

**Psalms, V**

Let me make a comment to you about marking your Bibles. I probably should have done this before you had the assignment to complete reading the Psalms, but one thing I like to do when I am reading Scripture is to mark the Bible, and I do not think God is offended by that. Perhaps He would not be pleased if you are simply doodling, but if you mark your Bible with a purpose—to help you observe and remember what you have observed—that can be very useful. Let me suggest that particularly, with regard to the Psalms, you may want to mark the type of psalm, although that is not perhaps the most important thing to mark. You may want to mark the general theme that emerges.

What I have found to be really interesting and helpful is to think in terms of what those of us at Covenant call the “fallen condition focus” that that psalm would address. The idea of a fallen condition focus (FCF) is a term that was invented by Dr. Bryan Chapell. The basic idea is that as we reflect on the way in which Scripture applies to us and brings its redemptive message to us, it addresses us in our fallenness. It helps us at our points of need. So I have found it very interesting in reading a psalm to think, “What would be the fallen condition that this psalm addresses? What in my life, in what circumstances, or in what condition would this psalm really minister to me?” For example, Psalm 113 talks about how God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. What might be the fallen human condition that this text is meant to address? I suppose if I am feeling terribly low, if I am becoming introverted, if I do not have a full vision of God, or if I am unable to praise God because I am so focused on my abysmal estate, then I might need to read this and refocus my attention and realize He is exalted above the heavens. He is transcendent and yet He stoops. He knows where I am. He sees me and He will lift the needy from the ash heap, if that is what I am feeling. Often what I do at the beginning of a psalm is just write the FCF, or fallen condition focus, and say which particular human need I or others may experience is addressed by the psalm. In doing this, you are not really talking about the theme of the psalm, which is helpful to do, but you are saying when this psalm will be useful and when this psalm would be just the right word to hear. And if you do that, if you are marking your Bible in various ways, that might be a good way for you to be able to quickly find something that would minister to you or to someone else. When we come to the Book of Proverbs, I am going to suggest that you mark your Bibles in the margin in a different way, and that is because the book of Proverbs amasses its collection in what appears, at first sight, at least, to be a haphazard way. It does not organize itself systematically. It is not a bad idea to write topical words in the margin to say, “This one has to do with control of temper; this has to do with the influence of friends; this has to do with generosity; this has to do with industry or industriousness; this has to do with the important of relationships,” and just mark your margins in that way as you are going through in the book of Proverbs so that you can get back to that material and find it quickly. If you are one of these people who thinks, “Oh, you should never write in the Bible”—probably no one in this class thinks that, but feel free. I think God smiles on it if you are doing it in order to understand His Word better.

Let us move on to a discussion of chapter 2 of Longman’s book. This chapter has to do with the origin, development, and use of the psalms. I want to spend some time talking, as Longman does, about the titles and superscriptions of the psalms. Longman points out that about 14 of the psalms have historical incidents, 13 of which are in the life of David.

Longman’s basic conclusion about the titles or the superscriptions is that it is best to treat them as non-canonical but reliable early tradition. What that means is that we should respect the fathers of the collection, but not necessarily consider the title as an original part of the psalm. It is probably the case that the title is not, in most instances, an original part of the psalm. What evidence does Longman give for that? For instance, in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, there are an increasing

number of titles. In the Masoretic text, the Hebrew text, there are a number of “orphan” titles that have no superscription. By the time the Greek translation was being made, there seemed to be a desire to provide titles and some freedom to add these titles. Another reason that they seem not to have been penned by the psalmist is that often the title does not fit the subject of the psalm. I want to come back to that point because if that is true, it would suggest not only that the titles have perhaps been added, but that they were also perhaps rather poorly applied. Longman also mentions that although a psalm may be written in first person, the titles are invariably in the third person. You know such as, “This is when David fled from Saul,” or whatever. We will leave it at that for the moment: the titles are non-canonical in the sense of not, perhaps, being an original line that was penned by the psalmist. In terms of the collection that we now call the Psalter, I think that God not only inspired the psalmists, but also guided and inspired those who compiled that Psalter, so that this book and the shape it now has is significant. We would not want to alter the form it has now or mix it up in any way. I think that much has been learned recently, even since Tremper Longman wrote this book, and he would be well aware of that by now. He is a very astute man who keeps up with things, so if I seem to amend what he has written a little bit, I think he would probably agree with the amendments I am making in light of recent scholarship. If I do amend his conclusions a little bit, I am not finding fault with him at the stage in which he wrote this.

