

# Psalms 2023 Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, July 30, 2023

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## OCC PRESENTATION

KEY – **VIDEO** & Ruth Dahlstrom

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a rather short space of time.

## SETTING THE STAGE

KEY – We are in the midst of an extended summer series on the Book of Psalms. In recent days we have noted:

### 1) The Passion Believers Possess for the Book of Psalms (i.e., Manifold Reasons)

**NOTE 1** – Many gravitate to the psalms for their sense of artistry and beauty. Not only do the psalms offer inspired and impacting content, but they do so in a beautiful manner. These ancient works of Hebrew poetry exemplify artistry in that they are characterized by beauty, craftsmanship and technique. The Lord has spoken to humanity, but is there no significance that He has chosen to do so in such a stylized manner?

**NOTE 2** – Many gravitate to the psalms as they help to inform and impact the practices of prayer and worship. The Book of Psalms has always given believers of the Old and New Covenant eras rich verbiage and vocabulary which helps us to connect with God in the midst of life and living (e.g., public and private elements herein).

**NOTE 3** – Many find connection with the psalms because they connect with human emotion and experience! The psalms touch upon nigh every human emotion (e.g., elation and celebration to despair and despondency) and experience (e.g., lack, betrayal and opposition vs. provision, fidelity and breakthrough) with striking detail!

**QUOTE** – “What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasury. I have been wont [i.e., inclined] to call this book not inappropriately, *an anatomy of all the parts of the soul*; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” –John Calvin

### 2) Types of Psalms

**NOTE 1** – Thus said, the biblical psalmists contended with the complexity of human experience and emotion via an array of TYPES of psalms: **a)** hymns; **b)** laments; **c)** psalms of thanksgiving; **d)** psalms of remembrance; **e)** psalms of confidence; **f)** psalms of wisdom; and **g)** royal (i.e., “kingship”) psalms. This was our topic last week.

**NOTE 2** – It was your homework to compose your own psalm based upon the information provided last week! I am still more than happy to entertain submissions (i.e., should you desire to share your psalm with the body).

**NOTE 3** – Today I would like to further address aspects of this genre of biblical literature...

## GENRE?

**NOTE 1** – From the outset let me note that genre matters. Genre matters in that it governs the manner in which we approach any form of written communication. As a rather simplistic illustration, the way that we approach the comics section of a newspaper will be different than how we approach the weekly obituary! Each type of writing has its own rules for effective interpretation and/or navigation, with unique characteristics.

**NOTE 2** – In fact, failing to account for genre will yield wayward interpretation and corresponding applications.

**Q1. Thus said, what genre of writing are the psalms?**

**Q2. Moreover, what are the unique characteristics thereof?**

**NOTE 3** – Great questions! I am so glad that you asked. Please note:

**A.** The Book of Psalms is a compilation of ancient Hebrew lyric poetry. Let us note the hallmarks of this genre:

## MUSICALITY

Lyric poetry was often connected to music and musicality. This is evident from a cursory reading of the psalms:

**NOTE 1** – In fact, six of the opening ten psalms make specific reference to music or musicality in their heading!

**Psalms 4 (NIV) (For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.)**

**Psalms 5 (For the director of music. For pipes. A psalm of David.)**

**Psalms 6 (For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to sheminith. A psalm of David.)**

**Psalms 7 (A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.)**

**Psalms 8 (For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.)**

**Psalms 9 (For the director of music. To the tune of “The Death of the Son.” A psalm of David.)**

**Q. Why would the psalmists (i.e., as lyric poets) utilize music to such a high degree?**

**A1.** Music has always been a way of expressing human sentiment and emotion. Therefore, it is no surprise that music and musicality has always experienced and abiding connection with prayer, praise, worship and beyond!

**A2.** Moreover, music can function as a mnemonic device (i.e., assisting in the memorization of sacred content). Think of how beneficial this would have been in a society given to oral communication, as most could not read!

**NOTE 2** – Of course, the melodies have been lost to time (e.g., “The Death of the Son”). It would seem that the content of the psalms alone was inspired versus the corresponding music. This point should be taken by those who have engaged in unholy warfare over what style of music should be operational in the Body of Christ. However, this loss does not mean that the topic of music has no bearing on our utilization of the psalms. Rather, consider how many have been set to music through the generations in one form or another!

## PARALLELISM

Ancient lyric poetry is also characterized by the presence or utilization of Hebraic parallelism.

