

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

LESSON SERIES

Old Testament Survey - Unit VIII
The Books of Psalms

for

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
CHRISTIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

www.cistonline.org

COMPILED BY

EDWIN M. GREGORIO

Contact: Academic Dean
e-mail: emgregorio@yahoo.com

Reference from:

Hearing of Faith Bible Institute
P.O. Box 372
Axtell, Texas 76624

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The book of Psalms has often been called the best loved book in the Old Testament. Why? Each Psalm is remarkably personal and comes directly from the heart of the one who wrote it - the Psalms are like the mirror of man's soul. All the sorrows, troubles, fears, doubts, hopes, pains, perplexities and ecstasies that man has ever experienced are here expressed to God. Thus the reader can identify with that which is expressed in the Psalms and find in them comfort, peace and hope.

And secondly, the feeling of Divine worship is so universal that these Psalms speak the language of devotion for every heart. Because of this, the Psalter not only was the hymn book of the Hebrews but became the hymn book for the Church as well. From the earliest time the Christian church has treasured the Psalms: of 287 quotations from the Old Testament appearing in the New Testament, 116 are taken from the Psalms. A casual examination of our present day church hymnals and prayer books will reveal how great has been the influence of the book of Psalms.

The **DIVINE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY** of the Psalms was stressed by our Lord, in His final appearance to His disciples after the Resurrection, in these memorable words

"These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44).

The book of Psalms is a collection of one hundred and fifty Psalms under the Hebrew name Tehillim, which means "Songs of Praise." As it comes down to us, the collection represents the hymns of perhaps a thousand years. In fact, our book of Psalms is a collection of collections. As one writer put it, the book of Psalms was not made. It grew.

Although individual Psalms come from across the whole range of Israel's history, their final collection and arrangement belongs to the post exile period. These were Israel's prayers and songs of praise used for worship in the second Temple, built under Zerubbabel. Through these poems Israel gave expression to every facet of her faith. In the study of the Psalms, therefore, one enters the worship life of Judaism at its best.

The editors who compiled and arranged the Psalms were conscious of the long history back of them when they divided the whole into five books, with a doxology to close each book. According to tradition these five major divisions or books correspond to the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses. The five fold division of the Psalms are:

1. Book One, Psalms 1-41
2. Book Two, Psalms 42-72
3. Book Three, Psalms 73-89
4. Book Four, Psalms 90-106
5. Book Five, Psalms 107-150

Certain of the Psalms are repeated in slightly different forms, indicating that Psalms in earlier collections appeared also in later collections or books, and that the final editors did not eliminate these duplications. For example, compare Psalm 14 with 53; Psalm 40:13-17 with 70; and Psalm 108 with 57:7-11 and 60:5-12.

We might also note that there are a number of ancient Psalms, reference to which is made in the earlier books of the Old Testament, which do not appear in our present collection of 150. One of the most famous is the song Moses wrote and the people of Israel sang to celebrate their victory over the Egyptians, when they had crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15).

Two other songs of Moses, the Farewell Song and the Song of Blessing in which he blessed all the congregation of Israel, are recorded in Deuteronomy 32 and 33. And one of the best of the early songs is the Song of Deborah, in the form of a ballad, which celebrates a famous victory over Sisera and Jabin, the king of Canaan. The appearance of these and other Psalms outside of the book of Psalms indicates that psalmody was widespread in Israel and that the Psalter collection is only a selective collection.

The FIRST and SECOND PSALM may be taken as a fitting introduction to the collection as a whole.

- Psalm 1 divides all people according to their covenant relationship to God - the godly and the ungodly. Those who have had a personal encounter with God, and those who have not; those whose "delight is in the Law of the Lord," and those who take no such delight.
- Psalm 2, on the other hand, represents the whole world set over against the Lord and in deliberate opposition to His rule. The point in the Psalm is its application to the Messianic King, who one day will be Lord of all. Thus, the psalmist, like a wise counselor and prophet, in his preface points to the scope and purpose of the book of Psalms.

As Psalms 1 and 2 are a fitting preface to the Psalms, so PSALM 150 is a fitting Doxology to the book of Psalms; bringing this collection of Psalms to a close with a note of triumphant PRAISE.

AUTHORSHIP OF THE PSALMS

Many writers contributed one or more psalms.

David was far and away the most famous musician of his age, which was the Golden Age of Israel. He was a noted musician and poet of the first rank. In the background of David's religious songs was a man after God's own heart, in spite of his human weaknesses. He had many remarkable religious experiences. He was traditionally and intimately connected with, and a chief promoter of, organized worship. Indeed, he as king was head of the worship of the Lord in his day, and unlike his son Solomon, he never permitted the worship of his God to become corrupted, or the Lord to have a rival in his kingdom.

