

**A Book for Our Times: the Psalms**  
*Introduction to the Psalms*  
**Christ Covenant Church ~ Sunday School**  
**June 7, 2020**

I. Introduction

A. Have you ever played the game “Can you imagine life without...?”

*\*Can you imagine the Bible without the Psalms?*

B. What would be lost?

1. Many memorable lines that...

a. Strike a chord

Verbal beauty: Psalm 91

Visual: Psalm 94:8-11

b. Encapsulate

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want...” Psalm 23:1

“Praise the Lord, O my soul: and forget not all his benefits.” Psalm 103:2

“So teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”  
Psalm 90:12

c. Minister

“The Psalms are for those who walk the joyful paths of life and need a word that will release their tongue and unbind their spirit to praise the God of life. The Psalms are for those who pace the corridors of suffering and sorrow and need a word to unleash the spirit which despair threatens to suffocate.” C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 50

“Whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill.” Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus*

“I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, The Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul.... There is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life of all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.” John Calvin, *Preface to the Commentary on the Psalms*

## 2. A Picture of Response

### C. What are the Psalms?

1. “The Book of Psalms is a *diversified* collection of sacred poems. Many of them are in fact prayers.... [The] book is an anthology of prayers, worship songs, and poems sung and spoken in public and private worship.” C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 22

#### 2. Poetry

- a. Distinct from prose

- b. What is the distinguishing mark of Hebrew poetry? **Parallelism.**

- i. How does parallelism work in Hebrew poetry?

- ii. Example 1: Psalm 1:1

Blessed is the man

Who walks not in the counsel of the *ungodly*,  
Nor stands in the path of *sinner*s,  
Nor sits in the seat of the *scornful*.

iii. Example 2: Psalm 37:1

Do not fret because of **evil men**  
or be envious of **those who do wrong**;  
for like the *grass* they will soon **with**er  
like the *green plants* they will soon **die away**.

iv. Example 3: Proverbs 10:1

A wise son brings joy to his *father*,  
but a foolish son grief to his *mother*.

d. Other Poetic Techniques

- i. Acrostic
- ii. Alliteration
- iii. Assonance
- iv. *Inclusio*

D. Why Poetry?

1. Memorization

2. Singing

“Words of this kind should be not merely said, but rendered with melody and song; for there are actually some simple folk among us who...think the reason for singing them is just to make them more pleasing to the ear! This is by no means so; Holy Scripture is not designed to tickle the aesthetic palate, and it is rather for the soul’s own profit that the Psalms are sung. This is so chiefly for two reasons. In the first place, it is fitting that the sacred writings should praise God in poetry as well as prose, because the freer, less restricted form of verse, in which the Psalms...are cast, ensures that by them men should express their love to God with all the strength and power they possess. And secondly, the reason lies in the unifying effect which chanting the Psalms has upon the singer. For to sing the Psalms demands such concentration of a man’s whole being on them that, in doing it, his usual disharmony of mind and corresponding bodily confusion is resolved, just as the notes of several flutes are brought by harmony to one effect.” Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus*

### 3. Internalization

“There is ... this astonishing thing in the Psalms. In the other books [of the Bible], those who read what the holy ones say, and what they might say concerning people, are relating the things that were written about those earlier people. And likewise, those who listen consider themselves to be other than those about whom the passage speaks, so that they only come to the imitation of the deeds that are told to the extent that they marvel at them and desire to emulate them. By contrast, however, he who takes up this book – the Psalter – goes through the prophecies about the Savior, as is customary in the other Scriptures, with admiration and adoration, but the other psalms he recognizes as being his own words. And the one who hears is deeply moved, as though he himself were speaking, and is affected by the words of the songs, as if they were his own songs.” Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus*

### 4. Teaching

*Extra Details about the Psalter not in the Video Lesson:*

## II. The Structure and Authors of the Book of Psalms

### A. Beginning and End: Introduction (Psalm 1 – 2) & Conclusion (Psalm 146 – 150)

### B. 5 Books (like the Torah)

1. Book 1: Psalm 1-41 (authors: mostly Davidic)
2. Book 2: Psalm 42-72 (authors: Asaph, David, and sons of Korah)
3. Books 3: Psalm 73-89 (authors: lots of Asaph and more David)
4. Book 4: Psalm 90-106
5. Book 5: Psalm 107-150 (authors: only 19 Psalms in Books 4-5 have a listed author)

## III. Different Genres of Psalms for Prayer

### A. Laments – i.e. 3, 12, 22, 51

- Structure – Prayed while in the midst of suffering
  - i. Address to the Lord
  - ii. Complaint about the suffering
  - iii. Trust, an expression of trust in the Lord
  - iv. Deliverance plea
  - v. Assurance
  - vi. Praise

### B. Thanksgiving Psalms – i.e. 30, 34, 92, 107

- Structure – Prayed after having been delivered from misery
  - i. Introduction to prayer
  - ii. Misery that you were previously in
  - iii. Appeal that you gave in the past
  - iv. Rescue that took place
  - v. Testimonial of praise

### C. Hymns – i.e. 8, 10, 103, 104, 114, 145-150

- Structure – Unmitigated praise
  - i. Summons – “Let us praise the Lord”
  - ii. Reasons given to praise God
  - iii. Further exhortations to praise God

### D. Enthronement Psalms – i.e. 47, 95, 97

- Distinguishing element – Emphasizing God as King
- E. Royal Psalms – i.e. 2, 72, 89, 110, 132
- Distinguishing elements – Very similar to enthronement psalms but with more of an emphasis on the relationship of the earthly king to God
    - i. King of Kings
    - ii. Often Messianic
- F. Zion Psalms – i.e. 46, 84, 122
- Distinguishing elements
    - i. Celebrating God's presence among His people
    - ii. Temple language
- G. Wisdom Psalms – i.e. 1, 37, 49, 73, 127-128
- Distinguishing element – Comparison and contrast between wisdom and folly or righteous and unrighteous.
- H. Trust Psalms – i.e. 23, 62, 91
- Distinguishing element – Prayer of trust in the midst of trials (similar to laments)
- I. Torah Psalms – i.e. 19, 119
- Distinguishing element – Reflection on or praise for God's Law