**NOTE 1** – In fact, parallelism is the foundational unit for the underlying literary style of the Book of Psalms.

### Q. What is parallelism?

**A.** Parallelism is defined as two or more lines that use different words but similar structure to express an idea.

**NOTE 2** – There are “five” types of parallelism found throughout the psalms. We do well to address them in kind:

### #1 – SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM

**KEY** – Synonymous Parallelism is a literary device which involves the repetition of one idea in successive lines.

**QUOTE** – Such parallelism “is the practice of saying the same thing twice in different words.” –C. S. Lewis

**NOTE 1** – Whereas much of English poetry is dominated by rhyme (i.e., which is the matching of sounds), Hebraic lyric poetry was dominated by such parallelism (i.e., which is the matching of ideas and/or thoughts). Let us consider the following examples of Synonymous Parallelism from the Book of Psalms. Please take note:

#### Psalm 2:1

1 Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?

#### Psalm 3:1

1 Lord, how many are my foes!  
How many rise up against me!

#### Psalm 18:4–5

4 The cords of death entangled me;  
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.  
5 The cords of the grave coiled around me;  
the snares of death confronted me.

**NOTE 2** – Of course, we do well to realize that this form of parallelism is found outside of the Psalter. Consider:

#### Proverbs 3:11

11 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not resent his rebuke, . . .

#### Isaiah 53:5a

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities . . .

## #2 – ANTITHETICAL PARALLELISM

**KEY** – Antithetical Parallelism, on the other hand, is a lit. device which works through the concept of contrast! Herein, the latter portion of a text seeks to affirm the truth presented in the former portion in a contrasting way (i.e., the connection of differing or opposing ideas).

**NOTE 1** – Please consider the following for the sake of illustration:

**Psalm 1:6b**

6 . . . the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

**Psalm 34:10**

10 The lions may grow weak and hungry,  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

**Psalm 37:9b**

9 . . . those who are evil will be destroyed,  
but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

**NOTE 2** – Of course, we do well to realize that this form of parallelism is found outside of the Psalter. Consider:

**Prov. 8:35b–36 (Personification of Wisdom)**

35 . . . those who find me find life  
and receive favor from the Lord.  
36 But those who fail to find me harm themselves;  
all who hate me love death.

**Prov. 12:26**

26 The righteous choose their friends carefully,  
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

**Prov. 13:12**

12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

**Ecclesiastes 10:2**

2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right,  
but the heart of the fool to the left.

**Isaiah 40:30–31**

30 Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
31 but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.

### #3 – CLIMACTIC PARALLELISM

**KEY** – In Climactic Parallelism, the second line completes the first by repeating part of it and then adding to it.

**NOTE 1** – Please consider the following for the sake of illustration:

**Psalm 29:1**

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

**Psalm 96:1, 7**

1 Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

**Psalm 93:3–4**

3 The seas have lifted up, Lord,  
the seas have lifted up their voice;  
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.  
4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,  
mightier than the breakers of the sea—  
the Lord on high is mighty.

**NOTE 2** – Of course, we do well to realize that this form of parallelism is found outside of the Psalter. Consider:

**Exodus 15:6 (Song of Moses and Miriam)**

6 Your right hand, Lord,  
was majestic in power.  
Your right hand, Lord,  
shattered the enemy.

**Joel 1:1–4 (re: A Swarm of Locusts – Judgment)**

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel.  
2 Hear this, you elders;  
listen, all who live in the land.  
Has anything like this ever happened in your days  
or in the days of your ancestors?  
3 Tell it to your children,  
and let your children tell it to their children,  
and their children to the next generation.  
4 What the locust swarm has left  
the great locusts have eaten;  
what the great locusts have left  
the young locusts have eaten;  
what the young locusts have left  
other locusts have eaten.

## #4 – SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM

**KEY** – A fourth type of parallelism is Synthetic Parallelism (i.e., Growing Parallelism). This type consists of a pair of lines that together form a complete unit and in which the second line completes or expands the thought introduced in the first line without repeating part of it, as Climactic Parallelism does.

**NOTE 1** – Please consider the following for the sake of illustration:

### **Psalm 23:5a**

5 You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies. . . .

### **Psalm 23:5b**

5 . . . You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

### **Psalm 24:3–4**

3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?  
Who may stand in his holy place?  
4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.

**NOTE 2** – Of course, we do well to realize that this form of parallelism is found outside of the Psalter. Consider:

### **Proverbs 3:5**

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;

### **Proverbs 21:27**

27 The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable—  
how much more so when brought with evil intent!

### **Proverbs 6:16–19**

16 There are six things the Lord hates,  
seven that are detestable to him:  
17 haughty eyes,  
a lying tongue,  
hands that shed innocent blood,  
18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
feet that are quick to rush into evil,  
19 a false witness who pours out lies  
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

## #5 – EMBLEMATIC PARALLELISM

**KEY** – Emblematic Parallelism is formed when a symbol or metaphor is placed side-by-side with its meaning. A passage that exhibits this type of parallelism will present in illustration and its interpretation simultaneously.

**NOTE 1** – Please consider the following for the sake of illustration:

### **Psalm 42:1**

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.

### **Psalm 103:11**

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him . . .

