

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 24: Psalms 1-41 *Poetry, Parallels and the Good Shepherd*

Welcome to Week 24 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters, and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

Well, today we're going to be taking a look. Well, the next four weeks, actually, we'll be taking a look at the longest book in the Bible, at least by chapters and verses. It's actually the third longest book in the Bible by number of words. Jeremiah is the longest, just over 33,000 words. Genesis has just over 32,000 words, and Psalms has a little bit over 30,000 words. So we're actually, in the next eight weeks, we're going to be reading four of the six longest books in the Bible. So we've got a lot of big pieces to look at over the next couple of months together. And that's a big part of the reason why we're putting this series together, is to help through these times in particular.

So in the next three weeks, we will be here in the book of Psalms, and after the third week, we will be about halfway through the Bible. So we're getting close to the halfway point. When we get to Jeremiah, it's only going to take three weeks even though Jeremiah is a little bit longer, because Jeremiah has an overall flow to it that you can read a little bit more at a time. But the Psalms, the Psalms slow us down. Each song stands on its own, and they jump wildly in length. So the shortest one has only two verses in 117. The longest has 176 verses, Psalm 119. Plus the mood varies so quickly.

So here's what we're going to do. Every week, I'm going to add a new fact about the psalms for you to take note of, we're going to take a look at what are the Psalms, we'll talk about that this week later, we'll talk about who wrote them, when were they written, those kinds of things. And all of them will help you to have a clearer understanding of what we're reading when we go through the Psalms together. Plus, each week, I'm going to highlight one or two of the psalms for you. And we'll conclude each week with a simple reading of one of the beautiful psalms, just straight without commentary.

So, first question this week is going to be this: what are the Psalms? Right? First of all the songs are songs and poems. They were sung at different times and sung for different purposes. We'll get into some of those times and some of those purposes, as we go through them a little bit more. Some of the psalms are laments, some are angry, some are full of rejoicing and thankfulness. Some question God, some get angry at God Himself, some are prayer, some are apologies, they can swing wildly from one song to the next. And so you've got to kind of brace yourself for the swing of emotions that comes as we read the Psalms together. Secondly, the Psalms are poetry. Even more so than Job, you're going to notice the poetry of the Psalms. And we read poetry differently than we read other parts of literature. You read history differently than you read biography, different than you read science, different than you read poetry. You just do, and we do it automatically when we pull a book off the shelf. But because this is all part of the same book, we have to make a conscious effort to shift gears and go okay, now I have to read it differently. Previously, when we were reading history books, Genesis and First and Second Chronicles, for instance, we read them as facts, because they were facts. They were literal facts from literal history. The Book of Psalms is not history, so we don't read it the same way.

So do we take the Bible literally? Well, that depends. We take the literal parts literally. And we take the figurative parts figuratively, we take the Bible as it was intended in different parts. And different parts have different purposes. And we're written in different ways. So we're not literalists, we are contextualists. And what that means is, we ask what was the context with which this was written? Was the person who wrote it, attempting to tell me actual history? If so I'm going to read it as actual history, or was the person who wrote it, telling me a poem and using figures of speech that aren't meant to be taken literally? Well, then it does disservice to the Bible to read a figurative part, literally.

For example, if you read the phrase "As bright as the sun", in a science book, you're going to be talking about lumens and heat, right? But if you read as bright of the Sun as the sun in a poetry book, you're not going to be worried about lumens and heat. You're probably talking about something that's beautiful, right? It's a figure of speech. The Bible is filled with figures of speech and the poetry especially is all figures of speech. So we can't read it literally. We would do disservice to it if we did. So pay attention to that as you read the Psalms. If you are a person who takes things literally and there are literalists out there who, that's your gift and, you're great bookkeepers and accountants and I want a literalist flying my plane I don't want a poet flying the plane that I'm in, thank you very much. I want someone who knows how to read the dials and know exactly where we are in the sky, okay? That's a literalist job. But if you are a literalist, you might have a challenge with the Psalms because you're trying to apply a literalist framework to something that wasn't written that way. If, however, you're a poet, and you are, you're a romantic, oh, this is where you're really going to love it for the next four weeks. Well, actually, for the next couple of months, as we go through the wisdom literature, all this poetry together.

