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Psalms

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee... Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Psalm 119:11,18

Key verses: Psalms 1, 100, 119

Key personalities: Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, and the sons of Korah

Timeline: About 1,500 B.C., during the Exodus through Solomon's reign and collected in 540-300 B.C. The Persians conquered the western world through India and Egypt, and the Spartans of Greece kept the fight and the legend of the 300. Persians build the first observatory. The Iron Age is the main reason for the vast armies. The Greeks were at their pinnacle of power and influence with Socratic philosophy; Plato founds his school. Hippocrates establishes the profession of the physician, and the Greeks build the temple of Zeus. They use carrier pigeons to communicate, had running water, working plumbing and toilets, reformed economic and legal laws, wrote tragedy plays and poetry, and were building ships to explore and conquer. The Chinese invent kites, and the Mayans come to power and build. Then, Alexander the Great conquers the Euro-Western world, paving the way for Rome to grow.

The Book of Psalms, also called the "Psalter", is a hymnbook of 150 prayer and praise songs for stringed instruments (like the harp, lyre, and lute). The Hebrew name, "Tehillim," means "The Book of Praise." Many of the Psalms date back to the early years of the Hebrews' wandering in the Desert, as they were beginning to learn how to worship this Mysterious, Astonishing, and Powerful God who delivered them from slavery and was mostly new to them. There have been many inspired authors, including Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, the sons of Korah, and many that are anonymous with variety and unity. They are about how we come before God, our simple trust in times of trouble, and the veracity of sin and conviction.

Composition: The Psalter was divided into five Books that echo the Pentateuch: Book 1: Psalms 1-41, personal and beginnings; Book 2: 42-72, devotional and deliverance; Book 3: 73-89, liturgical and sanctuary; Book 4: 90-106, God's Reign and man's unrest; and Book 5: 107-150, Word of God and God's faithfulness. These are written in the classical Hebrew poetry that does not use rhyme; rather, the poetry is a distinctive structure of powerful stanzas of parallelism and contrasts. With several types of genres, most scholars see eleven different kinds: *Mizmor*, meaning song (7); *shiggaion*, meaning "to reel about through drink"; *miktam*, meaning "uncertain" (16); *shir*, also a name for a "song"; *maskil*, meaning "contemplative poem"; *tephillah*, a "prayer"; *tehillah*, is "praise"; *lehazkir* meaning "remembered", a petition before God; *letodah* meaning "praising" or "giving thanks"; *lelammed*, meaning "teaching"; and *shir yedidot* meaning "song of loves". There are also categories Hymns and praise to God, 8;29;103;146; and from gratitude for God's wonders and faithfulness, 100, 118 136; for wisdom for righteous living, 1, 15, 37, 49, 73; the Kingship and God's Holiness, 47, 93, 99; the Messianic—Israel's need for a Savior, 2, 22, 110; the Ascents used in the pilgrimage and worship of the feasts, 120-134; and the many Laments, man's plight of suffering, 7,12,17, 55, and 142.

Collection: This was completed probably by the Third century B.C. 'Postexilic Prophets' perhaps started under Zerubbabel, Zechariah, and Haggai who worked after the Exile when the Israelites were restored to their land and life. Perhaps each Book was compiled prior to the next (over 1000 years), too. The Psalms served more than one purpose then (just as they do now). The Psalms are for praying and praising God, and they also reinforce the call to reform Israel back to God and keep them on the path of faith and obedience. The Psalms are to remind God's children of their call and responsibility to stay on task. As such, the Psalter served as the hymnal—a book of prayer, praise and religious instruction for the second Temple (Zerubbabel's).

Purpose: The Psalms were developed for worship and for the devotional life. Many come from those who truly surrendered themselves to God with the earliest being from Abraham, perhaps, with a few prior to Moses and most coming from David's writing or from collection through Solomon.

The Psalms help us know God in the way we come before Him for worship and prayer. It is a script on how we are to worship, pray, and address God in our personal lives and collectively as a church. Thus, the Psalms

must work their way into our hearts and in our church lives and worship. Calvin said, "There is not another book we are more powerfully stirred up to go before God", and Martin Luther called the Psalms "little Bibles to convict" (Psalm 22, 31).

Theme: As Luther so rightly identified, The Psalms speak for us to reveal our emotions and plight to God. The Psalms point out to us and remind us that we are not mindless emotional beings. We have a God who is there. He cares, hears, knows, and understands. The Psalms allow us to integrate ourselves, to see what is in us and go before God. In these "little Bibles", we know our character and God's Holiness. We understand that our hearts and minds are known and poured out; we learn that we must yield to God's heart and mind. We learn that it is worthy to know and follow the Lord. We understand that He is indeed worthy of our trust in Him and worthy of surrendering our lives to. We can go before God and ask Him to show Himself, so we find Who He Is, and what we are called to know and do (Psalm 32, 46, 73)

Key Happenings: A call to Worship, Prayer, Praise, and Devotion!