How were the psalms brought together? On page 43, Longman writes, “No overall structure can be discerned, but we can recognize some of the important groupings and movements within the psalms.” I think he might amend this statement today and say, “Well, perhaps there is more structure than we have yet discerned.” It might be more accurate to say we have not yet discerned an overall structure, but I think recent work may be pointing in that direction. In fact, in what you read from McCann’s writing, we are beginning to get at some of that already. McCann talks about various groupings. He mentions the five books of the Psalter, which I have mentioned before, each of which ends with a doxology. The first four, at least, end with a doxology and the fifth book ends with seven psalms of praise—seven doxologies, as it were.

If you have your book, look on the top of page 44. Notice an interesting feature that is often pointed out—the question of which form of the divine name is used in the various books of the Psalter: *Yahweh* or *Elohim*. In Book 1 there is a marked preference for *Yahweh* over *Elohim*. There are 272 occurrences of *Yahweh* and 15 occurrences of *Elohim*. In Book 2, that trend more or less reverses itself with 74 occurrences of *Yahweh* and 207 occurrences of *Elohim*. Remember that *Elohim* is the more generic title, like our word “God,” but *Yahweh* is God’s personal name, His covenant name. A greater covenantal aspect is implied when you say, “Yahweh.” That name implies His covenant with His people. Why would that change take place? I mean, if we understand that maybe book 1 precedes book 2, what might explain that? Peter Craigie has made a suggestion in his fine *Word Biblical Commentary* to the first 50 psalms. He suggests that this may be indicative of a time when there was an increasing carefulness about the articulation of the divine name. There are Jewish individuals today who do not want to say the name *Yahweh*; they fear that if they were to mispronounce it, it would desecrate the name. So, when they are reading the Hebrew text, they will insert the word *Adonai*, which is the Hebrew word for “Lord,” or they will refer to *hashem*, “the Name.” This suggestion Craigie makes is somewhat plausible. I am not sure that that is what is happening already here in Book 2 because the name *Yahweh* is not avoided. It occurs 74 times, whereas if that were the operative principle, then it should really be entirely avoided. However, there are some psalms that are almost repetitions, almost duplicates, of one another. One of the only differences is that the first used *Yahweh* and the second used *Elohim*. James L. Mays, in a more recent commentary, has suggested that maybe the use of the more generic name, “God,” is indicative that maybe Israel was realizing at this stage that they were to be a light to the nations. If the nations talk about the supreme being as “God,” then in the interest of communicating with the nations, perhaps the Israelites began to use that language, kind of like Paul with the unknown God saying, “You know that

one you talk about? I know Him. Let me tell you about Him.” Again, I am not fully convinced that that is the answer, but it is about the best I have heard so far. Perhaps one of you will go out and do a dissertation and figure that out or something. It is a phenomenon we recognize. I am not sure what the explanation is, but it does show, along with the presence of duplicate psalms and similar evidence, that the Psalter did appear to grow up over time. It was not just compiled by one group of people who sat down and said, “Hey, we have all these psalms. Let us put them all together into five books right now.” It seems that Book 1 may have existed on its own and then Book 2 was added. It may have had an independent existence for a time and then it was added. The metaphor or image that Derek Kidner uses, quite helpfully, is that of a cathedral. I think I have mentioned in this class before that a cathedral has diversity—it was built up over time—and yet there is a wonderful unity to it, even though you can recognize distinctiveness in style. If we think of the Psalter in that way then that tends to make pretty good sense.

The question could be asked whether it is generally accepted that the psalms are chronologically arranged. Not absolutely. Psalm 72 says, “The prayers of David are now ended,” and then there are more Davidic psalms later. Some of the Davidic psalms come very near the end, in Book 5. There are not as many, but there are some. It does not seem that they are all just chronologically arranged in sequence, but there is perhaps sort of a rough order or a general movement in the Psalter.

