

Old Testament Survey
Lesson 19 – Psalms
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Introduction

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 during this time. Many Psalms are rooted in Jewish history, especially events recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel and 2 Kings. 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.

Studying Psalms is valuable. We can learn much about God and ourselves. We can put words to our deepest longings, praise and worship. Many Psalms 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 and the church has also embraced them in their praise and worship, liturgies, and hymns. We even use them in our choruses, because they express "the cry of our hearts." Because they are lyrical, they can be easy to remember.

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 three separate Psalms and Paul quotes from them in his Epistles.

Authors

There are 150 Psalms and we know the authors of about 100 of them for sure: David 73, Asaph (David's music director) 12, Korah (probably written to his sons) 12, 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

An important principle to be understood when studying the OT is that of Progressive Revelation. Progressive Revelation is the principle that God has revealed his message gradually over time. Later truth never contradicts earlier truth, but may supersede or clarify it. Progressive revelation may shed additional light on a subject, but that light never contradicts or changes prior revelation. By understanding progressive revelation we are prevented from reading the NT into the OT.

Remember when we study the 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 cannot speak to us today. 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 NT 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." The 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."
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. All Scripture is for us, but not all Scripture is to us.

The Psalmist's Heart

These Psalmists, these poets, had less reason for loving God than we have: they *did not 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 *did not have* Him indwelling them by His Holy Spirit to give them power over sin; they *did not know* God as their daddy.

Yet, they long for Him, to be in His presence:

⁴One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall 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. Psa 27:4

He fills a basic desire:

¹As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. Psa 42:1

Not only do they want Him, they cannot live without Him.

¹O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. ²Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. ³Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. Psa 63:1-2

Just one day of worship in the temple is worth everything:

¹⁰For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Psa 84:10

Were they emotional about God? Was God an important part of their lives? Yes! There was no compartmentalization in their lives. They did not separate the secular from the holy. They saw all of their work, war, and worship as done "unto the Lord. They had an appetite for God.

Hebrew Poetry

All Psalms are poems and display the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, especially parallelism.

1. Synonymous Parallelism: both lines say substantially the same thing.
⁷When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:7
2. Antithetical Parallelism: the second line provides a contrasting parallel to the truth of the first line.
³⁴Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people. Prov 14:34
3. Synthetical Parallelism: one line builds on the previous line.
³He 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. Psa 1:3
4. Exemplar Parallelism: one line metaphorically illustrates the literal truth of the other.
¹⁷Iron sharpens iron,
So one man sharpens another. Prov 27:17

In addition to the types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, it is important to understand various literary devices used to convey the images.

1. Simile: comparison of two things, usually employing the words as or like (He will be like a tree... Psa 1:3)
2. Metaphor: comparison of two things without using the words as or like (The Lord God is a sun and shield; ... Psa 84:11)
3. Hyperbole: exaggeration for effect (Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears. Psa 6:6)
4. Personification: applying personality traits to inanimate objects (All my bones will say, 'Lord, who is like You,' Psa 35:10)
5. Apostrophe: addressing inanimate things (What ails you, O sea, that you flee? Psa 114:5)
6. Synecdoche: representing the whole by a part, or a part by the whole (For I will not trust in my bow, ... Psa 44:6).

Categories of Psalms

Many Psalms can be classified by categories relating to type or subject matter.

1. Hymns – Hymns are songs of praise to be sung by the whole congregation.
 - Hymns of glory to God for his attributes and works
²Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. Psa 105:2
 - Hymns for victory over enemies
¹Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, And let those who hate Him flee before Him. Psa 68:1
 - Hymns of reign (enthronement)
¹The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad. Psa 97:1

- Hymns of Hallelujah

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! ²I will praise the LORD while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Psa 146:1-2

2. Complaint (Lament) – 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

⁴Restore us, O God of our salvation, And cause Your indignation toward us to cease. Psa 85:4

- Individual Complaint

¹O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. ²Many are saying of my soul, "There is no deliverance for him in God." Psa 3:1

- Imprecatory

⁷When he is judged, let him come forth guilty, And let his prayer become sin. ⁸Let his days be few; Let another take his office. ⁹Let his children be fatherless And his wife a widow. Psa 109:7-9

3. Thanksgiving – Thanksgiving was expressed for personal deliverance from illness, meeting of needs, etc.

¹I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. Psa 116:1

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.

