

# H2R P18: Poetry E2

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## God Speaks in Poetry

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### Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

## God Speaks in Poetry

- Jon: Why read poetry? What is poetry's value? Politicians don't use poetry to write laws. Scientists don't use poetry to publish their findings. Doctors don't use poetry to diagnose illness. The value of poetry isn't in how precise it is, how pragmatic it is. Poetry wants something different for you.
- Tim: The primary way that it wants to connect and communicate with you is by bringing you through an experience. A verbal, artistic, emotional experience. Through verbal art. And that's a value itself. It's of so much value that a third of the Scriptures are cast in this form.
- Jon: Poetry does a lot with a little. A few lines, a few choice of phrases like a seed harboring unrealized abundance.
- Tim: It's an overabundant form of communication. That's just of supreme value.
- Jon: Poetry shapes your imagination and it does this for those who pursue it. It is a pursuit. Biblical poetry is ancient Hebrew poetry, and so it requires of us to come with some familiar skills, but also with some newly honed skills for how to appreciate this ancient art. It isn't easy, but when we do, we tap into its genius.
- Tim: It changes you. You walk away from really good poetry as if you just went on a trip.
- Jon: This is Jon at The Bible Project, and today we finish our conversation on biblical poetry. We complete a dialogue on ancient Hebrew verse. Thanks for joining us. Here we go. We've been talking about the arts of biblical poetry.
- Tim: Yes. I want you to give me a state of the union for where we've gotten so far.
- Jon: Where we've gotten so far is we just talked in general about how poetry is a way to use language that's different than what you would call typical language. What would you call—
- Tim: I call it more functional.
- Jon: Functional.
- Tim: Yeah. Language that just plays a function in our day to day interactions.
- Jon: Doing something with that language that not only is communicating a what, communicating an idea, but the way that it's communicating that idea is just as important and also communicates how you experience that idea.
- Tim: It draws you into the experience of the thing by a 'how'. A whole set of 'how' techniques.

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Jon: I could tell you that "God's voice is powerful," but Psalm 29, I'm giving you a poetic rendition of explaining God's voice.

Tim: Almost a recreation. A verbal recreation.

Jon: Acting like thunder. So I can actually visualize it and experience it. The how becomes important in this. We just talked about the different tools that the poet has.

Tim: Yeah. There's the how, and then there's every culture has its own set of techniques. In the video, we might want to anchor it in some famous or well-known examples that are easy to hang on to, and then talk about how those are conventions or techniques that both set limitations on your accepting limitation, but also they create new possibilities.

The net effect is language that communicates over surplus of meaning.

Jon: An over surplus.

Tim: Or an overabundance of meaning. The poem communicates more than just the words.

Jon: It's a little gift, and as you open it, it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

Tim: Yes. It's the perfect meditation literature because it's meant to keep yielding more reflection, more thought, more depth of insight the longer you sit with it.

Jon: That's not unique to poetry, though because—

Tim: Narratives could do the same thing.

Jon: ...narratives do that, and so can parables would so that.

Tim: Though in narrative, you are accepting some kind of limitation that the story mimics the basics of narrative plot, character setting. Here, you're not limited by that. What your limitations are, are simply the language techniques.

Jon: There doesn't have to be any plot in a poem.

Tim: Mm-mm. I mean, there was kind of in Psalm 29 we read.

Jon: The plot was the storm moving through exploding things.

Tim: The storm moving up into the mountains and over. That's not quite a plotline but it is an event or an experience.

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Jon: Yes.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Then bringing peace over the flood. So the flow thought is, it communicates what the how that together give a surplus of meaning. So the conventions are rhythm, the patterning of how things are said. But Hebrew poetry isn't strict in its meter. Very free flowing. Anywhere from three to five Hebrew words, which is 10 to 12 English words.

Tim: Right.

Jon: Then we've got terseness. Well, which is the same thing.

Tim: If you're going say everything in three to five words...

Jon: Choose those words carefully.

Tim: ...every word now matters deeply.

Jon: Then this idea of parallelism, which is there's typically a coupling of lines.

Tim: Yeah, couplet. Sometimes triplets.