The Psalms prompt us to truly know and experience God. From our deepest pains to the highest praise, we can and do have all--devotion, gratitude, trust, and reverence, presenting our true and complete selves before the Holiness of The Almighty. The Psalms teach us about life and death, about trust in times of pain and desperation. Through the Psalms we know that we can cry for help and lament our lives, seeking God's council and comfort. We begin to know God's call and character. We begin to know His majesty and how we can approach Him. We can proclaim His Glory and know His Law. In the Psalms, we learn—with Him--we can triumph over evil and problems, and we can encourage others to never give up for He walks beside us--always.

- Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to all of the Psalms as it gives us a template of what it means to be faithful and to be a blessing to God. This is in contrast to what it means to be sinful and perishing. It tells us how and why we should make decisions that follow God's will. Psalm 1 gives us two ways to lead life: The way of the righteous or the way of the sinner. One way gives us hope, happiness, and purpose; the other, a sinful pursuit that leads to self-destruction, sadness, and hopelessness. Which do we choose? God calls us to pursue godly piety; *this* pursuit is a response we make from God's revealed precepts and gratitude (Psalm 15; 24; 34:19-22; 37; 73; 111; 112; 119; 127; 128; 133).
- **In our need, where do we go? We go to God!** With reverence, humility, and respect, we are to be bold in pouring out our hearts, fears, and lives to Him. Just as in any relationship, our relationship with God is not without its fears and distresses, troubles and turmoils. We are in a world that is filled with distress and pain; there is no way to live this life with encountering suffering and distress. In Psalms, we see ourselves in an angry David, and we can understand that angry is ok just as long as we do not sin or curse God in our anger (Psalm 4; Jer. 23:6).
- **God is joyful when we follow Him!** When we choose to base our significance and attitude on who we are in Him and *not* in the ways of the world, God blesses and judges us in the manner in which we put our faith, trust, and obedience to Him. What about grace? Oh, yes, we have grace--Praise God! What about our faith in Jesus Christ Our Lord? Good question. Here's another: What good is faith if nothing is done with it? Let's not miss out. God actually desires to bless us; He enjoys blessing us! Our Father loves us and loves to give to us! He does even though we deserve nothing. However, we certainly shouldn't expect that God will just handsomely bless us without any faithful or obedient response from Him. We shouldn't want to be those people anyway for we know that such a relationship is wasted and empty. We must do our part. He gives us the call. It is up to us to respond in faith and obedience, being careful not to fall into apathy or indifference or allow ourselves to be conformed to bad cultural or peer pressure (James 1)!
- **The Psalms contrasts** the Kingship of God and the kingship of man. One is on greatness, comfort, and purpose; the other is of hostility, folly, and meaninglessness. Life is about God's Sovereign Kingship; in this we make the choice that our lives can be ruled either by a loving and purposeful God or by our own sinful foolishness. This is a contrasting of righteousness and sin and how God desires us to come before Him in our worship and daily life--and the cost when we refuse.

- God wants us to be concerned with His concerns; He wants us to be productive and good. We do this as we seek Him. We do this as we place Him first and foremost in pursuing His Will and Fruit. This is how a great tree grows and prospers and bestows blessings to others. We can do the same (Matt. 6:33).
- **Righteous** refers to those who honor God and live their lives faithfully--in all that they do--according to His precepts (1 Sam. 26:23; Psalm 82:1; Isa. 40:13-14; 1 John 3:7-12).
- **Righteous God.** This refers to the relationship between God and His people as He promises us of His presence and guarantees us victory! God's character is perfect--completely. He has no malice or jealousy that is wrong or misdirected. Therefore, when we pray to Him, we can be honest. He already knows our plight and fears and emotions anyway; we might as well let it out, knowing He will listen and have empathy and concern (Psalm 4; 1 Cor. 1:30).
- **Psalms of lament.** These are petitions in prayer to God asking that God will pay attention and hear our prayers—that He will hear our cries. The lament is an appeal for justice while experiencing injustice and is a call to us for authentic repentance. When we do wrong, we will realize from the law written on our hearts that we did wrong. We will feel remorse and guilt. (Psalm 7; 12; 17; 55; 57; 142; 119:50; James 4: 7-10).
- **Judgment.** This means to rise up and be witnesses for God; it refers to the reward for the godly that the wicked will not receive. The wicked have no defense for their actions and cannot blame others; those who do evil are purely responsible for their own actions. The wicked will not be able to survive God's wrath (Deut. 19:15; Psalm 27:12; Mal. 3:2; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 6:17).
- **Wicked will perish.** All will be held to account; all will be held responsible for their course in life! Those who are sinful do not make good decisions. They live for temporary pleasures or are anchored to apathy or indifference or are imprisoned in past hurts, disappointments, and anger and can't stand up to the storms of life or be at peace with God. We must release sin and hurt and choose to embrace God in order to excel in life and eternity (Psalm 1).
- **Selah.** Its true meaning may have been lost to us over the centuries; however, it is believed to be a liturgical or musical interlude or a brief pause for dramatic effect in worship. Perhaps 'Selah' is a musical note, or it is the time or line at which the congregation responds or pauses to reflect.
- **See his face.** God's self-disclosure and our extreme blessing of eternity will enable us to see our Lord and be in His presence face-to-face. Currently, God cannot be seen; but, in some phenomenal way, He will allow us to. In ancient cultures, to see a king's face meant blessing and honor; to be removed from the king and not be able to look onto his face meant punishment and banishment (Ex. 33:20; Esther 7:8; 2 Sam. 14:24; Psalm 11:6-7; 27:7-9; 105:3-5; John 1:14-18; 1 Cor. 13:12).
- The Psalms were a part of the Hebrew worship hymnal. They were also part of the Christian hymnal from the founding of the Early Church and certified during the Reformation. Our contemporary Hymns and praise music are recently new. Most denominations did not use anything but the Psalms and usually just used the Psalm called the "Psalter" (with a few hymns sprinkled in from composers such as Bach or Handel) until after 1900.