So when we're talking about poetry, the question we need to ask then is what makes it poetry. Like we read it, we go, well, it's not rhyming, how is it poetry? Does it rhyme in the original Hebrew? No, it didn't rhyme in the original Hebrew, either. Different cultures use different rules for poetry. In our culture, the main rules we use for poetry are rhythm, or sometimes called meter, and rhyming. So songs, for instance, are the most common way that we hear poetry in our culture. And they have a rhythm to it, and they have a rhyme to it. Rhyming and rhythm was not a part of ancient Hebrew poetry, what they did was they used parallels. Parallel. Here's how it went, they would say something in a short phrase, then they would say the same thing again, but in a different way. Or they would say the same thing again, but in the opposite way as a contrast, and then they would often conclude with a line that ties them together.

As an example. Let's start with the very first Psalms. It's a wonderful example of this literalism. And I know, without having it written down somewhere, it's hard. So if you have your Bible out in front of you, maybe you're listening to this in the car, or you're not paying attention while you're or you're cooking something and you're listening to this while doing that, I get it, I do the same thing. But I encourage you for this next section, at some point later, come back to this section, timestamp it right now, come back with your Bible open to Psalm 1 and watch this as I lay it out for you.

I'll be reading it out of the NIV. It'll work in any translation, but I'll be reading out of the NIV. Psalm 1 beginning with verse 1 goes like this, "Blessed is the one who does not..." and then gives us three parallels, talking about a person who's blessed, and this blessed is the

person who does not one: "...walk in step with the wicked...", or two: "...stand in the way that sinners take...", or three: "...sit in the company of mockers...". So here's the parallel, they do not walk or stand or sit with the wicked, with sinners, with mockers. You see that? Saying the same type of thing but in three different ways. Verse 2, "But...", and now the next couplet is actually a parallel, not just to each other, but to the previous verse, "But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." So we delight in the law and meditate on the law, two different ways to approach the law in parallel.

Then we go to verses 3 and 4, which now parallel 1 and 2. Yeah, it's really rich and deep in the way this is done. Verse 3 "That person...", the person we've been previously referred to, as one who does not walk, stand or sit in the way of wicked sinners or mockers, but who does delight and meditate in the law, okay, that person "...is like a tree planted by the streams of water, which..." does three things. One, "...yields fruit in its season...", and two, "...whose leaf does not wither...". And then we tie those two things together with "...whatever they do prospers". Okay? So fruit and leaf, right? And whatever they do prospers. And then we tie up by contrasting to somebody else.

Now, all of that about this one person who does it right is now contrasted in parallel to verse four, "Not so the wicked, they are like the chaff." So the person who does God's word is like a tree planted by the waters, and that is a living organism. The wicked are like chaff that is a dead and dying organism that's blown away. It's not planted, it blows away. It's not permanent, it blows away, it doesn't bear fruit, it blows away. So again, it's a parallel, "Not so the wicked they're like chaff that the wind blows away". Verse five, "Therefore...", and here's where we start tying it up, but with another couplet, therefore, one, "...the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." So you've got wicked compared to sinners, and judgment compared to the righteous, right? Again, another parallel.

And then it finally concludes, in verse six, "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous," There's your first one and two, "but..." the contrast, "...the way of the wicked leads to destruction." You see that? So there's multiple layers of parallel upon parallel upon parallel in there. So again, I encourage you, if you didn't catch that, because you're listening to it on the go, I understand that I do that all the time myself. But I encourage you, go back and listen to that whole part with the book open in front of you and see the wonderful parallels in that.

Also something else to look for, as we're reading through. This week, we'll be reading through psalms 1 through 41. Just this week, take a look. There are two times that Jesus quoted the Psalms while he was on the cross. Two times He quoted the Old Testament and both were out of the Psalms. Twice. Once Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1 "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" So when you get to Psalm 22, notice the context of it, it will help us even understand what Jesus did on the cross even better. And then secondly, Psalm 31. When you read that, notice the context of this psalm 31:5, with Jesus later repeats, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit." Understanding that those two full songs will help us have a clearer understanding of what Jesus said when he was on the cross.

So let's conclude this week with the reading of a Psalm. We'll do that every single week, and this week, there's only one choice that we could have out of the first 41 Psalms, and that is Psalm 23. By far the most well known Psalm in the world, also called The Shepherds Psalm, listen for the rhythm. Listen for the imagery and listen for the parallels. As I simply read this before we conclude this week, Psalm chapter one, a Psalm of David.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the path of righteousness for his namesake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Thanks, everybody. We'll see you next week.

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