Jon: Sometimes triplets. So these couplings, they work together, they feed off of each other in some way, in different ways. Sometimes they're approaching an idea from two different perspectives. Sometimes they're saying something completely opposite of each other to make a point. But then sometimes is just one long line.

Tim: One thing, and then the thing that follows.

Jon: And then, thing that follows. What you would expect when you're talking. But there is something about the dynamic of a couple of lines.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In your Bible or in my Bible, I'll see that because of indentation on the second line.

Tim: Usually, if it's formatted as poetry, which a lot of biblical poetry is, depending on your translation, you'll notice it. You'll see it visually. Now, this is a confession and I didn't make it early on. I've always found it less interesting to talk about Hebrew poetry and just more interesting to just read the poetry. Then I find you learn how it works—

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Jon: It's like dissecting a joke.

Tim: Totally, yeah. Because there is something to talk about. There are conventions that they're using, but it's just way more helpful. I've just found I kind of need to do both but do it a bit abbreviated. Some people go on. I mean—

Jon: You got books.

Tim: Yeah. I'm pointing at a fat book by a guy named Chip Dobbs-Allsopp on biblical poetry. It's brilliant. It's so good, but it's like 600 pages of literary theoretical discussion about poetry. And so you really have to be interested. It is really interesting. But what I like about it is it's just loaded through with examples.

Jon: Know enough to get your bearings so you don't feel lost and you feel like, "What is this? It doesn't make any sense to me." But then don't overdo it. Just kind of go in and start experiencing it.

Tim: Just get into it. Yeah, that's right. The most practical question is just to notice how many little mini lines in pairs or couplings are there, and what's the relationship between them. Just slow, reread, have a cup of tea, and then let the electricity between the pairs or the triplets of lines start to bounce off each other. Like we did those proverbs, you'll just see the overabundance in meaning. So we just do some more examples.

Jon: Let's do it.

Tim: Great. Take the opening lines of Psalm 51 which has a heading the confession of David after that Bathsheba incident.

Jon: Get some pennants.

Tim: That's right. "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

Jon: So that's three couplings?

Tim: Yeah, three pairs. There are three movements in this. The first one is a request "Be gracious" and "blot out my transgressions." The second is washing, laundry imagery. Then the third is an acknowledgment.

Jon: What does it mean to blot something out?

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Tim: Wipe out. Wipe like with a washcloth. My kids spill stuff all the time, so you get a washcloth, you wipe it.

Jon: So if I spilled something on the counter and I wipe it off, I'm blotting?

Tim: Well, you're blotting out. Meaning that you're absorbing. Wiping away. Blot out.

Jon: Blotting out.

Tim: So that's good. Notice what that is paralleled with.

Jon: Being gracious.

Tim: Being gracious. Being gracious is pretty general. If I asked you to be gracious to me, I could express myself in a lot of ways.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: So this is typical. I'm going to use the words A line and B line. A line is often more a general term. The B line will come in with a more specific. Be gracious to me. How exactly? By wiping away my transgressions.

Notice actually you can almost hear it. This is called a symmetry. Each line has two parts, so there are four elements here. "Be gracious to me, according to your loving kindness. According to your greatness, blot out my transgressions." It's a chiasm.

Jon: It's like an AB BA.

Tim: AB BA, yeah. Little chiasm symmetry. "Wash me." So washing, you're taking what's dirty obviously.

Jon: Taking the dirt out.

Tim: So here we have sin as a form of staining. You need to be washed. But then cleansing, if you've read Leviticus, at any length, the kind of cleansing you're doing in Hebrew Bible world, you can cleanse something from dirt, but in Leviticus, cleansing is about purity. Ritual or more purity.

Jon: There are metaphors already built into the psyche of the thinker.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So you're washing and purifying, which is both a metaphor of cleaning up something dirt. but it's also a form of—

Jon: Being in a regular...

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Tim: That's right. Well, being in a pure state so I can enter the divine presence. Third statement is an acknowledgment. "I know my transgressions." So there's using a mental image 'I'm aware of'. But then the second one is "My sin is in front of me." It's a spatial image. So like sin, something I apprehend, but then there's also sin that's just like public.

Jon: Staring me in the face.

Tim: It's public.

Jon: Oh, it's public?

Tim: It's right there.

