

### **Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Lecture 3**

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In the second lecture I read a brief poem by Christina Rossetti, “What Are Heavy,” which illustrates something else that is true of poetry in general, and that is the idea of pattern. By pattern we mean that things are repeated or they’re put together in certain ways so that the overall effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts. So in that poem, what are heavy? What are brief? What are frail? What are deep? The pattern of question, of successive questions, leads us with each line to expect a question for the next line. We can look at patterns on a very small scale and patterns on a very large scale. In talking about biblical poetry and looking at the book of Psalms, one of the things that we find is a great deal of what appears to be maybe mental stutters. That is, the poets seem to repeat themselves. They say one thing, then they say it again. They say one thing, then they say it again. They say one thing... So, Psalm 2, “why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devise a vain thing?” Well, those kind of mean the same thing, don’t they? Verse 2, “The kings of the earth take their stand, the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against those anointed.” So they take their stand, they take counsel together with the kings of the earth, the rulers. “Let us tear their fetters apart, and let us cast away their chords from us.” They sound almost exactly identical. Verse 4, “He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at them.” Verse 5, “Then he’ll speak to them in his anger and he’ll terrify them in his fury.” Well, the fifth one is a little bit different. It’s not exactly the same. The difference between speaking to someone and terrifying them points out something that often the second line does; it ups the ante a little bit, and makes it a little stronger. But the point is that we find in biblical poetry this constant interplay where the poet says something and then says something that’s very closely related to it, but not exactly the same way.

In English poetry rhyme is a way of organizing a poem. So if you can remember back this far when you studied sonnets, you know that the line scheme is a, b, b, a, so the first line is a, and the second line is b, it ends in a word that sounds like the sound of b, and there’s a, b, b, a, and that pattern is repeated. So the first and fourth line sound alike;

the second and third line sound alike, and then the fifth and eighth, et cetera. In English poetry, rhyme is therefore often an organizing method. It's something, a tool that can be used to organize a poem by showing us which lines go together. Hebrew poetry doesn't use rhyme. Instead, it uses what's come to be called "parallelism." And that is the idea that one line reflects the line before it, or we could say it the other way around. A line reflects or anticipates the line that comes after it. What is this? Well, the very quick summary: at one point the rabbis said God would never repeat himself so therefore the two lines must mean something very different. And they tried to figure out as many differences as they could between the two lines. So how can we distinguish nations from "people," how can we distinguish being "in an uproar" from "devising vanity," or something. And that's possible to do. But then, maybe in the seventeenth century, Archbishop Lowth gave a series of lectures, he was really arguing about something else, but along the way he said that biblical poetry can be described as made up of parallelism; the lines are parallel to each other. And usually its two lines, sometimes it's three or four or even five; which is very rare. Usually it's two, sometimes three. Lowth said there are three kinds of these relationships between lines. Sometimes they're saying the same thing like these examples in Psalm 1, in fact that's the most common kind of parallelism in the book of Psalms. In the book of Proverbs, on the other hand, as we might expect because you have a contrast between wisdom and folly, the usual kind of parallelism is a contrast where they say sort of the opposite. So, "the wise woman builds her house but the foolish woman tears it down with her own hands." Or "a wise son makes his father happy; a foolish son is his mother's grief." So the two lines contrast with each other. The contrast in the second one, by the way, isn't between father and mother, it's between the affect the son's behavior has on his parents. That's Proverbs 10:1.

Then there are many cases in the Bible where there is no parallelism. Now again, our translations and the general way I'd say that scholars look at it is that there must be a parallelism somewhere. But instead it seems that what we have are just lines that are of different length. Most of them are fairly short; in Hebrew they're quite short, so in Hebrew the average number of words per proverb is about between seven and nine.

When translated into English it blooms to thirteen up to about twenty-eight, depending on what they have to do, so they don't even sound like proverbs anymore. The same thing is true in the book of Psalms, where once they start translating, things get stretched out and have to get moved around because the languages are different. But nonetheless, we can see that if we read through Psalm 2, when we come to verse 6, verse 6 is actually a single sentence, unlike the five verses in front of it. Verses 1 through 5 each consist of two parallel lines. So, verse 3, "let us tear their fetters apart and let us cast their chords away from us". Verse 4, verse 5, the same thing. Verse 6 consists of one line; it's twice the length. Actually it's more than twice the length of any of the lines that have come before it, all of which are usually three words, something like four words in Hebrew. And this has seven words in Hebrew, a lot more in English of course. That is a fairly standard way in biblical poems of showing the reader that we've come to the end of a section.

