

PSALMS

ADVANCED
BIBLE
STUDY
SERIES

David W. Cloud

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PSALMS

INTRODUCTION

1. The title to the “Psalms”

The title “Psalms” in the English Bible is from the Greek word “psalms.” It means “a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument.” This is the word that was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and passed from there into Latin and then English. It is the title that is used in the New Testament (Acts 1:20). The book of Psalms is also frequently called the “Psalter.”

2. The splendor and purpose of the Psalms

The Psalms are a most amazing part of Scripture.

Note some of its characteristics:

- a. The book of Psalms is A DEVOTIONAL BOOK, providing comfort, hope, compassion, encouragement, conviction, and spiritual zeal. The Psalms plumb the depths of human experience and emotion. There is nothing that a person can feel or experience that is not described somewhere in Psalms. Many of the most wonderful promises in the Bible are found in the Psalms (i.e., Psalm 16:11; 23:1).

Consider the following statements about the devotional quality of the Psalms:

“This Book of Psalms is a limpid lake which reflects every mood of man’s changeful sky. It is a river of consolation which, though swollen with many tears, never fails to gladden the fainting. It is a garden of flowers which never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and

trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear, and unites them all in the full multi-chord of human experience” (J. Sidlow Baxter).

“There is no other book of the Bible that has the variety of human and divine experience like the Psalms. Every experience a human being can have is found there: victory and defeat; sickness and health; holiness and sinfulness. There is a Psalm for every need of your heart” (Bruce Lackey).

“The heart finds in these songs and prayers, the different experiences of human life, and the different emotions. The sufferer steeped in sorrow finds in this book the experiences of suffering and sorrow; he finds more than that, encouragement to trust God and the assurance of deliverance. The penitent soul finds that which suits a broken and contrite heart. The lonely one, helpless and forsaken, reads of others, who passed through the same experience” (Arno Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*).

- b. The book of Psalms is A PRAYER BOOK. Most of the individual Psalms are prayers addressed to God (i.e., Psalm 3:1), and as such they teach us that man, though a lowly sinner, can communicate with the majestic God through Christ and can pour out his heart before God, knowing that God hears and cares and answers. The Psalms teach us how to pray effectively and acceptably. “If we make David’s psalms familiar to us, as we ought to do, whatever errand we have at the throne of grace, by way of confession, petition, or thanksgiving, we may thence be assisted in the delivery of it; whatever devout affection is working in us, holy desire or hope, sorrow or joy, we may there find apt words wherewith to clothe it, sound speech which cannot be condemned” (Matthew Henry).
- c. The book of Psalms is A SONG BOOK, a divinely-inspired hymnal for the child of God who walks through this present dark and pain-filled world. “See what a good master we serve,

Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer” (2 Chron. 29:30).

- (2) The Psalms have been used by the churches from their beginning. See Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; and James 5:13.

Note the following lessons about Christian music from these verses:

- (a) *Believers are to sing to one another as well as to the Lord, and they are to sing from the heart* (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). A Christian song service should be a powerful thing, and it is powerful when God’s people understand what they are doing and when they enter into it with all of their hearts. They lift up their voice with spiritual songs to teach, exhort, and encourage one another in the faith as well as to worship their lovely God. Too often a church song service is boring and listless, and the people don’t really know what they are doing. This is usually because they don’t have proper leadership, and the song service is a mere ritual to be gotten through rather than the powerful spiritual thing that it should and could be.
- (b) *The songs are to be spiritual* (Eph. 5:19). This means holy. It is the opposite of fleshly. It refers to something that is set apart to God, something different in character from the things of this wicked world. It is impossible to borrow this world’s party music and use it acceptably in the worship of a holy God. “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thess. 4:7).
- (c) *The emphasis of spiritual music is on the melody* (Eph. 5:19). This is the simple tune, that part of the song that one can hum in his heart. On the other hand, the emphasis of the world’s party music is on the rhythm and a heavy back beat that affects the body in a sensual

