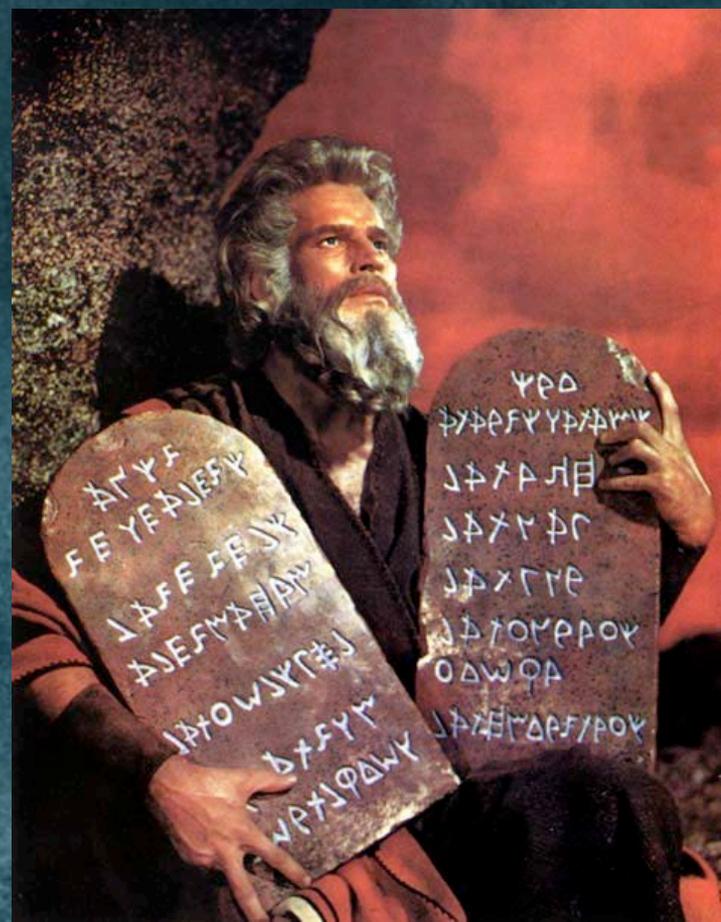




**Singing His Songs:
The Artistry of Biblical
Poetry**

Chafer Theological Seminary
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Dr. Mark McGinniss