Sometimes the line that signals we've come to the end of a section will be very short, one or two words, usually it's much longer than the preceding lines. The big clue really is that the poet sets up a pattern, and then he does something that breaks the pattern. So we read in the first five verses of Psalm 2, three words, three words, three words, three words, et cetera, et cetera, and then suddenly seven words. And so we ought to say then to ourselves, "wow, what's going on here"? Not just "what does it mean", but "why has he done it this way", because in fact, verse 7 begins a new section of Psalm 2. This is a psalm now in which the psalmist goes on to quote the Lord and we have this discussion of their relationship in verses 7 through 9, and then in 10 through 12 it is the summons to those kings who in verses 1 through 3 were rebelling. The psalmist in verses 10 through 12 summons them to submission and obedience. And we find in each of those cases, that we have some sort of discontinuity within the poem itself.

In English, we do that a lot of times by leaving a blank line, which is also true in my version of Psalm 2, for example, there are blank lines after verses 3, 6 and 9. But again, they're not original; they're added by editors. In English we also do it by means of rhyme; Hebrew does it by means of the style of the parallelism, the type and the length of the line. So when we read a poem or a psalm we find that paying attention to how it is

constructed, actually becomes a clue as to how the whole psalm is constructed. You might say, “isn’t that kind of pedantic?” Why do we want to worry about how the whole poem is constructed? Because, isn’t our goal in studying the Bible to submit to what it says? And part of that submission is to learn to think the poet’s thoughts after him or after her. Let me change venues for just a moment.

Let’s say that you are going to lead a Bible study and preach a sermon or a Sunday school lesson on Psalm 113. You might say, “Well, my first point is in verse 5, my second point is in verses 2 and 3, my third point is in verse 9 and my fourth point, the conclusion, is in verse 1.” What is the problem with that? Well I think the real problem is that the poet didn’t write it that way. He wasn’t thinking in that way. He was thinking it in the order that it was written. He wants us to read it in that order so that when we come to verse 9, whatever we think of it we have come to that verse having read verses 1 through 8. Same thing when we talk about parallelism. Say that we have two lines. We always ask ourselves how was each line related to the next line? Because that’s how the poet wrote it. Each line reflects or contrasts or steps away from the line before it. So we read Psalm 113 verse 2, “Blessed be the name of Yahweh from this time forth and forever from the rising of the sun to its setting. The name of Yahweh is to be praised.” Those are two very long verses and in fact, they are single sentences where there is no parallelism in the verse but instead the two verses as a whole are a parallel together. This is very cool. In verse 2 line A “Blessed be the name of the Lord”, verse 3 line B, “the name of the Lord is to be praised.” Those things are parallels and look at the two middle lines 2b and 3a “from this time and forever, to the rising of the sun to its setting.”--time and space. East to the west is what he’s talking about, not time. He just took the idea that God should be praised everywhere and always and he didn’t just say that but instead he kind of turned it inside out and asked us what might that look like; how can we even think about that? So he takes a very abstract idea and makes it a little more concrete. Rather than just saying “always and everywhere” he says “from this time forth.” I know what this time is, and forever, I don’t know quite know what forever is but it goes on for a long time, and from east and west, I know what that is.

Putting those two things in the middle and the other on the outside is a very common biblical pattern that has been come to be called a “chiasm.” Because when you arrange it in a certain way it makes the letter *chi*, which in Greek looks like our X. So people call something like this a chiasm. We don’t really know why they wrote things in chiasm. There is no manual on Hebrew poetry in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, I’d love to discover that, but we know that they did it many, many, many times. Sometimes it’s used in Proverbs where you have contracting lines. The words will be flipped in their order and that goes right along with the contrast in their meaning of the lines. Here the lines mean that same thing but their meanings are reversed.

