

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 34: The book of Psalms, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

READ PSALM 1

The first paragraphs of books are always important. The book of Psalms is no exception. It begins by doing two things:

1. *It separates mankind into only two categories, the righteous (vv. 1-3) and the unrighteous (vv. 4-6).*

In Galatians Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (or you are not)

So, separation from people because of their race, status, or sex is not an issue. The only criterion for separation is heart attitude and lifestyle. Is a person righteous or unrighteous? Does he live righteously or unrighteously.

2. *It explains how you live the righteous life.*

Don't walk, sit, or stand with the wicked and love the Scriptures.(v. 2) . " . . . *His delight is in the law of the Lord (Scriptures), and in His law he meditates day and night.*"

When we love the Word, read it, meditate on it (v 3): We become mature (firmly planted by streams of water) We become productive (yielding fruit) We become spiritually successful (whatever he does he prospers)

This is just a sample of the treasures just waiting to be mined in **The book of Psalms.**

Introduction

When I study to teach I follow a pattern:

First, I read the book as many times as time permits. Next, I read the book taking rough notes of things that strike me. Next, I attempt to outline the book. Then, I read other sources, starting with books in my library, the moving to other books I can borrow or buy from reliable authors. Last, if I have time, I refer to commentaries, handbook, etc.

I went to my library to pull out any volumes on The Psalms and found a gem I forgot even existed. It's a great little book named *Reflections on the Psalms*, by C. S. Lewis. He writes:

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

READ FROM PAGES 2 and 3

All Psalms are poems and display the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, especially parallelism (see hand out sheet on Hebrew poetry). Many were composed expressly for worship and others were born out of deep spiritual and emotional experience of the soul, later set to music.

They are lyrical. songs adapted to voice and musical instrument, designed for personal and corporate worship, but they were also meant to change behavior and bring maturity and fruit in our lives.

Jewish synagogues now use Psalms largely in rituals, devotions, and worship. They sing them, of course. The Christian church embraced them in their common books of prayer, liturgies, and hymns. We even use them in our choruses, because they express "the cry of our hearts."

They are practical. Have you noticed how well you remember the lyrics to a song, sometimes even if you don't want to? I would guess that virtually every Psalm you know by memory is one that you learned in a praise chorus. Check it out.

They are universal. Psalms include personal meditation, historical reminiscences, formal instruction, and passionate prayers. Sin, sorrow, shame, confession, joy, hope, faith, and love--all timeless--all expressed in a setting of prayer and praise.

They are relevant. We can put their importance in perspective when we notice how often they were quoted in the New Testament:

1. Jesus used them in His public ministry, prayer life, and teaching.

(The hymn He sang with His disciples before He went to the pray in the garden, Psalms 113-118, is still sung by orthodox Jews in services today.)

2. The Apostles used them as well. Peter's Pentecost message quotes from 3 separate Psalms and Paul quotes from them in his Epistles.

Background

The book of Psalms was the *Hebrew Hymnbook*. For a long time it was left untitled in the Old Testament documents, but the Jews traditionally called it Tehilim which translates *Songs of Praise*. It received the title, book of Psalms when the translators of the Greek Septuagint borrowed a word that referred to song sung with stringed instruments.

David's era has sometimes been called the Hebrew Renaissance, much like the Elizabethan era in England. Their enemies were primarily subdued, Jerusalem was a mighty capital city, the Ark was in the midst of the people, and Israel was a world power. More than half the Psalms were written down during this time.

Many Psalms are rooted in Jewish history, especially events recorded in I and II Samuel and II Kings. A great study is to look at the historical circumstances in which various Psalms were written (A chronological Bible is a great aid here). Reading through the book, listing and comparing the attributes of God and the characteristics of man is also a great and humbling experience.

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Many Psalms are labeled with the name of the author, instructions to the directors, choir and musicians, type of poetry, occasions to be use, etc. These notations are only missing from more recent manuscripts.

Many Psalms can be classified by categories relating to type or subject matter. Here is one chart that will help you organize them for your own personal devotions or study.

Authors

There are 150 Psalms and we know the authors of about 100 of them for sure: King David 73, Asaph, David's music director 12, Korah, probably written to his sons 12, King Solomon 2, and Moses 1.

