



*A Six Week Study in the book of  
PSALMS*

# **Window to the Soul:**

## **A Six Week Study in the Book of Psalms**

*Since the inception of the Church, the psalms have been the sweet hymnbook by which God's people have praised him for His goodness, kindness and Glory. They contain words of comfort in times of pain and encouragement for those who suffer. They are an example to us of how to be authentic in our struggles and honest in our failures, while always trusting Him to restore our souls. More than communicating a story, the psalms communicate experience, feeling, and emotion. As you study, remember that "The word of God is living and active...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). God's Word touches the depths of our souls, and leads us to the one who has all we need. Whether you are in a season of pain or sweet blessing, you can find rest as you read and study...*

### ***The Psalms.***

*Session 1: Psalm 100  
The Elements of a Psalm*

*Session 2: Psalm 100, Jonah 2  
Psalms of Praise*

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Psalms of Lament*

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# Session 1: Psalm 100



## The Elements of a Psalm

### Helpful Hints:

- The English word “psalms” is a Greek word simply spelled in Roman letters. The Greek word originally meant a striking or twitching of the fingers on a string. Eventually it became, “pulling or playing a stringed musical instrument.” So the meaning of the Greek title of the book is “sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment.” The Hebrew title for the book means “praises.” Therefore, the Greek title points to *music*, while the Hebrew title points to *praise*. A psalm is a poem that is sung as an expression of praise to God.
- Many psalms contain a *superscription* that might contain musical directions, notes on how to perform the psalm, historical settings and possibly suggestions of authorship.
- The Hebrew superscription *mizmor ledavid* is often found in the psalms. It might indicate Davidic authorship.

### 1. A Psalm is poetic and often repetitive.

“Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; no less than French must be read as French or English as English, otherwise we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.”  
-- C.S. Lewis

What are some different types of literature that are included in Scripture? Why is it important that we read each type as it was intended?

### 2. The Psalms make use of a literary device called parallelism. Concepts are repeated with art, analogy or image OR by saying the same thing in a different way. Jesus also used this often. For example, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Why was the repetitive and musical nature of the psalms important in a mostly oral culture? Why do you think Jesus made use of parallelism (repetition)?

3. A Psalm combines honesty with the unchanging truth of God.

“O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.  
*Yet* you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.” - Ps. 22

What does David honestly communicate to the Lord? What does the *yet* symbolize?

4. A Psalm communicates experience.

Poetry does not always have a “pretty” sound or a clear message. Many of the psalms have a message, but they first and foremost communicate the experience of the author.

What does God’s use of poetry for revelation tell us about experience? Why is the value of experience such a hot topic among evangelicals?

5. A psalm expresses emotion.

What emotions are conveyed in Psalm 100?

What words in the psalm are indicative of these emotions?

6. Read Psalm 100 (on page 5). How do you see each of the four elements of a psalm expressed?
- What makes it poetic? What is repeated?
  - What honesty or unchanging truth do you see?
  - What is the experience being communicated?
  - What is the prominent emotion of the psalm?

### ❖ Take it to Work

What line from Psalm 100 can you meditate on today to be a source of joy in your office?

## Session 2: Psalm 100, Jonah 2



### Psalms of Praise

#### Helpful Hints:

- The Hebrew title for the book of psalms, Tehillah, means “praises.”
- There appears to be no word for “thank you” in Biblical Hebrew, although present day Israeli Hebrew has developed one. There are over 20 Hebrew words for praise. People told each other what God had done instead of just saying “thank you, God.” The words translated for “thanks” in our English Bibles are translations of these different words for “praise.”
- Hallelujah is a combination of a word for praise, “Hallel” and a shortened version of “Yahweh,” Israel’s covenant name for God. It means “Praise Yahweh!”

1. Praise and thanksgiving are both key Biblical themes. Hebrew scholar Ron Allen writes, “Compare and contrast the two words “praise” and “thanksgiving.” The former is an Old Testament term, the latter is a New Testament term. The New Testament scriptures regularly speak of thanksgiving that can be done in one’s heart and in private, even “in a closet.” But these passages are using Greek terms, not Hebrew. All of the Hebrew terms for praise have about them a *public* and *vocal* nature. In contrast then, thanksgiving may be silent and private; praise must be vocal and public. Both must be intense and genuine.”