All the Hebrew prophets after David remembered him for his brave and heroic loyalty to the Lord and said so in their histories and prophecies.

The writer of II Samuel described David as "the sweet Psalmist of Israel." Indeed, he was. And with great reputation during his lifetime, it was easy for those coming after him to build up a tradition, and ascribe to him the authorship of the book of Psalms. In fact, the earlier books were called the "Psalms of David."

Since the subject matter of the Psalms covers many centuries, especially after the time of David, he could not historically speaking have written all of them. or perhaps even most of them. That he did write many of them, however is certain.

Thus, at least seven-three of our one hundred-and-fifty collection are considered to be Psalms of David and are assigned to his authorship. Some of what are know as "Orphanic Psalms" may also have been written by David.

Other individuals or groups are credited with the authorship of part of the Psalms. Twelve songs, Psalms 50, 73-53, are ascribed to Asaph, or the family of Asaph. Asaph's family, with Asaph himself as head, was one of three families of musicians permanently charged by David with furnishing music and songs for the worship service. Asaph himself was given the permanent office of sounding cymbals during the service. He was a Levite, and like other chief singers, was called a seer.

To the "Sons of Korah" are ascribed eleven Psalms: Psalms 42 (which originally included Psalm 43), 44-49, 84, 85, 87, 88. Korah was a historical character, one of four leader who rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16). The Sons of Korah were his descendants, and organized by David as singers of sacred songs in the Tabernacle.

Two Psalms are ascribed to Solomon, Psalm 72 and 127; and one to Moses, Psalm 90. Psalm 88 is attributed to Reman, and is the saddest and most despairing of all the Psalms. It pictures the suffering of the soul of Jesus in hell. Psalm 89 is assigned to Ethan, another Levite who was appointed a singer in the time of David. Ten Psalms are ascribed to Hezekiah.

Thirty-nine of the Psalms are anonymous "Orphanic". It is likely that some of these were written by the authors immediately preceding them, the author's name not being repeated.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The contents of the one-hundred-and-fifty Psalms of the book of Psalms may be classified for the purpose of reading and study according to following subject themes:

1. Songs of Praise

The key to the contents of the book of Psalms is to be found in its Hebrew title Tehillim, meaning "Songs of Praise."

For it is preeminently a book of praise and thanksgiving.

More than a third of the total collection have praise and thanksgiving as their central theme, and many more have praise as a secondary motive. This list includes the main ones: Psalm 8, 9, 18, 19, 21, 30, 32, 33, 36, 40, 47, 48, 65-68, 75, 76, 84, 92, 93, 95-100, 106, 107, 113-118, 136, 138, 144-150.

Of the Psalms of praise, here are seven that have won special favor with readers generally: Psalms 5, 19, 68, 84, 96, 100, and 107.

II. The Cry of the righteous in the presence of Trouble

Another common theme in the Psalms is that cry for help in time of trouble. As in the first group, the occasion for these Psalms varies as widely as the needs of human beings. Here are the main Psalms which feature this theme: Psalms 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 31, 35, 38, 39, 57, 74, 79, 83, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140-143. Many of the Psalms in this group appear to have been written by David. Although he led a many-sided life, and was one of the most successful of men, David's personal life was never far from trouble.

Eight of these Psalms should be read with this background of David's story in view: Psalms 7, 34, 35, 54, 56, 57, and 142.

III. Trust and Steadfastness in the Lord

Still another frequent theme in the Psalms is that quiet, confident trust in the Lord. In this group are some of the best loved Psalms in the entire collection. Any list should include the following: Psalms 3-5, 11, 16, 23, 27, 28, 46, 56, 62, 63, 91, 108, 121-123, 125, 131.

The special favorites include Psalms 16, 23, 27, 46, 91, 121, 122, 125. Psalm 23 is the best loved Psalm in the collection. If David had written nothing else, this Psalm would have entitled him to everlasting fame.

IV. The Greatness and Majesty of the Lord

Faithful Hebrews held in awe the greatness and majesty of their God, and their beloved psalmist delighted in portraying Him in all His exalted glory. The following are the main ones in this group: 8, 19, 24, 29, 33, 46, 68, 90, 93, 96, 97, 103, 104.

Psalm 90 is ascribed to Moses, who lived some 400 years before David. It is one of the most comprehensive and mature, as well as one of the most beautiful, in the collection. It is easily one of the greatest.

V. National and Historical Psalms

The psalmists frequently reminded the people of how the Lord had led them to victory on many occasions also reminded them of how often they were willful and disobedient, causing the Lord to punish them, even at the hands of their enemies. These feeling and attitudes are reflected in the following: Psalms 74, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 94, 105, 106, 107, 114, 132, 135, 136, 137. Some of the favorites are: Psalms 105, 107, 132, 135.