This indicates that it took over 900 years to compile and arrange this songbook, from Moses to late in the history of Israel after their exile.

Important

Remember when you study the book of Psalms that the initial readers were Jews. Their expectations, hopes, and experiences are from the standpoint of the Nation of Israel. This does not mean that it can not speak to us today. *"All Scripture is God breathed, and profitable . . ."*

But, the knowledge, understanding, and perspective they had varies greatly from ours and we cannot always understand the message without understanding the audience.

Some of the major differences are:

1. God is never referred to as Father and His followers are never sons.

The view of God is very "high." He is Jehovah, the Most High. The concept of family is a New Testament concept.

2. The promises (covenants) are earthbound.

The people are looking for a physical fulfillment on the earth. This as opposed to our "spiritual blessing in heavenly places."

3. The Holy Spirit is given for a given time and purpose.

David begs, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Holy Spirit now resides in the believer and cannot be taken away.

4. The worship relationship with God had a different focus.

The Hebrew nation entered the presence of God through a priest. The Christian enters "confidently into the throne room."

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5. The "second-coming" is not our "blessed hope."

Israel looks to Messiah coming to set up a kingdom on Earth.

The believers "blessed hope" is the "catching away of the saints."

There are many more so we need to keep this separation in mind as we study. It is bad theology and bad exegesis to claim for the church what only belongs to Israel. Understanding Psalms in context is vital. It was well stated by Dr. Gaebelien when he said of the Psalms, "All the Word is **for** us, though it may not all be **about** us."

Studying Psalms is valuable. We can learn much about God and ourselves. We can put words to our deepest longings, praise and worship God using these songs.

Homework:

Read: Continue to read the book of Psalms

Think: Do I really delight in the Word of God?

Apply: Pick a short passage of Scripture and meditate on it day and night.

Bible Survey Lesson 35: The book of Psalms, Part II

OUTLINE/TYPES OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Why do people write poetry? *To make us feel something!*

Yes, often they want us to think or do, but mainly to *feel* something. They want to stir up our feelings, elicit an emotional response. They express deep felt longings; anger, fear, love, joy, etc. in order to *creatively bare our souls*.

C. S. Lewis explained this clearly when he said, "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express that same delight in God that made David dance before the Lord."

Life, worship and poetry go together. Whether it's: David expressing fear and joy, or Elizabeth and Mary elated over "the child" about to be born, or Solomon sharing the truth about life or discussing love, or the Jews bowing down before YHWH, *poetry expresses the cry of their hearts with power*.

If you have become blasé or bored with your life or your worship of God. If knowing you are "saved and going to heaven to see God some day" has lessened the excitement of being with Him *now* . . . If personal and corporate worship doesn't excite you any more. If entering His "gates with thanksgiving and courts with praise" doesn't take your breath away and make you bow like it once did . . .

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YOU NEED THE PSALMS!

These Psalmists, these poets, had less reason for loving God than we have:

They didn't *understand* that the Messiah would die for them.

Their hope was for their children to be around when the Messiah set up His kingdom on earth and ushered in a perfect world.

They didn't *have* Him indwelling them by His Holy Spirit to give them power over sin.

They didn't *know* God as their daddy, or buddy, or therapist.

They didn't *have* enough data for God to become normal, or boring, or safe.

They long for Him, to be in His presence: 27:4-- "*One thing I ask from the Lord, that shall I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple.*"

He fills a basic desire: 42:1-- "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*"

Not only do they want Him, they cannot live without Him. Look at 63:1 and 2, "*O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water, Thus I have beheld Thee in the sanctuary to see thy power and thy glory . . . etc.*"

Just one day of worship in the temple is worth everything: 84:10-- "*A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside.*"

Were they emotional about God? Did they have what we today call a felt need? Was God an important part of their lives? I think so! Perhaps it was special because they only thought of God as being in the temple and they only got to go there occasionally, perhaps even just once a year, or some of them, never.