The five books are one of the groupings Longman talks about. He talks about the question of authorship. He talks about other different ways of grouping the psalms. We have already covered some of that material. His conclusion, at the top of page 45, is, “While a single systematic structure for the whole Psalter eludes us, we can observe occasional groupings or smaller groups of psalms.” Even though he says this, I want you to anticipate that we will perhaps learn more of an overall systematic structuring to the psalms. Longman then goes on to talk about movements, beginning on 45, and I really like the way he puts it: “In the Psalter as a whole, praise overtakes lament.” The lament psalms are heavy in the first two-thirds of the Psalter. Remember that before we said the first two-thirds are prayer and the last third is praise. This is another way of saying that praise overtakes lament in terms of the flow.

Longman makes another important point on page 46 where he talks about the lack of specificity of the psalms. That is very important. Longman and others have pointed out (I think rightly) that our hymns are not a bad analog for what we have in the psalms. Most of the hymns we sing in church are rather generalized, even though they came out of specific historical situations. Your pastor may tell you about the life circumstance that Fanny Crosby was in when she wrote a particular hymn, and that provides a wonderful background for the hymn. The story behind the hymn really brings it to life, but you do not get the story just from reading the hymn itself because the writer realizes “I mean this to be applicable beyond my situation” so the writing is more general and less specific. There is a generalizing quality to the psalms, and that is an important point to remember.

Longman also mentions on page 46 the possibility that a psalm can be updated. He mentions, in this instance, Psalm 51. At the end of Psalm 51, the translation often runs “In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.” Some people see that as sort of perhaps a post-exilic updating when Jerusalem was being rebuilt. The Hebrew actually just says, “Build the walls in Jerusalem.” It does not say, “Rebuild the walls.” I am not so sure that that would have to have been written after the walls had been built and were knocked down and they were being rebuilt. I think the end of Psalm 51 could just as well have been written by David. He would be saying, “I have sinned. I have jeopardized the whole thing. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me, and build the walls of Jerusalem. You know I am king here. Please restore to me the joy of your salvation and build the walls. Do Your work of

building.” Although Psalm 51 is often cited as an example updating, I am not certain it is the best example. I do not deny that updating can take place; I am just not sure that that is the best example.

Were the psalms intended for public or private use? They were used both publicly and privately. It seems an obvious point, but it is one that has not been obvious to all biblical scholars through history. Some think that they were used publicly for centuries, and then eventually people began to use them privately. However, it seems to stand to reason that they would have been used in both arenas.

Longman mentions also the possibility of special festival occasions. He says that this is speculative. We do not have a lot in the Bible to tell us about whether or not these occasions existed, so we do not want to make our interpretation hinge on that.

Now we want to move a little bit beyond what Longman has written and bring up some further things that are happening in scholarly discussion of the psalms. I want to discuss psalm titles, and although I have a great many notes, I am going to attempt to abbreviate them for you. First, a few words of introduction about psalm titles themselves: as we have said before, we find various kinds of information in them. We can have the association of a psalm with a particular person or a group of persons. We can have historical information, and Longman gives you that list of the 14 psalms where historical information is included. Interestingly, Psalms 30, 54, and 56, three of the four we have examined, all have historical information in them. In a moment I want us to look at that and say, “Does it make sense? Does it fit, or not?” Sometimes we have mention of a musical instrument or a liturgical situation in which the psalm was used. Someone may ask, “What is a *shiggaion*?” or some of these musical instruments that are mentioned. If we really knew, the translators would translate it into comprehensible English. We do not really understand a lot of these things. However, in the course of ongoing research, it is possible that somebody will discover something archeologically. This happens more often than you would think, and we may someday discover what a *shiggaion* is. Another example might be, when the title says, “To the tune of ‘A Dove on Distant Oaks’”—what does that exactly mean? There is a lot we are uncertain about because we do not have a lot of context in terms of these psalms. Sometimes the type of psalm is mentioned. Usually they are called “a psalm or a hymn,” but not always. It is important to note that if you were to look at a Hebrew text of these psalms, although in English the titles are in small type and are distinguished from the rest of the text and do not get a verse number, in Hebrew they are just like everything else. They get a verse number, so they are treated just like a verse in the psalm, even though it is probably correct that they were not penned by the original psalmist but by those compiling or by someone else who knew or understood the circumstance of the psalm. Now, although they do not distinguish themselves, they are sometimes questioned, and I think it is right to question and wonder what to make of them. I am glad they are still in the text. The New English Bible, I think, omits them entirely. I am glad we can still find them in our text, even if they are in smaller type.

