

Psalms – Introduction, Types and Historical Perspective

Lesson 1

March 23 & 30, 2014

A. Psalm Pre-Test – How well do we know our Psalms?

We will have some fun with your knowledge of Psalms! Give it your best try!

B. Favorite Psalm of The Week

Alan Dawson; Psalm 46:10

“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”

C. Name and Meaning

The name Psalms or Psalter comes from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where they originally referred to stringed instruments such as the harp, lyre and lute, then to songs sung with their accompaniment. The traditional Hebrew title “*tehillim*” meant praises, even though many of the psalms are “*tephillot*” meaning prayers.

“The Psalms are the Voices of the Church”; Augustine

“They are the epitome of the whole Scripture”; Martin Luther

“They are a little book for all saints, they are the anatomy of all parts of the soul”; John Calvin

“The Book of Psalms instructs us in the use of wings as well as words. It sets us both mounting and singing”; Spurgeon

It has been said that it is the only book that contains every experience of a human being; every thought, every impulse and every emotion that sweeps the soul. The epitome and anatomy of the soul.

Christ is prominent throughout Psalms and we get a full and complete picture of Him in Psalms

Out of 219 quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament, 116 of them are from Psalms.

D. Collection, Arrangement and Date

- The current Psalms is a Collection of collections and represents the final stage in a process that spanned centuries. It was put into its final form by post exile temple personnel around the 3rd century BC.
- It served primarily as a prayer book for the second temple (during Zerubbabel and Herod) and for use in synagogues. It was formally referred to as the “Book of Psalms” by the first century AD.
- Early collections and writings go as far back as the early days of the first temple with Solomon or David when the church liturgy began to take shape.
- Final edition contained 150 books
- Divided into 5 books (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150)
- Arranged in an orderly fashion
- First 2 books were probably pre-exile, with the rest possibly trying to imitate having the books of Moses
- Notes and input give additional indication that there was a conscious effort to arrange.

E. Titles and Authorship

Superscriptions (Use examples):

- Contents vary but fall into a few broad categories

- Author
- Name of collections
- Type of psalm
- Musical notations
- Liturgical notations
- Brief indications of occasion for composition
- Scholars do not agree on the antiquity or reliability of these superscriptions

Authorship

- Scholars are more divided than on superscriptions
- Notations are ambiguous since they can mean “belonging to” or “concerning” or “dedicated to” as opposed to being written by
- Davidic authorship is almost certain on some of the psalms (73 psalms); at one time there was a “Davidic Psalter”.
- Tradition as to which psalms are written by David are still indefinite. In many cases, “David” is used as a reference to the kings of his dynasty period.
- “*Selah*” is found in 39 psalms, but Scholars do not really know if this references a person, a liturgical notation, brief musical interlude, and brief liturgical response from the congregation.

F. Psalm Type and Examples

1. Prayers of the Individuals/ Prayers for the Community	(3, 7:1-3,8, 51)/(12, 44:1-3, 79)
2. Praise Psalms	(50, 66:1-4, 75, 103, 107)
3. Nature Psalms about His Glory	(8, 19, 29:1-3, 65)
4. Enthronement/Royal Psalms	(47, 93-99)
5. Songs on Zion, City of God	(46, 48, 76, 84, 122)
6. Messianic/Royal Psalms, the Lords Anointed	(2, 18, 20, 45, 72, 89:3-4, 110)
7. Assurance/Pilgrimage Songs	(23, 27, 46, 90, 120-134)
8. Character/Instructional Psalms	(15, 24, 68)/(1, 37, 73, 112, 119:9-16, 128, 133)
9. Vengeance	137

- Useful to study Psalms in conjunction with the others of the same type.
- Overlap does exist for some psalms across different categories
- Will study in more detail next week

G. Prayers and Forms of Speech to God:

- When pursued by an enemy or adversary:
 1. Petitioner describes the situation
 2. Pleads his innocence
 3. Lodges accusation against his adversary
 4. Appeals for deliverance
 5. Appeals for judicial reparation
- When suffering at the hands of God (God is the perceived adversary):
 1. Confesses his guilt
 2. Pleads for mercy

I want us to observe the different spiritual responses: God already knows situation, confesses guilt as opposed to innocence, takes blame for own actions as opposed to blaming why they did it or blaming

someone else, asked for forgiveness as opposed to deliverance; no request for reparation since we were at fault.