No, study their history and read the Psalms and you will see that it is we who have separated the secular from the Holy. They were farmers, herdsman, craftsmen and merchants. If God didn't give the increase, they starved. They saw all of their work, war and worship as done "unto the Lord." **We can learn this from them.**

David wrote a song for the temple choir that said: 68:24-- "*They (the audience) have seen Thy procession, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.*" v 35-- "*O God, Thou art awesome, from Thy sanctuary.*"

Did they **see** God in the temple service. Of course not, at least not physically.

So what was is that all about?

Some writers have called it "God consciousness," an awareness that God meets us in a special way in the act of corporate worship.

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I call it having an appetite for God.

If I come out of our service saying, "Wasn't that music great (or lousy), wasn't Dale good (or poor), didn't the soloist have a good voice (or too much vibrato), perhaps I've missed the point.

The poets didn't seem to think they were especially righteous because they sought to "see" God in the temple. (I'm good, I'm here, show me something, I'm a service critic.") NO, they felt privileged to be there, to receive the gift, to have the opportunity to worship God and even to hear a message from Him.

It is with this sense of awe and wonder and excitement I now come to the Psalms, the Hebrew book of Praise.

Introduction

The book of Psalms is a huge book compared to the other Bible books.

I understand why Martin Lloyd Jones' sermons on Psalms fill seven volumes. To make studying it harder, it is not thematic or event oriented, so outlining it is hopeless. You who have MacArthur's, or Ryrie's Study Bibles will see neither even tried.

So how are we going to do this? I have chosen to follow two Jewish approaches :

1. There are actually five songbooks in Psalms, each with its own introduction and doxology. Ancient Hebrew sources tell us that each book corresponds to a book of Moses in the Pentateuch. Our brief outline will follow this pattern.
2. There is a list of types of Psalms accepted by Hebrew scholars, both old and new, which divides the Psalms into categories based on their purpose. We will define them and look at samples of each.

OUTLINE OR THE BOOK OF PSALMS

I. BOOK I: PSALMS 1-41

The first book parallels the book of Genesis in that it deals with the way of the righteous and the fate of the ungodly and, like Genesis, is foundational to the entire Bible, it is foundational to the entire book of Psalms.

It is generally accepted that this grouping, mostly written by David, was compiled by Solomon and used in the initial temple services. David probably wrote some of the unlabeled Psalms as well since Acts 4:25 and Hebrews 4:7 indicate that he wrote Psalms 2 and 95 which do not bear his name.

book one gets off to a great start, in chapter one, encouraging the people to "delight in the law of the Lord" and "meditate on it day and night" (v 2). That sets the tone for the entire book.

[It advises not to walk, stand or sit with sinners](#) (v 1). Why? Because the wicked perish (v.. 6) but, to be firmly planted by streams of water. Why? Because [the righteous prosper](#). (v. 3)

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II. BOOK II: PSALMS 42-72

The second book reflects the teaching of Exodus because it focuses on Israel and their cry for deliverance and ends with a king reigning over a redeemed nation.

This section is traditionally thought as being collected by the Levites to be used in temple worship. Again this book starts strong with that famous verse, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God." This reflects the felt need for God to "provide or we perish."

III. BOOK III: PSALMS 73-89

Just as Leviticus centers on the sacrifices, with an overall theme "holiness unto the Lord" (87 times), so holiness and separation of God's people unto Him is the theme of book three.

This series of Psalms was collected by Hezekiah primarily for worship in the rebuilt temple.

This time the book begins with the statement, "Surely, God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! (v. 1-- holy unto the Lord)." It continues by discussing how hard walking with God can be, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, . . ." (v. 28)

IV. BOOK IV: PSALMS 90-106

The book clearly corresponds to Numbers even beginning with a Psalm written by Moses and ending with one that rehearses the wandering and rebellion of the nation Israel.

Moses begins by stating the fact that the Lord is always a factor in the life of Israel. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Before the mountains were born, . . . even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." (vv. 1 and 2)

V. BOOK V: PSALMS 107-150

book five is linked to Deuteronomy because it has the prevailing theme of God's Word (The Law), emphasized in chapter 119, "Oh how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day." (v 97)

books four and five are thought to have been collected by Ezra and Nehemiah for use in the rebuilt and refurbished temple.