I want us to move to the question of Davidic authorship as sort of the test case, since he is the main author of the psalms. I want to ask the question: “How reliable are the superscriptions?” Why would anyone ever question the Davidic authorship of many of these psalms? Some interesting arguments have been made in the past, and I will present them to you briefly. One is the aesthetic argument; this is the contention that some of the psalms are unworthy of David’s poetic genius. I am not sure how these critical scholars knew David so well that they could know exactly what psalms would be worthy and unworthy of him, but that argument has been made. Others arguments are theological. The theology of Psalm 139 has been deemed by some people to be inconceivable in David’s day. Again, these people seem to know a whole lot more than I know in terms of being able to pinpoint what kind of theology was possible for David, especially if we are dealing with divine inspiration. Other people have said that certain psalms are too spiritual for a rough warrior. They would ask, “Is a man like David really capable

of such love and faith, given the nature of his life?" Some have said that the historical references in the psalms are just not appropriate; they do not really fit the Psalms. I want us to look at that in just a minute. Another argument is linguistic. People say that the psalms contain Aramaisms. However, that is not a strong argument because Aramaic is well-known much earlier than people once supposed. There is also a textual argument that we mentioned earlier: the Septuagint continues to add titles, so if we see that happening at that time, should we not suppose that they were just added from the beginning? Again, we do not know. I would not assume that and here is why: if you look, for instance, at a different area, stories about Jesus, you can find various apocryphal stories about childhood activities of Jesus, like fashioning clay pigeons and then turning them into real pigeons and then having them fly away to impress his friends. There are a lot of stories about Jesus that are in the literature, but they are not in the Bible. The fact that those seem to be sort of fanciful, legendary accretions would not lead us to assume that every story about Jesus is a fanciful accretion. Similarly, the fact that some titles were added on the basis of the desire to give them all a title should not undermine the possibility that some of the titles give us reliable information.

In response to some of these objections, Derek Kidner offers three things that I think are worth pointing out. He says in kind of ascending order of importance, "David was of course an exceptional talent. Secondly, the Psalms were inspired. But since God does not gratuitously multiply miracles, the truth may be that it was the nucleus of a psalm, some germinal phrase or sequence, which came to David in the crisis itself, to be developed later as he pondered and relived the incident." What is he talking about there? Sometimes people say, "How could David in this particular extremity have the leisure and the circumspection of mind to sit down and compose such a wonderful psalm?" I will take an example from United States history. Our national anthem was written by Francis Scott Key, and he got the inspiration to write it while he was on a ship looking at Fort McHenry. How did he write that beautiful poem—"Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming"—while he was in the middle of a chaotic situation? As I understand it, he pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and penned a few lines and then later he was able to sit down and he wrote five or six verses of what became our national anthem. He was in an extreme situation. He was in a situation of war, and he received the inspiration for the seed of the idea and jotted down a few lines and then built the rest of it off of that. That could be what is meant when the superscriptions link a psalm with a particular circumstance. We should at least allow that as a possibility.

What about the issue of whether the titles even fit? If the title does not fit, then we are better off to say that it is non-canonical, it does not appear to be reliable, and it was added later; we do not give God credit for this title that does not really work. That is a question we need to ask. Let us go to Psalm 3 and look carefully at the superscription: "A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom." Do you remember the story? After David was well-established and feeling comfortable, he became a little careless and sent Joab off to war in the spring of the year, and in the evening he got up from his couch and he was walking along on the top of the palace and he saw Bathsheba, another man's wife, and he desired her. Because he was king, he took her and committed adultery with her. When he could not work it out to trick her husband into going and spending some time with her so that her pregnancy would not be discovered, he engineered the death of Uriah. Then Nathan the prophet came to him and told him a story. David thought, "I am king of the land; I am the judge; I have just heard a judicial case and that man shall surely die." And Nathan said, "You are the man. That was a parable." David realized he was entrapped. Parables often entrap. Nathan went on to say, "Your sin is forgiven and yet the sword will never depart from your house. You took another man's wife in secret; someone will take your wives in broad daylight," and that was Absalom. Absalom launched a rebellion and David had to flee Jerusalem. That flight from Jerusalem is recorded in 2 Samuel 15-17. The superscription to Psalm 3 says that this psalm was composed at that time.

