together. Sometimes we can discern the reason, sometimes we can't. But there's some reason there.

The same thing is true when we read the book of Psalms. I think that most of us are used to reading the Psalter as 150 individual poems, and we just pick the one we want or need for the day or like the best and read that one and then close the book and go our way. It would be much more helpful for us to read a particular Psalm and then as we're thinking about that, to read the Psalm that comes before it and to read the Psalm that comes after it and to assume that at some point maybe as long as almost 3000 years ago somebody said, "Nope, Psalm three is going to come before Psalm four and Psalm four is going to come before Psalm five, because I want Psalm five to come after four and I want Psalm six there, and I want Psalm five next to it."

As I said earlier, sometimes we can see why they are arranged the way that they are. So, for example, all the Psalms that talk about the LORD, Yahweh, as King, occur between Psalm 91 and 100. Psalm 29 is an exception to that and there are a few other exceptions but the bulk of them come in that little group of Psalms. So somebody said, "Yes this is a theme and we're going to group these thematically." In fact, if we were doing this in Hebrew you see that there are a lot more connections, it is not just the idea that the Lord is king but there are about twelve Psalms there that are very, very tightly interwoven thematically, and all sorts of words and structures and things that we just can't go into because of time that show that somebody gave a great deal of thought to

putting this together that then suggests that we ought to give a great deal of thought into how we read it. And rather than see them as things that are simply compiled or assembled, so that we can read them one by one. To think of it as a book, and to actually read it as a book. So we're asking "how this is this poem related to the poem before or after it, admitting sometimes that's pretty hard to see, but sometimes it's very clear.

Another question we want to ask ourselves is given the overall shape of the Psalter, so from these psalms, that are basically psalms of prayer and petition and asking for help to psalms of praise and thanksgiving. How does this psalm that I'm reading fit into that overall shape, what does it contribute to that shape? Is it one of the psalms of petition? Is it one of the psalms of praise? Is it a psalm of petition in the midst of a whole bunch of psalms of praise, why would they put that there? Why would they interrupt one kind of psalm by just dropping a single poem in there? Those are the kinds of questions that make us think more carefully about what we are reading. They make us considerate it and ponder it, and as I'll say at the end, I'll come back to this, poetry is not meant to be read quickly. It's meant to entangle our minds with pictures and ideas. To give us a different way of looking at some aspect of reality, to affect our thoughts.

Maybe the actual propositional content of the poem, that is the statement "the LORD is king," is not really the point. Maybe instead we're supposed to spend our time thinking about how does this poem explore the idea that the Lord is King. How does that help me then maybe purge my mind of unhelpful ways that the Lord is King, and by replacing them with biblical ways of reflecting and meditating on that?

So that the poems themselves begin to not just give us theological content or moral guidance, which are probably the reasons most of us read the Bible most of the time, but instead they begin to mold our thinking. Paul talks about having our minds washed or cleansed by the Word of God. He talks about in Romans 12, that we don't let the world press us into its mold, but we renew our minds. How do we do that? Well we learn to think differently. We learn to conceive of the world ourselves and the world and our role in it, and therefore the Lord himself in a different way. I think also that in reading the Psalter as a book, it helps us remember that the shape of things, let's say the universe, the

shape of things is ultimately redemptive. The Psalter by its very nature, by its very organization says to us that thousands of years ago, believers were already thinking this way. That these poems were put together to show us what it means for God to intervene on behalf of his people. Just as he intervenes individually, he also intervenes corporately in the life of Israel, in the work of his kingdom, in building the church. And the shape of the Psalter itself reminds us of that.

Now I think there's one further implication, and that has to do with what I said earlier, about the kinds of poems that are addressed to God, which are prayers and poems that are basically about God or meditations, reflections, or calls to praise. It is entirely appropriate to think about God and our relationship to him in different ways, and even the poems themselves show us that, because there are different kinds. So sometimes our way of thinking about him is primarily by talking to him. And in talking to him we begin to think about this person to whom we're speaking to our relationship to him. This helps us to see our circumstances in light of who he is. That's what the prayers do. The other way that we find, that is ways of thinking about God, either call for us to respond to him in a particular way, by calling him for praise, worship, submission, or adoration. Or by picking some little aspect of reality, such as God communicates with us. What does Psalm 19 say about that? He communicates with us through everything that's created. He communicates with us through his word. So that Psalm 19 itself points us beyond itself. It's not simply a meditation on the word of God, but it's a meditation on the communication of God with his people. And because it talks about God speaking through creation, "the heavens declare the glory of God," and so on. It speaks of God's communication universally with all beings, so that we find the poet has taken a basic idea, God communicates, and if you'll excuse the word, played with it. What does this really mean? Let's think about this. I won't read Psalm 19, you can read it yourself, and I think you will find that is true. So that the Psalms show us how to pray and show us how to think. So when we read this book, we read it as a book, rich in for our good, rich and poetically from God, for our blessing.

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