It seems to be like when a poet sits down to write a sonnet. He or she has decided to communicate in 140 syllables broken into groups of ten syllables. Every tenth syllable of which will fall into a particular rhyme scheme and that will follow a particular meter (iambic pentameter). And it will be arranged in a certain logical structure of eight lines that set forth a problem or a question or a situation and six lines that resolve or explain it. Or in the other kind of sonnet, twelve lines that set forth a problem and two lines that encapsulate it or, more often in Shakespeare, turn it on its head or upside down. What has the poet done? Well, restricted him or herself greatly! C.S Lewis wrote a sonnet once and said that it is was so difficult that he would never write another one. Well that’s not actually true he did write a few more. But it’s very difficult to do. Why would someone do that? Why would someone say that they are going to write poetry in a chiasm? The lines are going to be the same length otherwise it doesn’t sound right, it doesn’t fit? You have to have words that correspond with each other in some way. You have to have concepts that fit into, say: praise, time, space, praise or blessing so that we get this pattern that shows up in the words and in the idea. Why would somebody write a sonnet and submit themselves to that torture? Well part of it is, it’s a form that is recognized, a form that is used; it’s just a way to write. Just like parallelism is the way they wrote poetry. They didn’t write limericks; there are no limericks in the Bible. But they wrote lots of great poems that are very carefully put together and structured, as we will see in our fourth lecture.

If you look in Psalm 114 it's a short Psalm of 8 verses. Every line reflects the line in front of it and there is some very close repetition. So it says "when Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from the people from the stammering tongue Judah became a sanctuary, Israel his domain. The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back, the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs." What's with "you sea" it's kind of hard to translate "that you flee Jordan, that you turn back mountains, that you skip like rams, hills like rams, tremble earth before the Lord, before the God of Jacob. Who turned the rock into a pool of water the flint into a source into a source of water." Every line reflects the line before it. In fact so often do they reflect the line before it they usually just leave the verbs out of the second line. So "when Israel went forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob the people of the strange language" it doesn't say "the house of Jacob went forth from the people of the strange language or stammering tongue." Well, that's pretty common. The poet wants us to supply the verb from the first line into the second line. You see it's a very clever way of making us pay attention. I have to recall enough of the preceding line to make sure that I am inserting the verb that he intends into the second line, not just some verb I feel like. Like when "Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob scurried out by midnight after the plague of the death of the firstborn from the people of the strange language". It doesn't say that; it just says "went out." Or "Judah became the sanctuary of Israel"; it just says "Israel became his dominion." See, a lot of times our English translations will put the verb in the second line or they will put something in there because they think that it might be too hard for us to understand. But you know that if it's not there that's because it's not there. That's because the poet is writing in a way that binds the two verbs more closely than if he supplied the verb in the second line.

So we look at this psalm a little more we see that 3 and 4 are reflected in verses 5 and 6. So verses 3 and 4 "as he looked and fled, the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs, what ails you, what's with you sea that you flee." See it goes back to 3a, 5b goes with 3b, 6a and 6b go with 4a and 4b. In fact 4b and 6b are identical in Hebrew. They are identical, because there are no question marks in

Hebrew. Sorry I know that disappoints you, but they're added. So it just says "hills like lambs" and we understand from the context, that the first one is a statement and the second one is a question.

In looking at parallelism we ask ourselves each time "what is the relationship between these two lines? Now whether or not we come up with Arch Bishop Lowth's terminology, the terminology is not really the point. In fact, sometimes the terminology can get in our way, so that people have all sorts of terms to describe the relationship between lines. Whole books, big books, have been written on describing and analyzing paralleling structures and parallelism in biblical Hebrew. The real issue that we're dealing with is, when the poet wrote he didn't actually write two separate sentences that then we are supposed to somehow stick them together, like a plus b equals either ab or c (something new). Instead, it's a single statement that is comprised of two parts so that reading the first part of a verse without reading the second, or third if there is one, is illegitimate. It was never meant to be understood as a single isolated statement. Reading the second line of a verse without reading it in light of the first line, is also illegitimate. The verse was intended, I say "verse" specifically because parallel lines can extend across verse divisions; remember verse boundaries are much later than the original text. The parallel lines together, all of them together, create a statement, make an assertion, ask a question, offer a prayer, or whatever else it might be. So we're trying to ask: "what is the relationship between these? What does the second line add to the first line? Or, how does the first line help us understand the second line? If we write consecutively one word at a time, we read from one line to the next. So, I read this line; that now becomes the basis for understanding the next line, which is almost, we could say built on top of it. So in order to understand the building we have to understand the foundation. We are asking, how are these things related? and what is he saying by putting these two ideas together?