Remember that David told everyone, “Spare the young man’s life,” and Joab was not willing to do that. Absalom’s head was caught up in the tree or in the bushes and he was dangling there and Joab killed him. He first commanded his men to do it and they said, “No,” because David had said not to kill him. But Joab said, “Forget about that,” and he killed him. He speared him or darted him to death. What was David’s response? “Absalom, Absalom, O Absalom, O my son, Absalom!” He was in great distress. It was Joab who said, “If you do not hold your head up, you are going to lose this whole thing. We saved your life and we came back victors and you are acting like we should all be in mourning.” David listened to that advice, but he mourned the death of Absalom. Does that circumstance fit this psalm? Let me read it.

O LORD, how many are my foes!  
How many rise up against me!  
Many are saying of me,  
“God will not deliver him.”  
But you are a shield around me, O LORD,  
you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.  
To the LORD I cry aloud,  
and he answers me from his holy hill.  
I lie down and sleep;  
I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.  
I will not fear the tens of thousands  
drawn up against me on every side.  
Arise, O LORD!  
deliver me, O my God!  
Strike all my enemies on the jaw;  
break the teeth of the wicked.  
From the LORD comes deliverance.  
May your blessing be on your people.

Many people feel there is a discrepancy between the content of the psalm and the historical circumstance in the superscription. Obviously, whoever wrote the superscription did not feel this problem, but what problem might some people see? There seems to be a striking contrast between David’s cry, “Deliver me; strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked”—this sort of animosity that he can feel toward his enemies—and his response to Absalom’s death and his concern for Absalom. In the narrative account, he seemed as concerned with Absalom’s safety as he was for his own, whereas here he is saying, “Strike all my enemies on the jaw. Break the teeth of the wicked.”

I want to point out that David may have felt some guilt and responsibility for Absalom’s actions because he realized he was seeing his own sin replicated in the lives of his children. There are indications in the historical books that David was not the greatest father. Though God had forgiven him, perhaps he had not fully forgiven himself; I am psychologizing here a little bit and I do have to be careful about that. However, it does say in 2 Kings, for instance, when Adonijah launched his rebellion or made his bid for the throne, that David never asked him, “Why do you do what you do?” It is somewhat like David was the absentee father; he never really crossed his son or held him in check. So it is possible that David might not be in a position to say, “Oh, the audacity of what Absalom is doing!” He may think he brought this on himself because, in a sense (without exonerating Absalom for his own sin), he did.

In some translations verse 7 reads, “For you have smitten all my enemies on the jaw. You have broken the teeth of the wicked.” By translating it this way, the interpretation is that David is saying, “Arise, O Lord, deliver me, O my God, because I am confident in you; you have done it. This is what I have seen you do. You have smitten my enemies on the jaw. You have broken the teeth of the wicked. I have seen it, so I know I can trust you. I know you will deliver me; therefore, I lie down and sleep,” (verse 5) “I wake again because the Lord sustains me. I have that confidence because I have seen it in the past.” If we interpret it this way, he is not necessarily invoking that action for the present situation, but rather he is crying out for deliverance in citing God’s past action and past dealings with his enemy as testimony that God can deliver him.

What we have is a question of translation, and this is why we need some people who read the Hebrew and write the commentaries to understand what is taking place here. We are dealing with a perfect tense verb in Hebrew. Some people think this is a type of perfect that expresses a wish. That is the way the NIV is taking it: “Oh, that you would do this!” Others take the perfect in its normal sense of a past tense, “This is what you have done.” I really prefer in this context to take it as a past tense. Why is that important? How does that help in terms of understanding this title and maybe seeing that it does fit pretty well? We see that David is not necessarily crying out that God do this to Absalom, but he is saying, “I know you can deliver me because you have dealt with my enemies in the past. Now, please deliver me from my son.” His heart may still be saying, “Treat my son differently,” but he is simply saying, “I have confidence. I can lie down and sleep.” If we were to look at 2 Samuel 16:4, it talks about David refreshing himself overnight, and so there is a sense in which it does fit pretty well, given the generalizing nature of the psalms. They speak in general terms, not in specific terms. The superscription to Psalm 3 fits well, and particularly if we do not see this as invoking this kind of treatment for Absalom. That is the main offending verse.