According to Dr. Allen, Biblical praise is always \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

2. With this distinction in mind...
  - a) Write about a time you expressed praise of God.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b) Write about a time you expressed thanksgiving to God.
  
3. Technically, Psalm 100 can be further clarified as a psalm of *descriptive* praise. What does it describe?

2. Psalm 40, on the other hand is a psalm of *declarative* praise. Look at the first three verses of Psalm 40. How do these verses differ from the descriptive praise of Psalm 100?
3. Psalms are not restricted to the book of Psalms. Jonah 2 is an example.
  - a.) What elements of a psalm do you notice in Jonah 2?
  - b.) Is this a psalm of Descriptive or Declarative praise? Why?
4. Historically, why was it important for the Israelites to ensure that Yahweh was verbally and publically praised?
5. What character traits of God are being praised in the following psalms?
  - a. Psalm 93
  - b. Psalm 136
  - c. Psalm 144
6. How does Biblical praise unify God's people?
7. Look specifically at Psalm 100. There are three "invitations" to praise God. Can you identify them? How do they illustrate the unifying power of public praise?
8. How did these psalms help to preserve the theological integrity of Judaism?

❖ **Take it to Work**

In what ways can these psalms of praise serve as a prayer guide for Believers today?

## Session 3: Psalm 22 & 80



## Psalms of Lament

### Helpful Hints:

- *La • ment*: (1) to express grief for or about; mourn.; (2) to regret deeply; (3) to grieve audibly; wail; (4) a song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning.
- The book of Lamentations mourns the capture of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. It is also written in a poetic style with the first four chapters in an acrostic pattern.
- Lament psalms constitute the largest genre of psalms. The heart of a lament psalm is to describe and complain to God about the suffering of the psalmist. There is also generally a plea for deliverance.
- Many of the lament psalms also contain petitions (requests) and vows of praise.
- There are six general elements that make up a lament psalm: (1) the introductory appeal, (2) the lament, (3) the confession of trust, (4) the petition, (5) motifs that may justify divine intervention and (6) the vow of praise.

1. The genre of lament psalms can be further broken down into two sub-categories based on whether an *individual* or a *group* is speaking. Look at the following two psalms and decide whether they are individual or group. How can you tell?

Psalm 22

Psalm 80

2. Psalm 22 is a well formed representative of the *individual* complaint. Why is this psalm particularly important to Christianity?
3. In Psalm 22, what is the psalmist communicating in vv. 1-2?
4. Why is the “yet” significant in v.3? What does it tell us about the psalmist?
5. What elements of God’s character does the psalmist describe in vv. 3-10?
6. Verse 11 of Psalm 22 is a petition for what?

7. What is the psalmist requesting in verses 20-22?
8. What choice does the psalmist make (22-25)? What does he look forward to (26-31)?
9. A group complaint psalm follows the general outline of the individual complaint psalm but is the expression of the community as a whole when there was a large-scale crisis like drought, enemy attack or national tragedy. Psalm 80 is a good example of group lament.  
  
Verses 1-2 of Psalm 80 contain the invocation. What is the significance of the language used to invoke God's help?
9. What words alert you that there is a petition (request) in v.3?
10. What does the metaphor of the vine (vv. 8-12) represent? Why is it appropriate? Does it remind you of any New Testament teaching?
11. What promise does the psalmist make in v. 18?
12. What would you entitle Psalm 80?
13. What do these psalms communicate about the expression of pain, disappointment and complaint to God?
14. How can these Psalms serve as a guide to prayer?

❖ **Take it to Work**

In Evangelicalism, there is generally an emphasis on being “content in all circumstances” (Phil. 4:12), yet often at the expense of authenticity. In what ways do these lament psalms encourage us toward both contentment and authenticity?