### **Psalm 103:12**

12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

### **Psalm 103:13**

13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him . . .

**NOTE 2** – Of course, we do well to realize that this form of parallelism is found outside of the Psalter. Consider:

### **Proverbs 11:22**

22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout  
is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.

### **Proverbs 25:13–14, 18–20**

13 Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time  
is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him;  
he refreshes the spirit of his master.

14 Like clouds and wind without rain  
is one who boasts of gifts never given.

18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow  
is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor.

19 Like a broken tooth or a lame foot  
is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble.

20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,  
or like vinegar poured on a wound,  
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

### **Proverbs 28:15**

15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear  
is a wicked ruler over a helpless people.

## FINAL SENTIMENTS

**Q1. What is the function of biblical parallelism?**

**Q2. Why is it worth considering this literary device?**

**NOTE 1** – Dr. Leland Ryken warns against overemphasizing this aspect of biblical literature. Note the following:

**QUOTE 1** – “The liability of conducting an analysis of biblical parallelism . . . is that it can easily set up false expectations for readers of the Bible. Let me say emphatically, therefore, that there is no particular virtue in pigeonholing types of parallelism in a biblical poem.”

**NOTE 2** – However, Ryken does offer the following wisdom concerning the study of biblical parallelism! Note:

**QUOTE 2** – “The important thing is simply to be receptive to the effects of the rhythm of thought that occurs with parallelism.”

**Q1. What is the function of biblical parallelism?**

**Q2. Why is it worth considering this literary device?**

**NOTE 3** – I offer the following responses in kind. Consider:

**QUOTE 3** – “The prime function of any verse form, including biblical parallelism, is artistic beauty and its enjoyment. Parallelism is an example of the skillful handling of language, and it satisfies the artistic urge for balance, symmetry, rhythm, and shapeliness. Biblical poets were artists with a love of beauty and eloquence. When the writer of Ecclesiastes states that he “sought to find pleasing words” (12:10), he expressed a theory of writing that applies to all of the poets of the Bible. One function of biblical parallelism is thus artistic enjoyment. Lewis has once again said it well:

In reality [parallelism] is a very pure example of what all pattern, and therefore all art, involves. The principle of art has been defined by someone as ‘the same in the other’ . . . . In a building there may be a wing on one side and a wing on the other, but both of the same shape. . . . Parallelism is the characteristically Hebrew form of the same in the other. . . . If we have any taste for poetry we shall enjoy this feature of the Psalms.

There is no need to press biblical poetry at once in a utilitarian direction. It is beautiful and delightful in itself.”  
–Leland Ryken

**QUOTE 4** – “A second effect of parallelism is to increase the impact of a statement. In particular, it produces a concentration of attention and is very much a meditative form. Parallelism focuses attention on a thought and resists immediate shift to another idea. Someone has said that biblical parallelism ‘has within it a retarding element, stemming the current of ideas. The poet allows himself plenty of time. A scene, before being succeeded by another, is presented twice, in different lights. All the content is squeezed out of it. Its finest nuances are utilized.’ We thus look at an idea from at least two viewpoints as we look at the varied colors of light when a prism is turned. The complementary parts of a parallel construction reinforce an idea in our consciousness. There can be no doubt that if we read biblical poetry as slowly as it is meant to be read, it is a very affective form of discourse. The meanings sink into our consciousness with great force because of the element of repetition and retardation. The two parts of a parallel construction say more together than either would alone.” –Leland Ryken



**QUOTE 5** – [Thirdly] “If we remember that much of the Bible was originally oral literature, we can also see parallelism as a mnemonic . . . device. Parallelism makes it easier to memorize and recite a biblical passage, and it helps an audience to assimilate it when hearing rather than reading it. Lewis observes this in connection with the typical parallelism of Jesus’ [Olivet] discourse, but it applies equally to all biblical poetry: ‘We may, if we like, see in this an exclusively practical . . . purpose; by giving to truths which are infinitely worth remembering this rhythmic and incantatory expression, He made them almost impossible to forget.’” –Leland Ryken

**Matthew 5:3–10**

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

**QUOTE 6** – “The language of the Bible is powerful, majestic, impassioned. Its affective style, in its prose as well as its poetry, consists partly of the presence of parallelism.” –Leland Ryken

**WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

**NOTE 1** – In the next session we will further delve into the unique hallmarks of Hebrew lyric poetry.

**NOTE 2** – Until then, may the Lord speak to you as you engage this timeless and timely work. Until next time...

**CONCLUSION**

**NOTE 1** – Feel free to give either in person or online at [www.NewLifeBarre.org](http://www.NewLifeBarre.org).

**NOTE 2** – Check out our website for any of our beyond Sunday ministries (MM, WM & CYC).

**NOTE 3** – Potluck Supper taking place following this Service. We hope to see you then! God bless you!