- e. To rightly interpret the Psalms we must be familiar with Israel's history. Many of the Psalms, for example, arise from situations that happened to David, and to understand these properly we must know the background. Psalm 3, for example, occurred when David fled from Absalom. This history is found in 2 Samuel 15. A good study Bible contains cross references that allow the student to find these historical references. Also the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, with its hundreds of thousands of cross references, is a helpful tool to assist the student in comparing Scripture with Scripture. Most Bible software packages, such as *Swordsearcher*, come with the *Treasury of Scripture* knowledge built in as a part of the basic package.
- f. To rightly interpret the Psalms we must make use of a Bible dictionary to understand the words that are used. A starting point for understanding the Bible is to understand its individual words, and the effective Bible student will have a good dictionary in hand and use it every time he comes across a word that he cannot define. For example, Psalm 7 says God will “whet his sword” (v. 12) and the violent dealing of the wicked will “come down upon his own pate” (v. 16). To understand these statements properly requires that the student know the meaning of “whet” and “pate.” Many preachers say that the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity* is their favorite Bible dictionary.

11. The New Testament quotations of the Psalms

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

Psalm 2:7 - Acts 13:33

Psalm 8:4 - Heb. 2:6

Psalm 16:8 - Acts 2:25

Psalm 16:10 - Acts 13:35

Psalm 18:49 - Romans 15:9

Psalm 19:4 - Romans 10:18
Psalm 22:1 - Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:8 - Matthew 27:43
Psalm 22:18 - Matthew 27:35
Psalm 22:22 - Hebrews 2:12
Psalm 40:6 - Hebrews 10:5
Psalm 41:9 - John 13:18
Psalm 44:22 - Romans 8:36
Psalm 45:6-7 - Hebrews 1:8-9
Psalm 68:18 - Ephesians 4:8
Psalm 69:22-23 - Romans 11:9-10
Psalm 69:25 - Acts 1:20
Psalm 78:2 - Matthew 13:35
Psalm 91:11-12 - Matthew 4:6
Psalm 95:11 - Hebrews 4:3
Psalm 110:1 - Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:34-35
Psalm 117:1 - Romans 15:11
Psalm 118:22 - Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11
Psalm 132:11 - Acts 2:30

We do not believe that the New Testament writers quoted from the Septuagint. See the study on Psalm 40 under the section on “Prophecies pertaining to the Messiah.”

12. The person who can benefit from the Psalms

To benefit properly from the Psalms one must be a born again believer. Oftentimes unbelievers have tried to get comfort from Psalms 23 and other of the famous Psalms, but this is presumptuous. The very first Psalm describes in dramatic fashion the vast difference between the man who is blessed before God and the man who is not. You cannot justly find comfort from Psalm 23 unless the Lord is indeed your Shepherd, and from the New Testament we learn that He is the Saviour and Shepherd of those who have acknowledged their sinful, lost condition and have put their faith in Him as Lord and Saviour (Rom. 3:20-25).

is the spokesman of feelings which else had found no utterance. Does it not say just what we wished to say? Are not its prayers and praises exactly such as our hearts delight in? No man needs better company than the Psalms; therein he may read and commune with friends human and divine; friends who know the heart of man towards God, and the heart of God towards man; friends who perfectly sympathize with us and our sorrows, friends who never betray or forsake. ... They were the love songs of the people of God; could any others be so pure and heavenly? These sacred hymns express all modes of holy feeling; they are fit both for childhood and old age: they furnish maxims for the entrance of life, and serve as watchwords at the gates of death. The battle of life, the repose of the Sabbath, the ward of the hospital, the guest chamber of the mansion, the church, the oratory, yea, even heaven itself may be entered with psalms” (Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE INTRODUCTION

- 1-5. What five books of the Bible are called the Poetical Books?
6. What does the word *Psalms* mean?
7. What is a Psalter?
- 8-12. What are five characteristics of the book of Psalms?
13. “The heart finds in these songs and prayers, the different experiences of -----, and the different -----.”
14. Most of the Psalms are ----- addressed to God.
15. In David’s day the Psalms were sung by ----- who were dedicated to that purpose.
- 16-17. The worship of God in Solomon’s day consisted of what two things?
18. The public singing of the Psalms continued whenever there was a ----- in Israel.
19. What king restored the singing worship of David’s day?
20. What verse instructs the churches to teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs?
- 21-22. Believers are to sing to one ----- as well as to the -----.
- 23-24. The term “spiritual” means ---- and it is the opposite of -----.

