

A Song for Every Season

A Study on the Psalms

Week 1 – An Introduction to the Psalms

Why study the Psalms?

1. It's a part of God's Word. By Jesus's day it stood alongside the Law and the Prophets as one of the three primary categories of scripture (see Luke 24:44).
2. It has been an integral part of Jewish and Christian worship and devotional practice for millennia.
3. The NT quotes or alludes to the Psalms more than any other OT book outside of Isaiah. The Psalms are especially crucial to our Christology (see Psalm 2; 22; 31; 69).

How did the book of Psalms come together?

- The Psalms were written from the earliest days of Jewish life through the postexilic period.
- The Psalms were written by or attributed to ancient figures in Jewish history.
 - o 73 are attributed to David; one to Moses (Psalm 90); two to Solomon (Psalms 72 and 127); several are attributed to the sons of Asaph and of Korah.
 - o The Psalms were collected into five books: Book 1: Psalms 1-41; Book 2: Psalms 42-72; Book 3: Psalms 73-89; Book 4: Psalms 90-106; Book 5: Psalms 107-150.
- Psalms 1 and 2 serve as an introduction and Psalm 150 as a conclusion.
- There are also smaller collections within some of the books: The Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 50, 73-83); Psalms of the Sons of Korah (Psalms 42-49, 84-85, 87-88); Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134); Hallelujah Psalms (Psalms 104-106, 111-117, 135, 146-150).
- The Psalms are loosely organized by attribution, types, and themes moving generally from personal pleas to corporate praise.

What kind of Psalms are there?

- Hymns of Praise (8, 19, 29, 33, 40, 100, 103, 145)
- Hymns of Thanksgiving (18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 136)
- Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving (9, 34, 65, 68, 105, 118)
- Hymns of the Lord's Kingship (47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99)
- Zion Songs (46, 48, 50, 84, 87, 132)
- Individual Laments (3, 5, 6, 33, 37, 35, 36, 51, 63, 70, 109, 140, 143)
- Communal Laments (10, 12, 14, 44, 53, 77, 80, 90, 94)
- Psalms of confidence (4, 11, 16, 23, 52, 91, 125, 129)
- Liturgical Psalms (15, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 118, 131, 134)
- Instructions or Wisdom Psalms (4, 24, 53, 63, 78, 119, 127, 128)

- Salvation History Psalms (78, 105, 106, 135, 136)
- Imprecatory Psalms (69, 109, 137)
- I also like Walter Brueggeman's threefold categorization: Psalms of Orientation, Psalms of Disorientation, Psalms of Reorientation.

What to remember when you read the Psalms?

- They are poetry.
 - o They use parallelism, similes, metaphors, and hyperbole to describe both God and the human experience of God.
 - o While some are intentionally instructive, most are more of a spiritual journal of sorts of people's experience of God.
 - o We should take the language seriously, but not always literally.
- They are records of human beings' words to God that have become a part of God's word.
- The Psalms resist systemization. Two Psalms can feel almost contradictory to one another.
 - o "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Psalm 22:1) vs "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).
 - o "In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones" (Psalm 102:5) vs. "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits . . . who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:5).

What are the key themes/lessons of the Psalms?

- The psalms serve as a call to and guide for worship.
 - o The psalms constantly call us away from our preoccupation with self to the worship of God.
 - o The psalms guide us in what true worship looks like – exuberant, honest, trusting, angry, frustrated, grateful, etc).
- The psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God.
 - o They invite us to lay all of ourselves before our Lord. There is almost no human emotion that isn't expressed in the Psalms.
 - o The Psalms inclusion in the Bible gives us permission to say hard things to God.
- The psalms demonstrate the importance of reflecting and meditating on the things God has done for us.
 - o We can cultivate a longing after God. The Psalms help us to do this.
 - o They teach us how to move from and through lament to trust, praise, and thanksgiving (see Psalm 73).

Sources

- o Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003).
- o May, James L., *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1994).
- o Webster, Brian L. and David R. Beach, *The Essential Bible Companion to the Psalms* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2010).
- o Yancey, Philip D., *The Bible Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1999).