Jon: Comes out, yeah. Everyone knows.

Tim: I can see it. Everyone can see it.

Jon: The elf in the room.

Tim: Totally. Those are two different ways we experience our failings.

Jon: I can experience it internally, and then I can experience it as I go into social situations and know that other people know.

Tim: Yeah, it's in front of me. That's profound.

Jon: It's clear as the nose on my face.

Tim: Yeah, it's profound. There are failings that I'm aware of and then there are failings that are so to speak outside me.

Jon: Everyone's aware.

Tim: I'm aware of them and so is everybody else. There you go. That's it. I think that's what these poets are inviting us to do is do that kind of compare the second statement with the first and you'll almost always see there's some progression, different metaphor, different way of thinking about it.

Here's another. So we just do some messianic poetry.

Jon: Let's do that.

Tim: Messiah poetry, because why wouldn't you? This is one of my favorite poems in Isaiah. It comes right after a poem of Yahweh allows the Assyrian Empire to be like a

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lumberjack, chopping down trees, which is Israel and its kingdom. And then this poem.

"Then a shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and Branch from its roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD, he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what his eyes see, nor make a decision by what his ears here; with righteousness, he will bring justice to the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be a belt around his loins and faithfulness a belt around his waist."

Jon: Two belts?

Tim: Well, your underwear around your loins...

Jon: Oh, it's two different kinds of waist belts.

Tim: ...and then your belt is like your gear. One's for holding your underclass and the other one for holding your scabbard or something like a sword. The first line is a famous image.

Jon: Yeah, the shoot.

Tim: The shoot. Notice how the A line and the B line don't quite match metaphorically. One's from a stem. A shoot coming off a stem, which means you've already got a—

Jon: Well, you said stump. Is it stem or stump?

Tim: Oh, from the stem of Jesse. Did I say stump?

Jon: You said stump and I thought maybe you were just editing as you went.

Tim: Sometimes I do that. Now I want to make sure. The rootstock. The stock or the stem.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The point is, is a stock is typically above ground. So it's talking about us a stock that still above ground and a shoot it comes off of it.

Jon: Yeah, the new growth.

Tim: And what's the stock? It's the line of Jesse. Who is? Bible trivia.

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Jon: What do you mean "who is"?

Tim: Who is Jesse? Why are we talking about a guy named Jesse right now?

Jon: Yeah, why are we talking about Jesse? I guess I don't know.

Tim: I'm sorry. I'm putting you on the spot.

Jon: I actually don't know.

Tim: This is David's father. His name is Jesse. David bin Jesse.

Jon: Wow. As soon as you asked, I was like, "He must be one of the 12."

Tim: Yeah, it's David's dad.

Jon: So crazy.

Tim: Let's pause.

Jon: That's funny how familiarity just kind of create a sense of—

Tim: Especially as a biblical name. It happens to me all the time still, and I like thinking about the stuff a lot. I'm like, "Who's Abinadab again? Abimelech?"

Jon: Who is Jesse?

Tim: Jesse. By the way, I when I do this in classrooms, it's always the same. You don't have to feel bad. Because what are we talking about? I mean, I said this is a mess me at messianic poetry so we're talking about some awesome guy who's going to come and bring justice and be empowered by the Spirit. But the opening metaphor is of—

Jon: A tender little shoot.

Tim: ...a stock. Then the stalk is Jesse, David's dad, and then a shoot coming off. Now, if the stock is Jesse, you already know what the shoot from Jesse was.

Jon: David.

Tim: It's David. But then the B line comes along and says, "A branch or growth will come bear fruit from its roots."

Jon: From its roots.

Tim: Roots. So it's a different image.

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Jon: There's a new stock.

Tim: Right. Roots are underground. Stocks are already above ground, roots are underground. So growth from roots will be a totally new thing.

Jon: This poet is confused.

Tim: Yeah. Either he just doesn't know how to get—

Jon: He hasn't been gardening recently.

Tim: Yeah, totally. The odds of the opposite being the case is really high. The author did know exactly what he's doing. He's using the B line and A line and playing them off each other to say something. So if a stem, if a stalk already exists, it means it's not brand new. We're not coming out of some other family.

Jon: Starting over.

