

PSALMS AND THE CHRISTIAN"

Introduction to Studying the Psalms

INTRODUCTION

1. The value of the Old Testament to the Christian is mentioned several times in the New Testament:

Rom 15:4

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

1 Cor 10:11

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

2 Tim 3:15-17

¹⁵ *and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2. Of all the books of the Old Testament, these statements are especially true in regards to the **Book of Psalms**

3. The value of the Psalms to the Christian is so great, every Christian should do whatever they can to become more familiar with them.

[The purpose of this study is to help one do just that! Aside from what has already been said...]

I. WHY STUDY THE PSALMS?

A. We Are Commanded As Christians To Use The Psalms In Our Singing And Teaching...

1. "Speak to one another with **psalms**, hymns and spiritual songs" - **Eph 5:19**

2. "...teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." **Col 3:16**

3. "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise (psalms)." **Jas 5:13**

B. They Are Useful For Teaching And Confirming That Jesus Is The Christ (Messiah)...

1. Notice Jesus' use of the Psalms in **Luke 24:44**
"He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."
2. Peter likewise used them in his first gospel sermon - **Acts 2:25-28, 34-35**
David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, 27 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence."

C. As One Reads Through The Psalms, He Finds...

1. "Expressed the eager desire and longing for God's presence"
2. "Prayers and songs of joyous trust and praise"
3. Every emotion known to man expressed in beautiful and inspired terms (e.g., joy, anger, praise, repentance, trust, even doubt)

[With these thoughts in mind, let's examine more closely the aim of this particular study...]

II. WHAT IS THE AIM OF OUR STUDY?

A. To Become More Familiar With Old Testament Poetry...

1. Essential to getting more out the Psalms
2. Important to avoid misinterpreting the Psalms

B. To Develop An Appreciation And Working Knowledge Of The Psalms...

1. So one may turn to them for his or her comfort and encouragement
2. And to use them in counseling and comforting others

C. To Glean A Clearer Picture Of God's Character From The Psalms...

1. His love, mercy and deliverance towards the righteous
2. His wrath and judgment against the wicked

D. To Learn More Of The Christ In Prophecy...

1. Descriptions of His suffering and glorious reign are found in the Psalms
2. Some of which are not found elsewhere in Scripture

E. To See In Fulfilled Prophecy An Irrefutable Argument For...

1. The inspiration of the Scriptures
2. The claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah

Conclusion more reasons why the **Book of Psalms** should be read and studied.

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry

INTRODUCTION

1. Before we get into the background of the Psalms themselves, it may prove helpful to notice some things about Hebrew poetry
2. Not only does this help to better understand the nature of the Psalms, but can also assist in proper interpretation of this portion of Scripture

[One of the things that make Hebrew poetry different is...]

I. THE USE OF "THOUGHT RHYME" INSTEAD OF "WORD RHYME"

A. "Thought Rhyme" (Also Known As "Parallelism")...

1. Involves arranging thoughts in relation to each other
2. This is done without a concern as to whether certain words rhyme with each other (as found in most modern poetry)

B. Examples of "Thought Rhyme" ("Parallelism")...

1. **Synonymous parallelism**

- a. The thought of the first line is repeated in the second, expressed in different words for emphasis
- b. A good example is found in **Psalms 24:2**
 - 1) "For He has founded it upon the seas" (first line)
 - 2) "And established it upon the waters" (second line)

2. **Antithetic parallelism** (diametrical opposition)

- a. The truth presented in one line is strengthened by a contrasting statement in the other
- b. An example is **Ps 1:6**
 - 1) "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous" (truth)
 - 2) "But the way of the wicked will perish" (contrast)

3. **Synthetic parallelism**

- a. The first and second lines bear some definite relation to each other (such as cause and effect, or proposition and conclusion)
- b. A good example is **Ps 119:11**
 - 1) "I have hidden your word in my heart," (cause)
 - 2) "That I might not sin against you." (effect)