So why does he want us to know that Egypt is somehow identified with a people of a stammering tongue or a foreign or strange language? In verse 1 of Psalm 114, why not just say "from the land of the Nile." I mean there are lots of ways to describe Egypt. "The land of the Pharaoh," "the land where Joseph was second in command"... we could

use lots of things, but why did he chose that particular term or that particular idea in order to parallel what he said in the first line. And we could even ask from the beginning why he chose that word in the first line. Why say, "when Israel went forth from Egypt"? Why not say, "when Israel went forth from a people of strange language the house of Jacob from Egypt"? Is there a significance to that? You see, that is part of the whole question of authorial choice in a poem. So if you are writing a sonnet you can't use 142 syllables. You can't do it. You have to find another word. You have to fit the rhyme scheme. If you like this word but it doesn't rhyme, sorry, you've got to get rid of it; go get another one. Because you've chosen to communicate in a certain way, in order to really communicate that way, you have to follow the rules, the conventions of that method of communication.

In biblical poetry the normal convention is that lines will be parallel. Now, as I said earlier not all lines are. Our translations make it look that way because very, very rarely will a translation actually write out a whole line of text as a single sentence all the way across the page. Instead we move to double column Bibles, which just makes it more difficult or impossible to have long lines. Secondly it seems to me that convictions on the part of scholarship in general are that biblical poetry has to be parallel and so we're going to get two lines even if they aren't there. We'll just choose a place to break where it makes sense; break it after the verb and put the object in the second line or something like that.

So if you look at Psalm 2, what we looked at the beginning of this lecture, we see in Psalm 2 it says, "why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising of vain thing?" Verse 1, very parallel: "peoples, nations, uproar, devising of a vain thing." "The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take council together." Well, "kings of the earth", "rulers, take their stand", "take counsel together" all sound pretty parallel. But in this particular translation there's a third line in verse 2 which says, "against Yahweh and against his anointed" but in fact that doesn't work because that's not a sentence; that's not a clause. It's just a phrase and it's really part of the second line of verse 2, but the way the translation makes it look like somehow this is a third line that's being added to the first two. And we need to figure out how this line relates. Well, it relates because it's just an indirect object of the verb in the second line. So what we actually have are three

lines of three words each and then the fourth line is seven words. And then we have another six lines that are three or four words each then verse six with seven words. So we actually have a little break in structure after verse two. That ought to make us then wonder, "Ok, if there's a break in the structure is there a reason? Is it arbitrary?" No, see that's the danger. To say he did this for poetic reasons or poetic effect is really a "cop out." We can't say that. Poets don't do things arbitrarily. Sometimes we can interpret things and get to some pretty elaborate interpretations and wonder is this really what's going on?

Let me read a brief quote from Molly Peacock's book. She says, "am I making this up? Can this be real?" To paraphrase it she says, "is it really possible that all this meaning is packed into all of these lines, this interplay of sound and images and meaning and function and line length and structure?" You know that when a poet works it's actually the right brain informing the left brain of what it's trying to do so that things happen synergistically within the process creating the poem that the poet may not even be fully aware of. This is, in fact integral to the nature of the poem's meaning because it's part of its structure. Remember we're thinking about structure because we want to think the way the poet did. Think his or her thoughts after him or her so we say, even though most translations will put the break after verse 3 rather than after verse 2 in Psalm 2. It sounds like that's where it should be, but the way the poem is made the break should come after verse 2 somehow. Verse 3 is set off.

Well, there are other things that break verse 4 because if you read on you will see that verse 4 talks about the Lord whereas verse 3 talks about the kingdom, etc. In Psalm 2 verses 1, 2, and 3 are bound together in terms of their content, but verse 3 is separated from verses 1 and 2 by the structure of verses 1 and 2. In fact in Hebrew there are four verbs in the first four lines, that is, verses 1 and 2. The first verb, let's call it a perfect, in Hebrew. The next verb is an imperfect. The third verb is an imperfect, the fourth verb is a perfect. See, after that, we have the ABAA pattern- the chiasm. Is that a coincidence? Did the poet not know that he used these verb forms? Or did it just happen and worked out? In fact, if we were to actually write out the verse in Hebrew and say we'll call the subject

in each line “A”, each verb “B” and the object “C”, we would find that the order of the sentences is in fact reversed. So all of verse 1 is a chiasm and all of verse 2 is a chiasm, then the four verbs in verses 1 and 2 tie the two chiasms together but create a different chiasm. Could that be a coincidence? I think not. And verses 3, 4, and 5 go onto a different kind of parallelism where, if we did the subject-verb-object thing, it would just be ABC, ABC, ABC; there is no chiasm. Is it an accident? No. The poet knew exactly what he was doing, we may not know exactly why he was doing it, but he was doing it very, very intentionally. And part of reading a poem is just to say: “woah, that's really cool!” That's a legitimate response to poetry. And then to ask, “why is it cool?” Why did he work so hard to make it look like that? There's a reason somewhere, even if we can't think about it. Part of the process is to ponder.