Tim: But it's from an existing family...

Jon: But it in a new way.

Tim: ...but in a new way. It's not as a shoot coming from David. That's what significant here. He doesn't say a shoot from the stalk of David, because that would be one of the sons of David. In the perspective of all the prophets, the sons of David were mostly failures. All of them were failures. Some of them succeeded for a little while.

What we don't need is more sons of David. What we need is a new David. That's the image here. We need a son of Jesse, a new David.

Jon: We need something fundamentally new coming from roots.

Tim: Yes. That fundamentally newness of a new David translates in the B line into a different plant image, which is essentially that we do need something brand new from the roots.

Jon: It is a shoot from the stock, but also it's a new stock.

Tim: Yeah. It's both from something that already exists and it's something brand new. That's what he's trying to say, and he does it through conflicting plant parts. I think he does assume that you're going have a long cup of tea and just think about that one line till you get it.

Jon: No, I don't think they drunk tea back then, right?

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Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: Sure?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You're crushing up plants and sipping on it?

Tim: Totally.

Jon: Sounds like it.

Tim: I'm trying to think. I don't know where it's quite talked about in the Bible. Here's something cool. We got a new David in town. This is a poem written hundreds of years after David died. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him the Spirit of wisdom and understanding the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge. Okay, all right.

Jon: I get it.

Tim: Is it the repetition?

Jon: Yeah. He's got the goods.

Tim: Totally. Then it's like, what kind of goods? He's got wisdom and understanding, so he's sharp, super sharp, council, which is like strategy, strength to pull off the strategies, knowledge—

Jon: Is that's a strength from the muchness word?

Tim: No, this is the normal word for strength. Knowledge, we're back to wisdom vocabulary, and fear of the Lord. Wisdom vocabulary.

Jon: It's a lot of wisdom and then strength.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Notice how many spirits he has resting on him. I underlined them all.

Jon: We talked about this poem before. I think during the [ReWalk? 00:21:22] competition?

Tim: Oh, yeah. The empowerment.

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Jon: And I got hung up on how many spirits there were. Then you were trying to go, "Oh, this is one Spirit." And I was like, "But there seems like there's a lot of different spirits."

Tim: Count them out. I put the underline. Did we do this already? I don't know if we did this last time we talked about this.

Jon: No, no we didn't.

Tim: How many spirits are on him?

Jon: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.

Tim: Of course. Of course, it's seven. Of course. It's the seven-fold spirit.

Jon: What does that mean?

Tim: It's seven for all kinds of things. I actually got some reading on this I still need to do on symbolic numbers in the Bible. But seven's one of the main candidates all over the place as a statement of completeness and unity.

Jon: Sure. So seven-fold spirit? I've never heard that phrase before.

Tim: Yeah. I don't think I coined it, but it's what just came to my mind.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: It's one spirit, the Spirit of Yahweh, who's so complete and sufficient. He creates an overabundance of capacity and power and potential inside of the new David. So it's all these poetic lines that are just talking about he's Spirit-empowered. Which has all these different—

Jon: This guy has got the divine energy.

Tim: Totally, yeah. And the seven arranged in other one of these symmetries. A nice little chiasm where it's the Spirit of the Lord on him and then the fear of the Lord...

Jon: At the end.

Tim: ...is at the end.

Jon: The Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Tim: Totally. We could go on, but you get to feel. Here's something interesting. This is something that Adele Berlin pointed out. She said you've got this rhythmic principle

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for the biblical poets can use. They want to pair or sometimes triple pair short lines, and all kinds of patterns. Basically, that free verse set of methods creates what she calls an infinite number of ways to communicate similar ideas.

She counted up all of the times in the book of Psalms where a poet asks God to hear their prayer. She found 29 examples, and not one of them is identical. It's really interesting. This is just from a section—

[crosstalk 00:23:43]

Tim: ...It's really it is kind of like that. Totally, yeah. Psalm 54: O God, hear my prayer // listen to the word of my mouth. Psalm 61: O God, hear my cry // pay attention to my prayer. Ps 66:19 Truly God has heard // he paid attention to the sound of my prayer. Psalm 84: Yahweh, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob. Ps 102: Yahweh, hear my prayer // may my cry come to you. Psalm 88: May my prayer come before you // incline your ear to my cry. She has more but you get the idea.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But also, those aren't all identical. They all are doing slightly different things. Where one is listening, sometimes they'll use a metaphor of my words leave my mouth and rise up like cloud, rise up and no flow into the heavenly temple. Maybe you'll hear them, maybe it'll make it up there. That's different than the demand of like, "Listen!" Or it's different than saying, "I'm crying, yelling at you. Please hear me."