VI. The Prosperity of the Wicked

From the days of Job on, ancient Hebrews wrestled with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. It perplexed them to know that God permitted the wicked, as well as the righteous, to prosper in this life.

The answers the psalmists gave are developed in Psalms 10, 12, 14, 37, 53, 73, 93, 94. The question of the prosperity of the wicked is well answered in Psalms 37, 73, 94.

VII. Psalms of Wisdom

Several of the Psalms are known for their wisdom. Psalms in this group are: 1, 19:7-14, 37, 49, 73, 78, 90, 111, 112, 127, 128.

VIII. Psalms of Deep Penitence

In a few of the Psalms the psalmists cry out in anguish and deep penitence. These include Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130. Nearly all of them appear to refer to David's personal experiences.

IX. Psalms on the Hebrew Bible

Three of the Psalms fall in this group. Psalms 1 and 19, 119. Psalm 119 is a continuation and an enlargement of the ideas in 1 and 19. It is the longest chapter in the Bible.

X. Psalms Relating to the Exile and Return

Psalm 137 is a lament of an exile "by the waters of Babylon" not long after deportation. Psalm 126 appears to have been written shortly after the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Also, most of the Psalms of Book Five, Psalms 107-150 appear to belong to this group.

XI. Messianic Psalms - Psalms Which Foretell the Coming of the Messiah

Some of the most significant Psalms in the collection are those which foretell the coming of the Christ, The Savior and Hope of the world. Of these Messianic Psalms at least fourteen are quoted in the New Testament and refer to Christ's coming and mission.

- Psalm 2:6-9 is the first to speak of the Messianic Age: "You are my son, today I have begotten you." (Acts 13:3)
- Psalm 8:6 presents the Messiah, as the Lord of Creation. (Hebrews 2:6-10; I Corinthians 15:27).
- Psalm 16:8-11 refers to the Resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25-31).
- Psalm 22 gives a realistic picture of incidents and details foretold of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:43, 46; John 19:23-24, 20:25).
- Psalm 40:6-8 refers to the willingness of the Son to obey the Father in the sacrificial death (Hebrews 10:5-10).
- Psalm 41:9 is quoted by Jesus after He washed His disciples' feet on the night of the Last Supper (John 13:18).
- Psalm 45:6-7 refers to the Messiah as the ideal King (Hebrews 1:8-9).
- Psalm 69:4,9,21,25 quoted in John 15:25, John 2:17; Romans 15:3; Matthew 27:34; Acts 1:20 referring to Jesus.
- Psalm 72 presents the eternal reign of the righteous King (Luke 2:14; Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 11:16).
- Psalm 89 repeats God's covenant with David - the promise of an everlasting throne (Hebrews 1:5-13; Colossians 1:16).

- Psalm 91:11-12 is quoted by Satan at the time of the Temptation in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:6).
- Psalm 109:8 is quoted by Peter concerning Judas (Acts 1:20).
- Psalm 110:1 was quoted by Jesus as evidence of His Sonship (Matthew 22:43-45; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13).
- Psalm 110:4 (Hebrews 5:6,7:17)
- Psalm 118:22, "The Stone which builders rejected..." (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:7). Verse 26 contains the shouts of the crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9)
- Psalm 132:17 infers that the Messiah would be the Eternal Inheritor of David's throne (Luke 1:69).

XII. The Hallel Psalms

The Hallel Psalms, Psalms 113-118, have always been associated in the Jewish Church with the three great pilgrim festivals of the Jewish year, the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Passover hymns were sung in Jewish families on the night of the Passover.

XIII. Songs of Ascent

Another group of Psalms is the Songs of Ascent. They are the fifteen Psalms 120-134. These songs were often sung by pilgrims on their annual journeys to keep the various feasts at Jerusalem.

XIV. The Hallelujah Psalms

The final group is call "The Great Hallel," or Hallelujah Songs. They are Psalms 146-150. These Psalms are praise-hymns in an extraordinary sense. In the earlier groups of hymns other motives and elements besides praise were present. But in the Hallelujah Psalms there is singleness of purpose, and that purpose is the adoration of Jehovah.

Each of the five Psalms opens with a prologue of Hallelujah, and closes with a epilogue Hallelujah, which translated into English means "Praise the Lord." Indeed, as someone has observed, these last Psalms form an elaborate and comprehensive doxology to the whole collection, just as each division of the book has its individual doxology (see last stanza of Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106).

END of Lesson

Reference from:
Hearing of Faith Bible Institute
P.O. Box 372
Axtell, Texas 76624