

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Introduction

- 1) The book of **Psalms** is one of the best-known and most-loved books of the Bible
- 2) The book is an anthology of 150 individual psalms divided into five sections
- 3) This lesson is an introduction to the book to better understand and use it to the glory of God

I) **The Value of Old Testament Studies**

- A) Written for our learning and to provide hope (Rom. 15:4)
- B) Examples to warn us (1 Cor. 10:11)
- C) Make one wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:14-15)
- D) Given by the inspiration of God and profitable for instruction (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- E) The book of Psalms illustrates each of the above points and is valuable for study by Christians

II) **The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament**

- A) Hebrew Old Testament divided into three parts: **Law, Prophets, Writings**
 - 1) Psalms is the first book of the **Writings** (Jesus called this section **Psalms** [Lk. 24:44])
 - 2) In the English OT arrangement, Psalms is the second book in the **Poetry/Wisdom** section
 - 3) Hebrew title was **Tehillim** – Songs of Praise, or Praises (“praise” 211x in book)
 - 4) Title used by Jesus and apostles was “**book of Psalms**” (Gk. *psalms* Lk. 20:42; Acts 1:20)
- B) Considered part of God’s law (Jn. 10:34; 15:25 [just as the prophets were, 1 Cor. 14:21])
- C) Inspired revelation of the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; Heb. 3:7; Mk. 12:10, 36)
- D) Unknown as to **who** arranged the book of Psalms and **when** in its present form
 - 1) Time of psalms range from Moses [psalm 90] to the Babylonian captivity [psalm 137]
 - a) This is a time range of approximately 900 years (with its main period in David’s time)
 - 2) Copying and arranging of some wisdom scripture was done at later times (cf. Prov. 25:1)
 - a) Psalm 72:20 indicates some collection activity
 - 3) The book of Psalms was most likely put in its final form after the Babylonian captivity, probably in the time of Ezra (5th century BC)
- E) “**Psalm**” – Gk. *psalms* from Heb. *mizmor* derived from the root *zamar* meaning “to pluck”; taking hold of the strings of an instrument with the fingers; some, or perhaps most, psalms originally composed to be sung with a harp (see Ps. 33:2; 30:4)
 - 1) “making melody” (Eph. 5:19) – Gk. *psallo* – pluck the strings of; the instrument is determined by the context, which here is found “in the heart”

III) **Arrangement of the Book of Psalms**

- A) Five “Books” within the Book of Psalms
 - 1) Book 1 (Psalms 1-41)
 - 2) Book 2 (Psalms 42-72)
 - 3) Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)
 - 4) Book 4 (Psalms 90-106)
 - 5) Book 5 (Psalms 107-150)
- B) Each “book” ends with a doxology of praise to God (41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6)

IV) **Authorship and Types of Psalms**

- A) 116 of the 150 psalms have individual superscriptions that include comments about authorship, musical direction, and events
- B) **Authors**
 - 1) **David** – 73 (2 more by NT attribution [Acts 4:25 – Ps. 2; Heb. 4:7 – Ps. 95]
 - a) King of Israel, sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1)
 - 2) **Asaph** (12) – musical/choir leader during reigns of David and Solomon (1 Chron. 16:4-7)
 - 3) **Sons of Korah** (11) – Levites who served in the Temple (1 Chron. 26:1-19)

- 4) *Solomon* (2) – king of Israel, son of David (1 Kgs. 4:21)
- 5) *Moses* (1) – chosen leader of Israel (Ex. 3:10)
- 6) *Ethan the Ezrahite* (1) – companion of Asaph and Heman (1 Chron. 15:19; 1 Kgs. 4:31)
- 7) *Heman the Ezrahite* (1) – the singer, contemporary with David and Asaph (1 Chron. 6:33)
- 8) *Anonymous* (47)

C) Types of Psalms

- 1) Wisdom
 - a) *Ethical* – guidelines for righteous living (Psa. 15)
 - b) *Instructional* – teaching for proper understanding (Psa. 37; 73)
- 2) Praise
 - a) *Hallelujah* – songs of praise to God (Psa. 103)
 - b) *Historical* – reviewing God’s history dealing with His people (Psa. 106)
 - c) *Royal* – God’s sovereign rule and the coming messianic rule of Christ (Psa. 2; 110)
 - d) *Pilgrimage* – songs of ascents; sung as people journeyed up to Jerusalem (Psa. 120-134)
 - e) *Thanksgiving* – highlighting God’s greatness and mercy (Psa. 100)
- 3) Lament
 - a) *Imprecatory* – invoking God’s wrath on the enemies of God’s people (Psa. 69; 109)
 - b) *Penitential* – expressing sorrow for sin and seeking forgiveness (Psa. 51; 32)

D) Styles in the Psalms

- 1) *Alphabetic/Acrostic* – patterns used with letters of Hebrew alphabet (Psa. 119; 37)
- 2) *Didactic* – teaching and instruction (Psa. 1)
- 3) *Meditation* – extended thoughts on God and His truths (Psa. 119)
- 4) *Praise and Devotion* – joyful praise (Psa. 148)
- 5) *Prayer and Petition* – attitude of prayerful approach to God (Psa. 51)

E) Poetic Characteristics

- 1) *Synonymous parallelism* (repeated thought for emphasis Psa. 27:1; 34:1)
- 2) *Antithetic parallelism* (contrasted statements to emphasis truth Psa. 1:6)
- 3) *Expansive parallelism* (amplifying the first line Psa. 71:8)
- 4) *Progressive parallelism* (each line adds to a complete thought Psa. 1:1; 29:1)
- 5) *Synthetic parallelism* (lines have relation to one another Psa. 119:11; 55:6)
- 6) *Figurative expressions* (Psa. 18:31; 80:8)

V) The Book of Psalms in the New Testament

- A) Quoted more than 100 times and appears in nearly every NT book – quoted more than any other OT book
 - 1) Even quoted by Satan, but for evil purposes (Matt. 4:6)
- B) Early New Testament Christians used the Psalms
 - 1) To understand the truth about Jesus Christ’ person and work (Heb. 1:8-13)
 - 2) Holy Spirit-inspired songs of joy and praise to God (cf. Matt. 26:30)
 - 3) Quoted in their prayers for encouragement and strength (Acts 4:25-26)

VI) The Scriptural Use of the Psalms

- A) Singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13)
 - 1) Psalms 148 (“Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!”), 19, 23, 24, 25, 51, 118, 136, 145
- B) Teaching fulfilled prophecy that Jesus is the Christ (Lk. 24:44-46; Acts 2:24-28, 31, 34-36)
- C) Evidences of God (Psa. 19:1; 33:6-9 [creation]; Psa. 139 [omni-present, -power, -knowledge])
- D) Admonitions and warnings (Heb. 3:14-15 [Psa. 95 - falling away])
- E) Training in righteousness (1 Pet. 3:10-12; Psa. 15)

Conclusion

The Psalms may have begun as individual expressions of faith that were later used by the whole community of faith (like Psalm 23). Let us learn, appreciate, use, and give glory to God in them.