But they're all basically saying, "Listen, I hope you hear my prayer." Do you want to wrap? I don't know. Do you want to create any kind of wrap around that?

Jon: The point is how you experience the poetry. What we did is we just went through and we tried to dissect a little bit about how we were experiencing it or what was happening that helped us experience it in different ways. Why is that important? So important that 30% of the Bible is poetry.

Tim: One piece, it's actually not right here is our notes, but it's what we talked about when we talked about just different literary styles in the Bible. It means a third of the Bible's communication is communicating through poetry, or what? It's communicating something.

But the primary way that it wants to connect and communicate with you is by bringing you through an experience. A verbal, artistic, emotional experience through verbal art. That's of value. It's of much value that a third of the Scriptures are cast in this form.

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As we're going to see with some closing kind of thoughts and quotes here, it's a way of communicating more. It's an overabundant form of communication. To me, you can talk about the techniques, but the net effect total is more than the sum of the parts. That's just a supreme value, I think, for how just poetry works.

Robert Alter who wrote one of the classic introductions to Biblical poetry called "The Art of Biblical Poetry", he quotes from a famous Russian filmmaker from the 20th century. His name's Sergei Eisenstein. I put a picture in the notes there.

Jon: Yeah, he looks crazy.

Tim: He looks awesome. He directed the most in the important film version of Ivan the Terrible. I guess, all these really important Russian classics, he put in classic film form in the mid-20th century. This is a quotation he has about the power of setting one thing alongside another thing. And they're not the same. He's thinking of film montage is where you juxtapose two scenes back and forth. Robert Alter quotes that because this is a really great analogy for how the poetic lines work and bounce off each other.

So this is Eisenstein's words. He says, "It remains true to this day that the juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus one shot - it's a new creation. The result is qualitatively distinguishable from each the elements viewed separately. This is the effect of the montage. Each piece exists no longer as something unrelated."

It gets technical here, but it's helpful. "So they're not two unrelated things. They're a given particular representation of a larger common theme that now penetrates all the shot pieces. This juxtaposition of these partial details calls to life and forces into the light and general qualities that each piece expresses that might bind them together into a single hole, a single image that the spectator experiences."

If you like movies, this is this is like one of the nuts and bolts of good editing is how you juxtapose sequences of scenes.

Jon: He's talking specifically of montage scenes, or just in general?

Tim: Oh, well, he talks about the montage here.

Jon: As you're reading, I was trying to think of a montage that I've seen that that does this particularly well. I haven't really thought of one.

Tim: There was a film, this is back in the 90s for me, the director Ron Fricke made a nonlinear documentary of both nature documentary footage, but incredible. This is

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before drones. They were doing this on a helicopter and so on. So incredible vast panoramas of mountains and deserts juxtaposed with the people who live in each of those regions doing their religious rituals. So it'd be like the Himalayas.

Jon: Yeah, I see this.

Tim: And it'd be Tibetan monks during their prayers.

Jon: What was it called Baraka.

Tim: Oh, it's astounding.

Jon: It's really powerful.

Tim: The whole film progresses through juxtaposition. Then there's the whole scene in downtown Tokyo. Do you remember that?

Jon: Yeah. Like the people going every which way in the street?

Tim: Yes. It's fast motion of all the massive intersection.

Jon: And then it'll cut to like—

Tim: Chicks.

Jon: Yeah, little chicken...

Tim: In a chicken factory.

Jon: ...and throwing them in different belts.

Tim: Going down conveyor belt. It's unbelievable. It's so vivid in my memory to this day. So you've had all these scenes of beautiful, serene mountains, and peaceful monks and then the city comes along. The city, you sequence and you're like, "Oh, it's so ugly and unpleasant and it's humans in mess." Then he lays them on top of—

Jon: Separating the male from female chickens.