25. Why is it wrong to borrow from the world's party music in the worship of God?
26. The emphasis of spiritual music is on the -----.
27. The emphasis of worldly party music is on the -----.
28. Why do we know that it is not wrong to use musical instruments in the churches?
- 29-30. What are two problems with contemporary Christian music?
31. John Livingston Lowes called the King James Bible the ----- of English -----.
32. Henry Mencken called the King James Bible probably the most ----- piece of writing in all the literature of the world.
33. Jonathan Yardley said the King James Bible is the ----- work ever written in the English language.
34. Who was the sweet psalmist of Israel?
35. Who was Asaph?
36. What is he called in 2 Chronicles 29:30?
37. Who was Korah?
38. What was the work that his sons did?
39. How many of the Psalms did Moses write?
40. According to Acts 1:16, who was using David's mouth to speak the Psalms?
41. In what verse did Jesus say that the Psalms spoke of Him?
42. How many times are the Psalms quoted in the New Testament?
43. What is it about the content of the Psalms that shows us its miraculous inspiration?
44. During the reign of what Hebrew king was the book of Proverbs collected?
45. The book of Psalms was probably arranged in its present form by who?
46. The Psalms that do not contain an inscription or title are called ----- Psalms.
47. What did the Psalms of Degrees probably refer to?
48. Who was Jeduthun?
49. What is the meaning of "maschil"?
50. What is the meaning of "neginoth"?

51. What is the meaning of “selah”?
52. The Hebrews divided the Psalms into how many segments?
53. Each segment ends with what?
54. What is the key to understanding the division of Psalms?
55. Many of the major Messianic prophecies are found in what division of the Psalms?
56. Psalm 42-72 depicts the remnant of Israel viewed prophetically in what situation?
57. Psalm 107-150 depicts what?
58. Hebrew poetry contains parallels of -----.
- 59-60. What are two major types of parallelism found in the Psalms?
61. What does Psalm 2:12 mean when it says the kiss the son?
62. How does the parallelism solve the meaning of this term?
63. What verse says that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning in the Christian life?
64. How does the New Testament believer interpret the Psalms properly?
- 65-66. What are two chapters of the Bible that teach that the New Testament believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit?
67. What verse in the New Testament mentions the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God?
68. The church is a special ----- ---- composed both of Jews and Gentiles.
69. What passage teaches that though Israel is currently blinded during the church age, when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in Israel will be saved and God’s covenant with them fulfilled?
- 70-71. What are two characteristics of Amillennial theology?
72. What is replacement theology?
73. What Bible study tool contains hundreds of thousands of cross references?
74. What is the meaning of *whet*?
75. What is a *pate*?
76. To benefit from the Psalms one must be a ---- ----- believer.

SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES OF THE PSALMS

Some of the Great Themes of Psalms can be seen in the first few chapters:

1. The blessing of the righteous (Psa. 1:1-3)
2. The importance of the Word of God (Psa. 1:2)
3. The judgment of the ungodly (Psa. 1:4-6)
4. The afflictions of the saints (Psa. 3:1)
5. Prophecy
 - Prophecies pertaining to the Messiah (Psa. 2:6)
 - Prophecies pertaining to the Kingdom (Psa. 2:8-9)
 - Prophecies pertaining to Israel (Psa. 6:1-10)
6. God as the protector and help of His people (Psa. 3:3)
7. Praise and worship (Psa. 4:5)
8. Righteousness (Psa. 4:5)
9. God as a great and holy God (Psa. 5:2, 4)
10. Imprecations on God's enemies (Psa. 5:9-10)

1. THE BLESSING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

One of the wonderful themes of Psalms is the Lord's blessing on His saints. We find this theme roughly 50 times. The very first Psalm begins with the words "*blessed* is the man..." "The word translated 'blessed' is a very expressive one. The original word is plural, and it is a controverted matter whether it is an adjective or a substantive. Hence we may learn the multiplicity of the blessings which shall rest upon the man whom God hath justified, and the perfection and greatness of the blessedness he shall enjoy. We might read it, 'Oh, the blessednesses!' May the like benediction rest on us!" (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*).

Following are some of the blessings that are pronounced in the Psalms:

- a. *Blessed is he that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly but who*