Let me show you one more kind of repetition and then I'll move on to larger structures. To go back to Psalm 113. Psalm 113 is the beginning of a group of Psalms (113 through 118) called “the Egyptian Hallel”- a song recited at Passover every year. What these Psalms all have in common is that they have the word "hallelujah" in them. Praise “jah” is a short form of the word Yahweh. So “Praise the Lord”, at the beginning, or the end, or both. Some of the verses begin with “Praise the Lord--Hallelujah”, and end with, “Praise the Lord--Hallelujah”. That's not just parallelism, it's repetition which means exactly the same thing is repeated. Now, when something like that happens at the beginning of a psalm and the end of a psalm, why would a poet do that? Why would he say over again what he said in the first? Psalm 103 begins, “Bless the Lord oh my Soul”, Psalm 103 ends, “Bless the Lord oh my Soul.” Why would the poet do that? Let's assume we're not coming with all sorts of theological baggage, we read Psalm 113 and it says “Praise the Lord.” What's a natural response? Remember when you were eight years old, when your father said "take out the garbage"? What's a natural response? - "why?" So when we come to the end of the psalm, the "why" has already been answered. See, so even though it's repeated, the words are the same but the meaning but the function of the statements are very different. The first one is a summons, the second is a summons that is at the same time a reminder, because in verses 4 through 9, he's given us several reasons

for “Praise the Lord” by explaining how great he is and how generous and good he is to his people. So even though they are parallel, in fact repetitious, they don't have the same function. Same vocabulary meaning and dictionary meaning, but not the same purpose. Same thing with Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord, oh my soul.” It's a big difference in saying it in the beginning of the psalm and saying it again at the end twenty one verses later in verse 22 when he's gone through a huge catalogue of all the good things that the Lord has done for his people he'll say it again. Now you know who we're blessing, why we're blessing him, and what he's done for us.

This points to another characteristic of psalms of praise, which is that the Psalter never calls on us to praise God because he exists. Sometimes people say “I don't want to praise God for what he's done, I just want to praise him for who he is.” But that's not biblical. The Bible always gives us reasons and the reasons are often our self-interest, what God has done for me, what God has done for us. That's why we praise him. Sometimes, it's because of creation but much of the time it's actually the work of salvation or deliverance. And what's really striking, if you turn to Revelation chapters 4 and 5, there are three songs that John hears in the heavenly worship when he is taken up by the Spirit. The first one is very broad, the second one praises God because of his work of creation and the providence upholding his creation and the third one praises the Lamb for the work of salvation. These are the same reasons that we find for praising God in the book of Psalms, which is a good reason to talk about biblical poetry and Old Testament poetry because really it is all one.

So, we look at the relationship between lines in order to talk about, or force ourselves and encourage ourselves I should say, to pay attention and think about what these two lines together are saying. Why ought we use those two lines, combine them, and say that. And remember, we don't separate, just read one line like reading “half proverbs” on why a wise son makes his father happy. Ok, but that's not the whole proverb. It doesn't say everything that is to be said- a foolish son is his mother's grief. Ah, see, the contrast throws the meaning of each to a higher profile than they do if they are just standing by themselves. And it shows us the consequences of not just one kind of

behavior, but of both. Anyway, in Psalms, the things that we read that are parallel to each other combine to give us a greater meaning than either one, or of both of them taken individually.

Now when we look at structures, if we were to go through and outline all the psalms. You pretty quickly, starting with Psalm 3, actually find out that there are some fairly standard outlines for psalms. About a third of the psalter actually looks like Psalm 13. Let me give you a very rough outline of Psalm 13. In the first three verses we have these questions: “How long, Yahweh, will you have to forget me forever?” “How long shall you hide your face from me?” “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, sorrow in my heart all the day?” “How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” Those are addresses to God, like many other psalms that start off with “O Lord”, “O God” or “Oh my God”. They basically plea for God’s attention or ask “Are you going to forget me forever?” That is a pretty strong way of saying “I think you have forgotten me and I don’t like this and what’s going on.” Those are followed by a request for help. And in Psalm 13, here’s the request, “Pay attention, answer me, Yahweh my God; give light to my eyes, or even maybe make my eyes shine, or something like that.” That is his request. And then he gives the Lord some reasons for why he should answer that request. “Lest I sleep in death, lest my enemies say ‘I’ve overcome him’, or my adversaries rejoice when I am shaken.” So actually, you can see the parallelism in verse 4, “my enemies”, “my adversaries”, “I’ve overcome him lest they rejoice when I am shaken”, it’s not exact parallelism, but it is really close, it’s analogous. That is one reason; the other reason is “lest I die.” So he doesn’t just ask God, he gives him reasons for why he thinks it is a good prayer request.