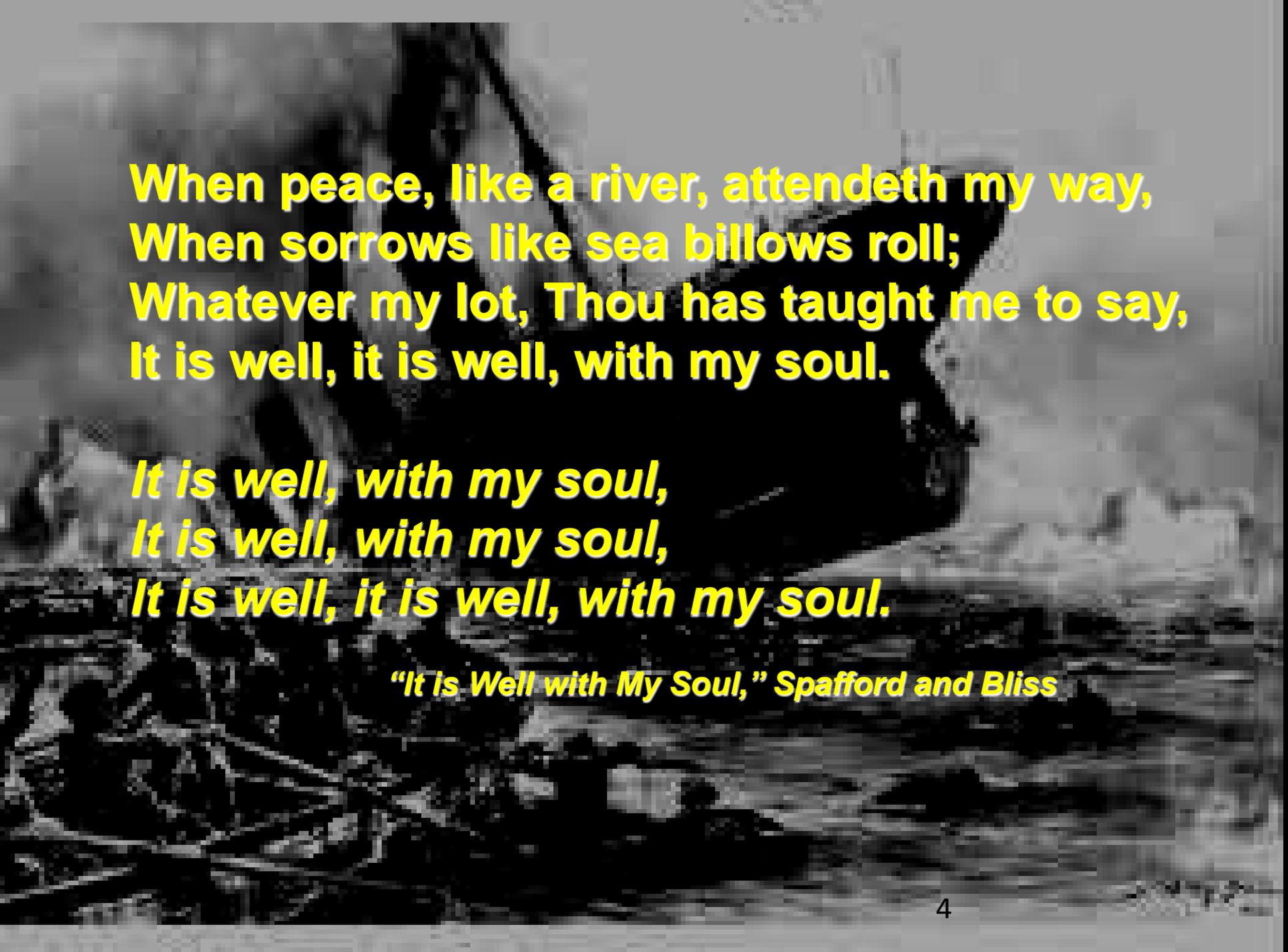
“Why did God choose to communicate
in poetry?”



Why Poetry?



- “The psalms are of course poems written out of deep and often passionate faith.... The poetic medium made it possible to articulate the emotional freight, the moral consequences, the altered perception of the world that flowed from this monotheistic belief, in compact verbal structures that could in some instances seem simplicity itself” (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 113).



**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.**

***It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.***

"It is Well with My Soul," Spafford and Bliss

Introduction to Poetry: Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

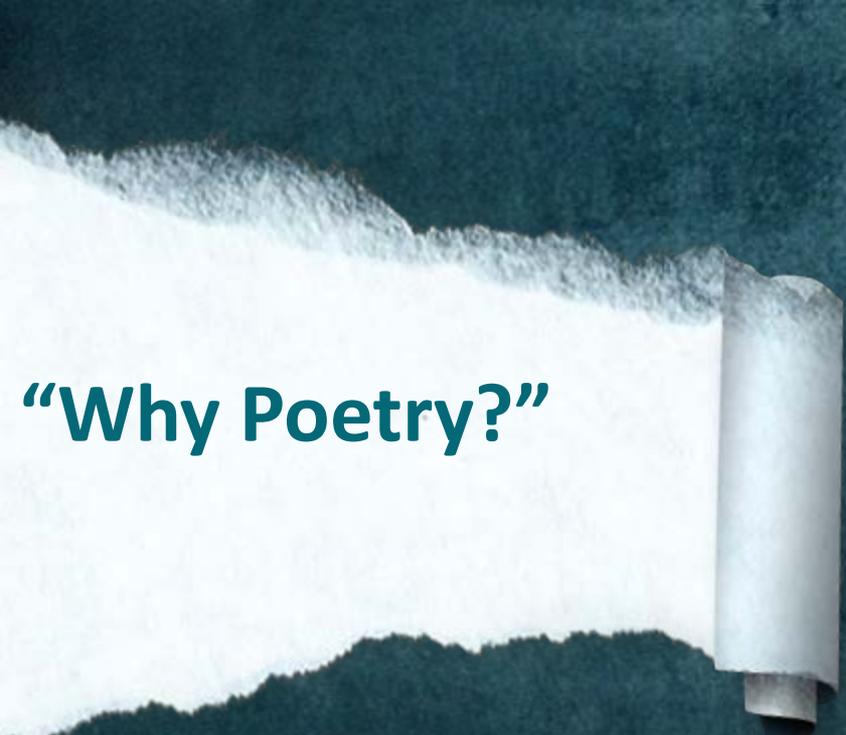
***I want them to water-ski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.***