God wants us to understand that the psalmists' experiences are our experiences and that we live in a sinful world under a caring and loving God. He wants us to make sure we honor and live for Him. He wants us to obey His commands for our own good. He does not want us to break His commands or betray His trust by living foolishly or in sin! We can use the Psalms for Christ to intervene into our deepest recesses to save us, mold, shape, and use us for our betterment and His glory. He makes intercession for us! *How are we responding?* Does our faith touch us so deeply that we can be mediators and intercessors in the lives of others as well? Or, are we so focused on our hurts and circumstances that we only see ourselves and have no gratitude for Christ and no application of our faith to others? Take a look at your life and your circumstances; how do you see them in the Light of His love and Word? Are we affected by our happenstances, or are we affected by Christ as Lord over our circumstances and ourselves (2 Cor. 3:18)?

Key Takeaway: Listening to God means being fruitful!

God desires us to wise up and see life as a series of serious opportunities to grow and become spiritually and emotionally mature. It is a time to stop cursing and blaming God, and it is time to seek what He desires in us. Only then can we seek to please Him. A plan to please and serve God will carry us far, whereas a plan seeking to thwart God will only send us into despair, bitterness, and regret. We do not submit to God just because He will become angry if we do not; after all, we have grace now. Rather, we do it because it is the best way to please Him. God's anger denotes disappointment that when we wasted our lives when we could have had so much more and so much better. This is exactly as when a parent grieves for his or her child when he or she is making bad decisions that are ruinous. We could have been overcomers, prosperous in the important things of life, bearing fruit in our relationships, character, maturity, and our spiritual formation. God does not want us to ruin ourselves and others. He wants us to be victorious and prosper in Him! If you want true security, joy, significance, and contentment, you will only find it in the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ! We must learn to submit to His Lordship. He is our King!

David submitted. He was faithful. When our trust is in Him, we can have confidence (with a good attitude, too).

The foreshadow of Jesus Christ?

Psalms 1 is "Messianic," and points us to Christ as the great Messianic Son of David and God's Anointed One. It points to a time when all things will be reconciled and the ways of the world will finally be revealed as futile and meaningless. For us as Christians, Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the anticipated, prophesied Redeemer King and Shepherd, our Messiah, and we are the product of this promise of a future redemption as the promises given to David are fulfilled in Him. Jesus is also presented as God's Son in Psalm 2 and 110, in 22 (how He will die), and in 41 (how he will be betrayed).

Questions to Ponder

1. What is the first thing you do when something goes wrong? How is that like a lament?
2. How do you give thanks to God? Do you praise His name? Ask God for wisdom? Give a lament?
3. How do you feel that God wants us to know and feel the psalmist's experiences, since they are our experiences, as we all live in a sinful world under a caring loving God?
4. How do you feel that our God, who loves and cares for you, also watches over you? How can this help you trust Him more?
5. What would your life look like if you 'let it go,' gave up all of your fears and worries to Our Lord's care?
6. If the Lord cares for us in our tough times--and He does--does our attitude reflect it?
7. What renews your confidence when things go awry?
8. What gets in the way of your confidence of God at work? What can you do to have more confidence in Christ the Lord?
9. How does honoring God help you lead a healthy and well balanced life? What can your church do to equip and spur you on?
10. Do you long for intimacy with Christ as Lord and love of your life? What can you do about it? How can the Psalms give you inspiration and direction?
11. What does it mean to you to serve God with a surrendered heart? How can this elevate your being in God's eyes?
12. What have you done to respond to God's desire that you come before Him in your worship and daily life? What could be the cost when you refuse? What could be the rewards when you do? What is stopping you? What will you do now?