Tim: These chicks and their little beaks get burned and they get thrown into these conveyor belts. Then you start showing escalator stairs and stuff in Tokyo in Tokyo subway juxtaposed with chickens going down conveyor belts. That's a vivid example in my memory.

Jon: That's a classic. Because there's nothing else other than juxtaposition happening.

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- Tim: That's it on the editorial level. Eisenstein's point is obviously, you put them next to each other, they become a new creation, a new artistic statement about ourselves, about how we treat animals and how we treat ourselves by the environments we create. It's a new hall. And what you immediately start doing is looking for the connections and the larger common theme that binds two unlock things together. I think that's excellent. It's a great inroad into how biblical poetry works.
- Jon: There's also something very enjoyable about experiencing a juxtaposition and you coming to understanding the [inaudible 00:32:09] of it. The discovery process of it that were pattern recognition machines. It's like giving us an opportunity to do what we're good at, which is, see patterns come up with new observation. It's like teaching in a way that allows the participant to really thrive in the environment of learning.
- Tim: Yeah. There's a great analogy here, then, with how biblical narrative works through its the gaps and the lack of clarity - about character motive or is this a good or bad thing. In a poetry, the equivalent is dense blinds that put like with unlike, or like with like, but there's always a little bit of difference that creates a juxtaposition. And then that's it. The poet's done their work, now, you have to do your work. It's a way of communication.
- Jon: It's a developmental way of teaching.
- Tim: Correct. As a communicator, there's also a liability that people won't get it.
- Jon: This isn't how we communicate generally when we want to communicate about important things. When I say we, I mean, church leaders.
- Tim: Yeah, right. Teachers.
- Jon: Teachers. You want clarity. You want them to get it without any miscommunication, and then move on to the next thing and get that. And so you actually want to take out any sort of ambiguity, make it very clear. Tim: Poetry wants to do the opposite.
- Jon: Poetry wants to do the opposite.
- Tim: There is a 'what' that they want to communicate. There is a 'something'.
- Jon: But they're comfortable with the liability that you might totally miss it.
- Tim: Or that you might under read it. That you'll only get—
- Jon: Or misread it.

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Tim: That you'll misread it or under read it. You'll only get a quarter of what they really wanted you to.

Jon: That liability is worth it because of the payoff that they are really soaking in and becoming a part of the—

Tim: And how much the reader will own the discovery if they make it.

Jon: Yeah. It's a lot more work to communicate that way as well.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Poetry is really hard to write, much less read.

Jon: But honestly, if you're a pastor, and you just got up and you did something that was very poetic, and then sat down, I think half the congregation would be like, "What was that? Try again. We are not going to put up with this. Tell me what I need to know."

Tim: Right. Different—

Jon: There are different types of traditions.

Tim: Traditions have different ways of conceiving what the purpose of teaching the Bible is in the worship gathering. But it's at least worth asking, no matter what tradition you're part of. If a third of the Scriptures is a form of communication...

Jon: Maybe a third of your sermons.

Tim: ...it's intentionally dense, isn't always fully clear, and will generate as much ambiguity and invitation as it does clear communication, it's just worth pondering. Is that something worth imitating in the public worship gathering?

Tim: That leads to final point. It's kind of making the same point. This is over surplus of meaning. It's kind of the same idea we've been talking about already. It's just another awesome quote by Robert Altman. Here he's talking about how it's a chapter on the poetry of the prophets, and how in the Hebrew prophets, divine speech is 99% of the time in this poetic form.

So just pause and think the prophets were an institution and a tradition in ancient Israel that lasted centuries. And they left a legacy of writing in essays and preaching, those have been collected in the books we have, and divine speech as these individually conceived of it, how they encountered and wanted to express it to others was in this very form.

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It's really fascinating to think about it. When God talks in the prophets, He talks in this form.

Jon: He talks in poetry.

Tim: So in this quote, he's trying to imagine what's the prophet's thinking when they're trying to communicate a Divine Word to their audience. He says, "If we could hear God talking, making His will manifest in words of the Hebrew language, what would it sound like? Poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication. It's not only solemn, weighty, and forceful, it's densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implications."