## Session 4: Psalm 51



### Psalms of Penitence

#### Helpful Hints:

- *Pen-i-tence*: (1) Repentance, (2) A means of repairing a sin committed, and obtaining pardon for it, (3) Pain, sorrow or regret for a wrong committed.
- There are seven commonly recognized penitential psalms: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143. Although this category of psalms is small, it is exemplary and vitally important to the life of the Believer.
- A Brief History Lesson: The word “penance” associated with the Roman Catholic Church is related to penitence. In 1517, Pope Leo X announced the building of St. Peter’s Basilica through the sale new “indulgences” which, if purchased, promised to alleviate the penalty for sin in this life and the next. Indulgences were also available to help move loved ones from purgatory to heaven. A memorable jingle went, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs!” It was this largely this idea of purchasing forgiveness which led Luther to pen his 95 Theses, asserting that salvation and forgiveness were available through *sola fide* (faith alone).

1. The most famous example of a penitence psalm is found in psalm 51. Based on the superscription, what is the historical background of this psalm?
2. Of what sins is David guilty? (See 2 Samuel 11)
3. Who did God use to rebuke David? What was his relationship with David?
4. Obviously the rebuke powerfully convicted David of his sin (2 Sam. 12:13). What was unique about the manner of the rebuke (2 Sam 12:1-7) and what made it so effective?
5. Even though David repented of his sin, there were unfortunate consequences for his actions. What price did David pay for his sin with Bathseba? (2 Samuel 12:14-18)
6. Besides recognition of sin, what are other elements of Godly repentance?

7. In Psalm 51:17, David writes, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; and broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” What does David mean when he says “broken spirit” and “contrite heart”? What evidence do you see in Psalm 51 that David is broken and contrite before the Lord?
  
8. Do you see any hints from King David that he is concerned about his sin affecting the nation of Israel?
  
9. David was called “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). This obviously did not mean that David was free from sin, because in fact he committed grievous sins. What was admirable and Godly about the way that David responded to his sin?
  
10. There are six other psalms commonly recognized as psalms of penitence. Choose one of the psalms below to read and study. Then answer the following questions.

*Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, Psalm 102, Psalm 130, Psalm 143*

- a. Are there any poetic devices used in this psalm (for example parallelism or repetition, metaphor or simile, exaggeration)?
  
- b. Is there surprising honesty in the psalm? What unchanging truth can you identify?
  
- c. What is the experience of the psalmist?
  
- d. What emotions is the psalmist expressing?



**Take it to Work**

When you make a mistake at work, what kind of attitude enhances your witness?  
What harms it?

## Session 5: Psalm 67, 96 & 99



### Psalms of Kingship

#### Helpful Hints:

- Kingship psalms are more formally called “Royal Psalms.” These psalms celebrate the rule of Yahweh.
- Many psalms have royal elements to them (mentions of Yahweh’s eternal reign or perfect rule, for example) but these psalms are specifically centered around the idea that Yahweh is King: 47, 93, 96-99.
- In Jewish traditions, the kingship of Yahweh psalms are messianic and forward-looking in anticipation of the decisive historical realization of the kingdom of God. In Christianity, these are eschatological and prefigure the coming of messiah (Jesus).
- In the ancient world, mountains were the dwelling places of high “gods.” Zeus lived on Mount Olympus, Baal on Mount Zaphon, Marduk on the Ziggurat and Yahweh on Mount Sinai. As the Hebrews moved from Sinai to Canaan, Yahweh’s “residence” also moved – to Mount Zion, within Jerusalem. It became a symbol of the presence and power of Israel’s God, and of His royal reign in Israel.

1. God is a perfect King, but Israel has not always recognized Him as such. Following the death of Joshua, the book of Judges reports that, “another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. They did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals” (Judges 2:10-11). God appointed judges for the Israelites (2:16) but the people would not listen. Eventually, they bellowed for a King.  
Read 1 Samuel 8:6-9 and answer the questions below.
  - a. Why was Samuel displeased by the people’s request for a king?
  - b. Are you surprised by the Lord’s response to Samuel’s prayer? Why or why not?
  - c. What emotion response do you have when you read this passage?
2. The royal psalms recognize the true King of Israel. What character attributes of Yahweh are most emphasized in Psalm 99?
3. In Psalm 99, what evidence do you see that Yahweh is specifically the God of Israel?