Modes of Speech and Appeals to God:

1. Address to Go; “O Lord”, “My deliverer”, “My God”
2. Initial appeal; “Arise”, “answer Me”, “Help”
3. Description of distress; “The wicked attack”, “I am in distress”
4. Complaint against God; “Why have you forsaken me?”, “How long will you hide your face from me?”
5. Petition; “Be no far from me”, “Vindicate me”
6. Motivation for God to hear; “For your names sake”, “For I take refuge in you”
7. Accusation against the adversary; “Ruthless men seek my life”, “There is no truth in their mouths”
8. Call for reparation; “Let them be put to shame”
9. Claims of innocence; “They hate me without cause”, “I have walked in my integrity”
10. Confessions of sins; “I confess my iniquity”, “I have sinned against you”
11. Professions of trust; “You are a shield about me”, “You will answer me”
12. Vows to praise for deliverance; “I will sing your might”, “My lips will praise you”
13. Calls to praise; “Magnify the Lord with me”, “Sing praise to the Lord”
14. Motivations for praise; “for you have delivered me”, “for the Lord hears the needy”

G. Theology of Psalms

- Largely Book of prayer and praise
- Not a summary of doctrine
- Theology is not abstract or systemic, but confessional and expression of the individual
- Selective and incomplete; Usually no progression
- Each Psalm presupposes the theology outlined

Main themes of Doctrine

1. God is Omnipotent and Sovereign King

- Core of theology Conviction that the gravitational center of life (man’s understanding, trust, hope, service, morality, adoration) is God, not ourselves
- Great King over all, whom all things are subject too
- He created all things and preserves them
- He alone is sovereign God
- One divine purpose
- God’s creation is orderly and systemic
- Majestic glory is shown in nature, God’s creation
- Supreme kingship of Yahweh is the most basic and most pervasive theological concept in Psalms
- To be a creature in this world, is to be part of His kingdom and rule.

2. God is Holy, Sinless and will triumph over Evil

- He will ultimately not tolerate any power that opposes, denies or ignores Him
- Opposes the proud and those that rely on their “own resources”
- God delights in the humble, poor and needy of spirit and acknowledges their dependence on God.
- Ultimate executor of justice among men
- To be human in this world is to be dependent on and responsible to Him
 - To deny this fact is the root of all evil
- God’s election of Israel, election of David and Zion and giving of the Word; signify God initiating to bridge the great divide between righteousness and sinful man.

- Human pride will be humbled; wrongs redressed
- Righteousness will reign eternal

3. God Loves and Cares for His People; Uses them in His Plan and Will

- Chose Israel to be His servant people, His inheritance
- Chose David to be his royal representative on earth
 - Anointed and adopted him as his royal “son” to rule in His name
 - Govern His people with godlike righteousness
 - Intercessor with God in behalf of the nation, builder and maintainer of the temple
 - Foremost voice calling the nation to worship God
- Chose Jerusalem as His own royal city
 - Temple is where everyone had prayers, praise, power and glory
 - Intercession with the Lord
 - Pledged to be among them at His temple
- Psalms are God’s enduring Book of prayer for His people
- God reveals himself

H. Personal Testimony

Dealing with Death of a Loved One

Kim Brown

Psalm 142

1 I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. 2 I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. 3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. 5 I cry to you, Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” 6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. 7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

I. Group Reading of Psalm

Psalm 150

1 Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

J. Questions for Small Group Discussion

1. Psalms is God’s enduring book of prayer to His people. Do you regularly use Psalms in your prayer life as God intended? If not, why?
2. Is using Psalms as our prayer guide to know God just as relevant in today as it was when written? Why or why not?
3. Are the core issues of humanity and our relationship with God any different now than in the Old Testament? Describe how we should be using Psalms in our life right now.
4. What do you find most interesting or revealing about Psalms? How does this relate to human nature and have people really changed from Old Testament times?
5. Take time to describe your favorite Psalm, read it and discuss why with the group?

Psalm Pre-Test Answers

1. How many Psalms?
 - a. 150
2. How many Books are Psalms subdivided into?
 - a. 5 (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150)
3. What Books immediately precede and follow Psalms?
 - a. Job, Proverbs
4. What does Psalm mean?
 - a. Originally a stringed instrument(harp, lyre, lute), then to songs sung with their accompaniment
5. Who is generally credited with writing Psalms?
 - a. Generally attributed to David at least in part
 - b. All authors are not known and subscriptions are limited, confusing and not known well
6. Complete the following well known Psalms:
 - a. Search me, O God, and _____ my _____. Know, heart, 139:23
 - b. I lift up my eyes to the hills, where _____ come from? does help, 121:1
 - c. I have ___ your word in my ___, that I might not ___ against you. Hidden, heart, sin, 119:11
 - d. ___ away all my ___ and cleanse me from my ___ wash, iniquity, sin 51:2
 - e. Be ___ and ___ that I am ___ still, know, God 46:10
7. Name the Main Theological point of Psalms?
 - a. Supreme kingship of Yahweh is the most basic and most pervasive theological concept
 - b. Core of theological point is that the gravitational center of life (man's understanding, trust, hope, service, morality, adoration) is God, not ourselves
 - c. God's election of Israel, election of David and Zion and giving of the Word; signify God initiating to bridge the great divide between righteousness and sinful man.
 - d. God is King over all, creator of all, preserver of all, sovereign power over all, Earth and nature are His orderly, systemic creation

Psalm Pre-Test – How well do we know our Psalms?

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 - b. I lift up my eyes to the hills, where _____ my _____ come from?
 - c. I have _____ your word in my _____, that I might not _____ against you.
 - d. _____ away all my _____ and cleanse me from my _____
 - e. Be _____ and _____ that I am _____

Bonus Question:

7. Name the Main Theological point of Psalms?