**But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.**

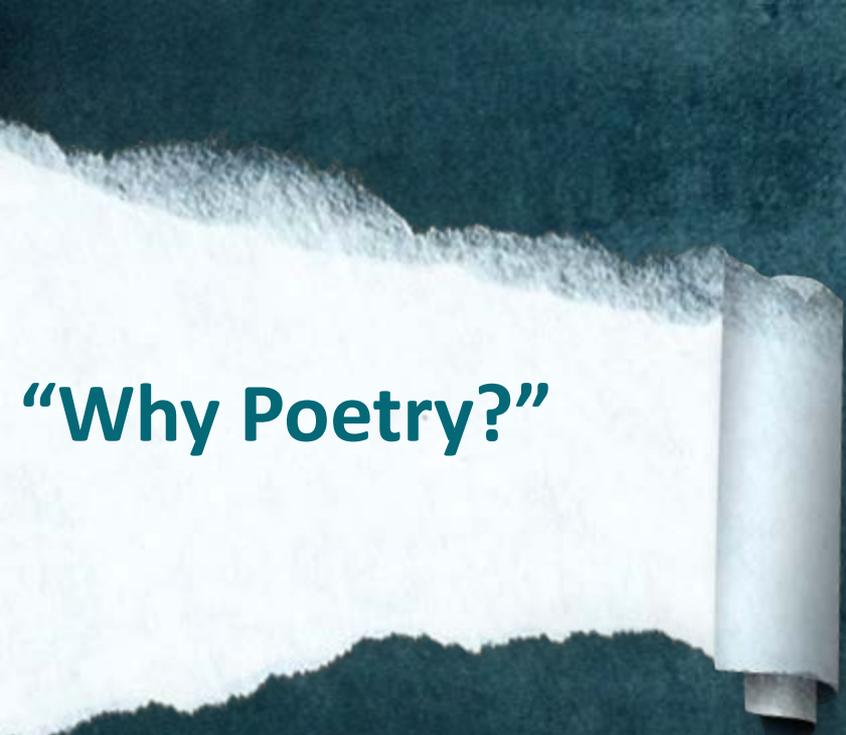
**They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.**





“Why Poetry?”

Ryken, “Poets speak in the manner that most accurately communicates their message. This is simply a vote of confidence that we need to give to poets.”



“Why Poetry?”

A biblical poem is the poet’s experience of his world with God in a moment of time. Through the poet’s words the reader is able make his experience their own.