Can we move on to another one? I want to cover a few so that you get a sense of how these do fit, because sometimes you read that they do not really fit. I think that one fits pretty well. As Longman says, “We can allow the superscription to guide our interpretation initially.” I think that is a useful thing to do. He says that we ought not to bend and twist and misshape the psalm to make it fit the superscription, but we have not done that here. We have simply translated the Hebrew one acceptable way and not another way, which is also an acceptable translation, but probably not the best here.

Turn to Psalm 54. Here we have another superscription. Notice how many different pieces of information it has in it: “For the director of music with stringed instruments, a *maskil* of David.” There is one of those words which we are not so certain of its meaning. The footnote in the NIV says, “probably a literary or musical term.” The superscription continues and we get the historical notice “when the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, ‘Is not David hiding among us?’” That is a lesser-known story, but this was during David’s flight into the wilderness when Saul was out to kill him. This story is in 1 Samuel 23. Let us read the Psalm:

Save me, O God, by Your name;  
 vindicate me by Your might.  
 Hear my prayer, O God;  
 listen to the words of my mouth.  
 Strangers are attacking me;  
 ruthless men seek my life—  
 men without regard for God.  
 Surely God is my help;  
 the Lord is the one who sustains me.

Let evil recoil on those who slander me;  
 in Your faithfulness, destroy them.  
 I will sacrifice a freewill offering to You;  
 I will praise Your name, O LORD, for it is good.  
 For He has delivered me from all my troubles,  
 and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.

Again, is there any problem with that? I do not really see any real point of contention there. “Strangers” could refer to the Ziphites, who were strangers to David. That one seems to fit acceptably.

Turn now to Psalm 56. There is more interesting information: “For the director of music. To the tune of ‘A dove on distant oaks.’ Of David, a *miktam*”—this is probably another literary or musical term, but we do not know exactly what it means—“when the Philistines had seized him in Gath.”

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me;  
 all day long they press their attack.  
 My slanderers pursue me all day long;  
 many are attacking me in their pride.  
 When I am afraid,  
 I will trust in You.  
 In God, whose word I praise,  
 in God I trust; I will not be afraid.  
 What can mortal man do to me?  
 All day long they twist my words;  
 they are always plotting to harm me.  
 They conspire, they lurk,  
 they watch my steps,  
 eager to take my life.  
 On no account let them escape;  
 in Your anger, O God, bring down the nations.  
 Record my lament;  
 list my tears on your scroll—  
 are they not in your record?  
 Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help.  
 By this I will know that God is for me.  
 In God, whose word I praise,  
 in the LORD whose word I praise—  
 In God I trust; I will not be afraid.  
 What can man do to me?  
 I am under vows to you, O God;  
 I will present my thank offering to You,  
 For you have delivered me from death,  
 and my feet from stumbling  
 that I may walk before God  
 in the light of life.

Again, is there a major problem with that? If we allow for the generalizing nature of the psalms, I think there is a reasonable fit. My point in all of this is to tell you not to allow foregone conclusions to go unquestioned. Even if most people are saying that the superscriptions do not really fit very well, you

should still question that and still look for yourself, because someone thought they fit whether they were original or not. Someone put them there and thought they fit, and it may be a matter of our training our own understandings and our expectations to say, “Yes, that fits well enough for their purpose and what they are talking about, and so I can allow that to guide me as well.”

What are our conclusions regarding psalm titles? I would not conclude vastly differently from what Tremper Longman has said. I do think they can inform our interpretation initially. Do not simply overlook them. As I was reading these Psalms earlier, remember I consciously did not read the titles because I did not want to get into this discussion at that point. I am not saying that you should always read them aloud in church necessarily, but do not overlook them in your study of the Psalms. They may enlighten you in some way, as you go back and think about the psalmist, or David in particular, in that particular circumstance and you think, “How would this fit? Do we get a glimpse at the heart of David?” One that seems to fit clearly is from Psalm 51: “For the director of music, a psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” Knowing that that is the background of that psalm really opens our eyes to the depth of David’s own distress and the nature of what he is saying when he says, “Against you only have I sinned.” How can he say that when he has killed Uriah and he has taken Bathsheba, possibly by force? (We do not really get an account of whether she came willingly or not.) How can he say, “Against you and you only have I sinned”? He says that because all sin is against God, and I think he realized that his sin against God was far, far greater than even what he had done to human beings. He is not lessening his guilt, but he is recognizing the true magnitude of his guilt: having offended a holy God, a God who had made His blessing rest upon him.