Then there is a statement here in verse 5, “But I have trusted in your loving kindness, my heart rejoices in your salvation” which is an expression of confidence, or assurance, or some sort of hope that the Lord has answered his prayer or is about to answer it or will answer it. Then in verse 6 he says, “I will sing to Yahweh, because he has dealt bountifully or well with me.” Again, notice it is the last verse in the psalm, it is a single sentence and a really long one. That is part of the function of long lines, to close

things off. So in there, in verse 6, we find a promise; this is what I will do. So he goes from saying, “how long will you forget me” to saying “I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.” And in the space of six verses, he has gone through this outline: an address or an invocation to his reasons for the plea, the motivation, to his expression of confidence and to his promise. Sometimes it’s a promise to sing, sometimes it’s a promise to offer sacrifices, sometimes it specifically says “I will testify in company of the brethren, about the Lord’s goodness to me.” There are all sorts of promises.

Now a third of the psalter looks like that, about fifty-two or fifty-three of them. And they always end this way, except, I should say, with the exception of Psalm 88. Psalm 88 does not end with any cheer or any promise, instead Psalm 88 ends very graphically by saying “You have removed lover and friend far from me; my acquaintances are darkness.” Kind of a bummer. But, one of the questions then that we ask ourselves is, if there is a pattern that the poets tend to follow, why doesn’t Psalm 88 follow that pattern? Was this poet just having a really, really, really bad day? Maybe, or is its presence in Scripture merely a reminder that we will not always see light at the end of the tunnel? At least it is still a prayer addressed to God, right? He is complaining to him, but he’s at least talking with him. In fact that points up one of the values of even noticing outlines like this. And that is that we can compare two or three psalms that have the same patterns and we notice in one psalm the reasons, the motivation are five or ten verses long. In another psalm, the complaint is the part that is ten verses long. In another psalm, the promise at the end goes on and on and on and on about all of the things the psalmist is going to do once he’s delivered. And so, we ask ourselves, “Okay, so he’s taking this idea, but in this psalm, in this poem, this ‘lament’ as they are called, he is really emphasizing this idea. Why? And how does this compare and contrast with other poems of the same type?”

It’s is a very interesting exercise. Sonnets have been written for many hundreds of years. If you were to take Oxford’s book of sonnets, and read through it and ask you yourself, “I know a sonnet is supposed to follow a certain sort of logic, how does this sonnet fit that, and why doesn’t he quite follow the scheme. Why does the pattern look a

little different? Why does he re-arrange things?” So we start to think about why a poet would take something that is more or less standardized and tweak it a little bit. The tweaking is part of the meaning of the poem because in poetry the form and the content are not just lying side by side. It is not just that the form supports the content, but the form and shape are actually part of it. And that is why we pay attention. Remember in appreciation we talked about the “cool factor”, well, that is part of wanting us to see that. Look at all the work, he put this together, and look what he says when he puts it together! Look what it says when you put together that package of those lines at the beginning of Psalm 2! That is how poetry communicates.

We only have a couple of minutes, so I will just mention one other main type of psalm, and that is the psalm of praise. These are like 113, in that they always follow the same pattern. They start with a call to praise, a command, reasons for praising, and then they end with a call to praise. Sometimes one of those is longer or shorter, so in Psalm 150 the reasons to praise are basically half of one line (verse three), and the last five verses are all calls to praise with instruments. Well, Psalm 150 has a different emphasis than Psalm 148. The emphasis in Psalm 148 is on who is doing the praising. In Psalm 150 the emphasis is on how the praising is being done. But in each case there are reasons for doing it.

Keep in mind there are other types of psalms; there are other patterns that you will see. And sometimes the patterns are easy to discern, sometimes they are not. But learning to look at the psalms as falling within genres helps us to compare, helps us to see that we don't just have 150 psalms but we actually have 150 poems that fall into general types that let us then look at them individually in light of each other within that type, see how each one of them functions, and what each one of them does with that pattern. Paying attention, reading carefully, and noticing how the poet wrote can help us try to think his or her thoughts after them.