This book begins with thanksgiving "to the Lord, for He is good; For His loving kindness is everlasting." (v 1) It is so packed with references to the Law (Scripture) that is often sounds like Proverbs. 112:1-- "Praise the Lord! How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments." 119:1-- "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord."

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

TYPE OF POEMS IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Last week I gave you a chart listing various types of Psalms. These lists are not unusual and they appear in many Bible Handbooks and Study Bibles. The orthodox Jewish community separates them in slightly different categories and, just for fun, I will use those designations as I also give you a sample of each type.

1. Hymns

Hymns are songs of praise to be sung by the whole congregation.

There are several type of hymns: Hymns of glory to God for his attributes and works. Psalm 105:2-- "Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders." Hymns for victory over enemies. Psalm 68:1-- "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; and let those who hate Him flee before Him." Hymns of reign (enthronement). Psalm 97:1-- "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice . . . " Hymns of Hallelu Yah. Psalms 146:1 and 2 --"Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being."

2. Complaint (Lament)

Complaints, in the Hebrew, are complaints. Corporate complaints find the entire nation gripping about their problems: enemies, sickness, famine, etc. Individual complaints are made by a single person or small groups about any or all kinds of trouble. These include the imprecatory Psalms, calling for help, vindication and justice.

Corporate Complaint, *Psalm 85:4-- "Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine indignation toward us to cease." Individual Complaint, Psalm 3:1-- "O Lord, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising against me. Many are saying of my soul, "there is no deliverance for him in God." Psalm 109:13-- "Let his posterity be cut off; in the following generation let their name be blotted out."*

3. Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving was expressed for personal deliverance from illness, meeting of needs, etc. *Psalm 116:1-- "I love the Lord, because he hears my voice and my supplications."*

4. Royal

Royal songs have to do with the king and his family, official events, and especially those chanted when he went off to war. *Psalm 72:1 and 2-- "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thine afflicted with justice." (A Coronation Psalm)*

5. Torah (Wisdom)

A Torah Psalm is one that gives moral or religious teaching to lead men to a righteous life in the real world. They are similar to Proverbs. *Psalm 127:1 and 2-- "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it , . . . it is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep."*

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

6. Oracle

An oracle is a decree from God ending with a prayer to God to do it. *Psalm 82:2-- How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked. . . (v. 8) Arise O God and judge the earth."*

7. Blessing

These are ceremonial blessings given by the priest to the hearers. *Psalm 128:1 and 2-- "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat the fruit of your hands you will be happy and it will be well with you."*

8. Taunt

Taunts are songs or chants that reproach the godless for their vile actions and pronounce doom on them. *Psalm 52:1--Why do you boast in evil, o mighty man? The loving kindness of God endures all the day long...(v. 5) But God will break you down forever."*

9. Trust

These songs exhibit faith in God, even under tough conditions. *Psalm 11:1-- In the Lord I take refuge; How can you say to my soul, flee as a bird to the mountain...(v. 5) The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven."*

10. Antiphonal

An antiphonal Psalm is one where the priest reads and the people reply. We call it responsive reading. *Psalm 136:1-- "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His loving kindness is everlasting," etc., etc.*

Conclusion

We can learn much from the Hebrew song-writers. There are no light and meaningless refrains here. All have impact, are moving, and emotionally charged.

I believe, somehow, the people were moved to respond as the choir sang, the orchestra played, and they themselves sang about:

1. God, the creator of the universe.
2. God's involvement with His people.
3. God's judgment on sin and rewards for righteousness.
4. God's faithfulness and mercy to the needy.
5. God's promise of a coming Messiah, a Savior for His world.

But, today's question is always, "What have you done for me lately?"

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Lessons

1. Joy and despair, guilt and comfort, love and hate, thankfulness and griping are all experienced by man, which the loving hand of God can bring us through.

2. We need to make praise, confession, cries, requests, and thanks part of our worship, both personally and corporately.

Homework:

Read: The book of Proverbs (Some people read it, a chapter a day, every day.)

Think: Is there one special area in my life where I need supernatural wisdom.

Apply: Try to ignore the obstacles to worshiping God this week, at home and at church.