¹Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's son. ²May he judge Your people with righteousness And Your afflicted with justice. Psa 72:1-2

5. Torah (Wisdom) – A Psalm that gives moral or religious teaching to lead men to a righteous life in the real world. They are similar to Proverbs.

¹Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. ²It 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. Psa 127:1-2

6. Oracle – An oracle is a decree from God ending with a prayer to God to do it.

²How long will you judge unjustly And show partiality to the wicked? ... ⁸Arise, O God, judge the earth! Psa 82:2, 8a

7. Blessing – These are ceremonial blessings given by the priest to the hearers.

¹How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. ²When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. Psa 128:1-2

8. Taunt – Songs or chants that reproach the godless for their vile actions and pronounce doom on them.

¹Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The lovingkindness of God endures all day long. ... ⁵But God will break you down forever; He will snatch you up and tear you away from your tent, And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah. Psa 52:1, 5

9. Trust – These songs exhibit faith in God, even under tough conditions.

¹In the LORD I take refuge; How can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain; ... ⁴The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; Psa 11:1, 4a

10. Antiphonal – A Psalm where the priest reads and the people reply – responsive reading.

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Psa 136:1

Organization

The book of Psalms is a huge book compared to the other Bible books. To make studying it difficult, it is not thematic or event oriented, so outlining it is hopeless. 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.

Outline of the Book of Psalms

The book ends of the Psalms tell a great deal of the focus of the follower of Yahweh. Psalm 1 focuses on the word. Psalm 150 focuses on the praise of God. Our praise of God begins with His word.

¹How 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! ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³He 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. ⁴The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish. Psa 1:1-6

Psalm 1 begins by telling us two things.

1. It separates mankind into only two categories, the righteous (v1-3) and the unrighteous (v4-6).

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 whether one is a true follower of Yahweh or not.

2. It explains how you live the righteous life.

Don't walk, sit, or stand with the wicked and love the Scriptures.(v2). " ... *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 (v3): we become mature (firmly planted by streams of water), we become productive (yielding fruit), and we become spiritually successful (whatever he does he prospers).

Psalm 150 tells us to praise God for who He is and what He does.

¹Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse.

²Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

³Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre.

⁴Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

⁵Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals.

⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD! Psa 150:1-6

I. Book 1: 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 Heb 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" (v2). That sets the tone for the entire book. It advises not to walk, stand or sit with sinners (v1). Why? Because the wicked perish (v6) but, to be firmly planted by streams of water. Why? Because the righteous prosper. (v3)

Doxology of Book 1:

¹³Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen. Psa 41:13

II. Book 2: 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 reflecting the need for God to provide the most basic needs of life.

¹As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; Psa 42:1-2a

Doxology of Book 2:

And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory Amen, and Amen. Psa 72:19

III. Book 3: 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!" 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, ..." (v28).

Doxology of Book 3:

Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen. Psa 89:52

IV. Book 4: 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.

¹Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Psa 90:1-2

Doxology of Book 4:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the LORD! Psa 106:48

V. Book 5: Psalms 107-150

Book five is linked to Deuteronomy because it has the prevailing theme of God's Word, 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." (107:1) It is packed with references to the Law (Scripture).

Doxology of Book 5:

⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD! Psa 150:1-6

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. 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.

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

- Today is 20 Sept. Our next meeting in OT Survey is 18 Oct. That is 28 days, so read one chapter of Proverbs every day.