It's like super dense, like a super multi-layered onion. I have a friend who uses the image of dense German bread to talk about biblical poetry.

Jon: For some reason, the description made me think of like an atom.

Tim: Oh, got it. Just this dense form of—

Jon: Just like it's very compact, but there's also energy and it's intricately designed.

Tim: Yeah. So poetry is the way humans express dense solemn, weighty. He goes on. "It makes perfect sense why divine speech in the Hebrew Bible is most often represented of poetry. The form of this divine poetry explains why these texts have touched the lives of millions of readers far removed in time, space and situation from the small groups of ancient Hebrews who produced and first read these texts."

The point is actually what you're saying that poetry, he's more talking about the payoff of using the poetic form. That the reward is so high for those who engage in it that it changes you. You walk away from really good poetry as if you just went on a trip.

Jon: It's the survival of the fittest in language.

Tim: It's the most supreme divine form.

Jon: The language that's going to get passed on is the things that made the most impact for you, created this value for you. Then the rest wasn't fit enough, and so it will go to the wayside. But the two lines of poetry that carried so much over excess of meaning for you—

Tim: In the head, you're thinking all day long about, "Well, what was that?"

Jon: You're going to pass that along.

## God Speaks in Poetry

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so it would make sense that when God tells you something, it's going to have that abundance to it. So how would you describe it, or you'd have to be in poetry?

Tim: That's why—

Jon: God speaks in poetry.

Tim: One thing God has spoken; two things I have heard.

Jon: God says one thing; I hear two things.

Tim: I hear many things that bounce off each other and create a mega thing that I can't quite express except through the language of poetry.

Jon: The title of this episode of the podcast should be "God Speaks in Poetry." The next video topic that...

Tim: It's going to be a metaphor.

Jon: Specifically, [inaudible 00:40:31] metaphor.

Tim: It's going to be the same principle of juxtaposing images on top of each other, that sometimes they're similar and just a little different, sometimes they're totally different. Same principle. But there's a whole other conversation with cool things to learn about metaphor theory that I think it's really interesting.

Jon: Cool. So the core motif underlying both videos is biblical poetry's tradition that juxtaposes language to bounce off each other on video one and then video two, images that bounce off each other.

Jon: That's it for this episode of The Bible Project podcast and that's it for our conversation on poetry in general, but it's not the end of our conversation about poetry. In the next two episodes of the podcast, we're going to look at the use of metaphor and symbols in biblical poetry. We're actually going to look at how metaphor shapes the way we think and the way we live, and how biblical poets masterfully use metaphor and imagery.

The Bible Project is a nonprofit. We're in Portland, Oregon. We make free resources that show the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. You can find all of our videos, our podcasts, our other resources like study notes and posters, it's all for free at [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com).

## God Speaks in Poetry

A quick little side note from me, and kind of what's going on at The Bible Project, it's the very beginning of June, we're going into the summer months, and we've got a lot of stuff going on. We're expanding the team and a couple very key positions.

One position is a director level position that's going to be in charge of all of our global initiatives. We've got a lot of translations happening all over the globe, we're partnering with a lot of really cool organizations who are using this material all over the globe, and we need someone who is an administrative ninja, who's entrepreneurially minded, and loves to connect a lot of dots to solve problems and help us expand this resource to people all over. If you think that's you or someone you know, you can send us your resume and a cover letter to [amber@jointhebibleproject.com](mailto:amber@jointhebibleproject.com).

The other position we're looking for is a manager over a new initiative we're doing called Classroom. Basically, we are going to have Dr. Tim Mackie teach to a select few students, a diverse group of students, and we're going to film that, and then we're going to provide those Classroom interactions for free on a new online tool that's going to be coming out in 2019.

We're looking for a manager who can help us find those students, host those students, and just make sure the whole Classroom Initiative goes off without a hitch. So if you know someone who might be a good fit for that position, you can also send your resume and cover letter to [amber@jointhebibleproject.com](mailto:amber@jointhebibleproject.com). That's [amber@jointhebibleproject.com](mailto:amber@jointhebibleproject.com). Both those positions, the Director of Global focus and the Classroom Manager. So thank you for listening, thank you for your support, and thanks for being a part of this with us.