Some General Guidelines for Interpreting Poetry

- **Be careful over-exegeting poetry.**

Psalm 19:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

**The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.**

Some General Guidelines for Interpreting Poetry

- **Remember you are reading ancient poetry.**

Psalm 18:2

**The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**

Some General Guidelines for Interpreting Poetry

- Realize that the psalms are of several different types or genres.
- Each psalm must be read as a literary unit.
 - Psalm 2:4
He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them

Some General Guidelines for Interpreting the Poetry

- Appreciate the form (poetry) as well as the message
 - “The Bible is an affective book that communicates much of its meaning by moving the feelings and the will of its readers, readers must be careful not to ‘depoeticize its form’ by ignoring its literary conventions” (Klein, et. al. *Intro to Biblical Interpretation*, 273)

Some General Guidelines for Interpreting the Psalms Individually

- Determine who is speaking
- Determine if the psalm is Personal or Corporate
- Determine the historical context by observing the situation in the titles
- Determine the emotional orientation of the Psalm
- Determine the genre of the individual Psalms
- Observe reoccurring or theologically significant phrases, words
- Observe (recognize) the rhetorical devices of Hebrew poetry

English Poetry

- Italian sonnet: a b b a a b b a.

"London, 1802" by Wordsworth

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

Hebrew Poetic Terms

- Stichography
- Parallelism

“It is a literary pattern that states an idea in one line and focuses more closely on the same idea in the following line, either repeating the thought in different terms or focusing on the thought more specifically”

(Bullock, 36).

The verse of the Hebrew Bible is strange
the meter of Psalms and Proverbs perplexes.
It is not a matter of number,
no counting of beats or syllables.
Its song is a music of matching,
its rhythm a kind of paralleling.
One half-line makes an assertion;
the other half paraphrases it;
sometimes a third part will vary it

Hebrew Poetic Terms

- **Stichography**
- **Parallelism**
 - **Synonymous Parallelism**
 - **Antithetic Parallelism**

Proverbs 15:13-15

A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,
But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.

The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge,
But the mouth of fools feeds on folly.

All the days of the afflicted are bad,
But a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast.

Hebrew Poetic Terms

- **Stichography**

- **Parallelism**

- **Synonymous Parallelism**

- **Antithetic Parallelism**

Chisholm also has reiterative or synonymous; specifying, complementary; explanatory; progressive or consequential; comparative; and contrastive parallelism (*From Exegesis to Exposition*, 142-144). The important issue to remember is to determine the relationship between the first and subsequent lines.

Psalm 1:1-6

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the
counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of
scoffers!

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 And he will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of
water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,

And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Hebrew Poetic Terms

- **Stichography**
- **Parallelism**
- **Stanza (or strophe)**
- **Colon (or stich)**
- **Hemistich**
- **Bicola (or distich)**
- **Tricola (tristich)**
- **Simile**
 - Psalm 1:3
 - Psalm 1:4
 - Psalm 22:13
- **Metaphor**
 - Psalm 59:17
 - Psalm 22:16
- **Ellipsis**
 - Psalm 36:6
 - Psalm 100:4
- **Hyperbole**
 - Psalm 69:4
 - Psalm 141:7
 - Psalm 78:27

Hebrew Poetic Terms

- **Merismus (merism)**
 - Psalm 49:1-2
 - Psalm 50:1
 - Psalm 139:2
- **Metonymy**
 - Psalm 76:12
 - Psalm 5:9
- **Synecdoche**
 - Psalm 50:19
 - Psalm 103:1
 - Psalm 18:27
- **Personification**
 - Psalm 19:1-2
 - Psalm 98:8
- **Anthropomorphism:**
 - Psalm 10:17
 - Psalm 51:9
- **Zoomorphism**
 - Psalm 91:4
- **Rhetorical Question**
 - Psalm 8:4
 - Psalm 22:1

Psalm 49:14 As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd;

Psalm 50:1 The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Psalm 50:22 "Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear *you* in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.

Psalm 52:2 Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.

Psalm 53:2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God.

Psalm 57:4 My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, *Even* the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows And their tongue a sharp sword.

Psalm 69:34 Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas and everything that moves in them.

Psalm 17:8b Hide me in the shadow of Your wings

Psalm 136:12 With a strong hand and an outstretched
arm

Psalm 2:1 Why are the nations in an uproar And the
peoples devising a vain thing?