4. In Psalm 99, what evidence do you see that Yahweh's reign extends beyond Israel?
5. When was this psalm written in reference to 1 Samuel 8:6-9? How do you know?
6. What attributes of the Lord's character are emphasized in Psalm 96?
7. What does this psalm encourage the people to do in response to God?
8. In psalm 67, a key reason for God's blessing of Israel is revealed. Read Psalm 67 and answer the following questions.
  - a. What should be the end result of Israel's being blessed by God?
  - b. According to psalm 96, how is Israel to represent their God to the people around them?
9. What is true about the gods of the other nations (v.5)?
10. How does the historical background of Israel in regard to their kings enhance your understanding and appreciation for these royal psalms?
11. Handel's Messiah made its debut in Dublin in 1742. Still performed in churches and performance halls around the world today, it has become tradition for the audience to stand during the famous Hallelujah chorus. This practice dates back to the reign of King George II, who recognized that it is proper to stand in the presence of royalty as a sign of respect. The Hallelujah chorus clearly exalts Christ as the King of Kings, and tradition has it that George stood out of recognition of the True King.

Although we do not live in a monarchical system, we live under the rule of a mighty king. What does it look like when a nation has God as King?

❖ **Take it to Work**

What are you like when something other than your King rules you? What reminds you that He reigns?

## Session 6: Psalm 1 & 19



### Psalms of Wisdom

#### Helpful Hints:

- Whereas psalms of lament are frequently recognized by their unique structure, wisdom psalms are unique because of their content.
- Characteristic vocabulary: wisdom, insight, learning, understanding, comprehension. Not every psalm that contains these words are “wisdom psalms,” but wisdom psalms tend to use these words a lot.
- Pronouncement of blessing: “blessed is the man who...”
- Most significant are the words or phrases “the fear of Yahweh” or “the knowledge of the Holy.”
- Wisdom psalms are similar to the wisdom books: Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. This similarity includes style, structure and content.
- In general, wisdom literature tends to contrast the lives of those who choose to follow God (the wise or righteous) and those who choose to reject God (the foolish or wicked).
- Other wisdom psalms: 8, 36, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 127, 128 and 133.

1. Psalm 1 is a well known wisdom psalm. What are the attitudes and behaviors of the blessed man in Psalm 1 (vv.1-3)? To what is he compared?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the attitudes and behaviors of the wicked man in psalm 1 (vv.4-5)? To what is he compared? What makes this such a powerful and effective metaphor?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are some results of obedience for the blessed man?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are some results of disobedience for the wicked man?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. The original psalms were not numbered as we have them today. They were a collection of songs that were later put into order and numbered for ease of reference. Why do you think this psalm was chosen to be first?

6. Psalm 19 is also a wisdom psalm, but with a different focus. What two things does Psalm 19 extol?
7. Personification is the literary device used to ascribe human attributes to inhuman objects or aspects of nature. What aspects of creation are personified in Psalm 19?
8. Romans 1:20 says, “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” What evidence do you see in Psalm 19 that the Psalmist was in agreement with the Apostle Paul?
9. The “fear of the Lord” is a very important concept throughout Scripture, but especially in wisdom literature. In the Old Testament, this language is used to refer to a person who is in a saving relationship with Yahweh. The Hebrew word “fear” in v.9 does not mean fright. What does it mean?
10. Faith was very closely tied to obedience in OT Israel. What evidence do you see for the importance of this connection in vv. 7-11?
11. Psalm 19 starts off very broad (the heavens declare the glory of God), then narrows as it describes the Law and finally ends with a personal request from the psalmist. How does the psalmist contrast himself with God in vv. 12-14?
12. “Wisdom literature generally contains PRINCIPLES, not PROMISES.”  
- Howard Hendricks

Why is this general rule important to keep in mind?

❖ **Take it to Work**

How do you show your coworkers that “your delight is in the law the Lord?”

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