4. **Progressive parallelism** - there are several varieties, the most common being:

a. **Stairlike**

- 1) Composed of several lines, each providing a complete element of the aggregate or composite thought
- 2) Notice **Ps 1:1**, "Blessed is the man..."
 - a) "Who WALKS not in the counsel of the ungodly"
 - b) "Nor STANDS in the path of the sinners"

c) "Nor SITS in the seat of the scornful"

b. **Climatic**

1) The principal idea in the first line is repeated and expanded to complete the thought

2) An example is found in **Ps 29:1**

a) "Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones" (give what?)

b) "Give unto the LORD glory and strength"

5. **Introverted parallelism**

a. The first line is closely related in thought to the fourth, and the second to the third

b. For example, consider **Ps 91:14**

1) "Because he has set his love upon Me," (cf. line 4)

2) "therefore I will deliver him;" (cf. line 3)

3) "I will set him on high," (cf. line 2)

4) "because he has known My name." (cf. line 1)

II. THE LACK OF POETIC RHYTHM

A. Unlike Most Modern Poetry...

1. That has standard measures of identifiable rhythms

2. As illustrated in the rhythm of "Roses are Red, Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet, and so are you"

B. The Art Of Poetic Rhythm Was Of Secondary Consideration...

1. It is not likely that the Hebrew poets had standard measures, worked out and carefully defined

2. Again, the emphasis was on "**thought rhyme**"

III. THE USE OF FIGURATIVE EXPRESSION

A. The Figure Must Be Accepted And Dealt With As A Figure Of Speech, And Not As A Literal Statement...

1. For example, calling the Lord a "shepherd" - **Ps 23:1** "The Lord is my..."

2. He is LIKE a shepherd, but not one literally

B. The Figure Must Be Interpreted In Light Of Meaning of The Figure In The Day And Setting In Which It Was Used...

1. Example, "the valley of the shadow of death" - **Ps 23:4**

2. Commonly applied at modern funerals to dying...

a. It refers to a treacherous place where the guiding hand of a "shepherd" would be very helpful to "sheep" to AVOID death

b. It is therefore applicable to times other than just when we are dying

CONCLUSION

Appreciating these characteristics of Hebrew poetry can help the Psalms become more meaningful to us.

"PSALMS AND THE CHRISTIAN"

Background Material on the Psalms

INTRODUCTION

1. We discussed earlier some of the uniqueness of Hebrew poetry in general
2. Now let's focus on the Book of Psalms itself...

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD "PSALM"

A. the greek word is "psalmos"...

1. From the Hebrew word zmr (zamar), meaning "to pluck"; i.e., taking hold of the strings of an instrument with the fingers
2. Implies that the psalms were originally composed to be accompanied by a stringed instrument
3. "Psalms are songs for the lyre, and therefore lyric poems in the strictest sense."
4. David and others originally wrote the Psalms to be sung to the accompaniment of the "harp"

B. In New Testament Worship, We Are Told To Sing The Psalms To The Accompaniment Of The "Heart"...

1. "...singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" - **Eph 5:19**
2. The phrase, "making melody" comes from the Greek word psallontes (literally, plucking the strings of)
3. Thus, we are to "pluck the strings of our heart" as we sing psalms, not the strings of a harp

II. THE HISTORY OF THE PSALMS

A. The Oldest Of The Psalms Originate From Moses (ca. 1300 B.C.)

1. **Ex 15:1-15** - a song of triumph following the crossing of the Red Sea
2. **Deu 32, 33** - a song of exhortation to keep the Law after entering Canaan
3. **Ps 90** - a song of meditation, reflection, and prayer

B. After Moses, The Writing Of Psalms Had Its "Peaks" And "Valleys"...

1. In David (ca. 1000 B.C.), the sacred lyric attained to its full maturity
2. Under Solomon, the creation of psalms began to decline; this was "the age of the proverb"
3. Only twice after this did the creation of psalms rise to any height, and then only for a short period
 - a. Under Jehoshaphat (ca. 875 B.C.)
 - b. And again under Hezekiah (ca. 725 B.C.)

III. THE AUTHORS, OR WRITERS, OF THE PSALMS

A. David...

1. Commonly thought to be the author of ALL the psalms, but he was not
2. He wrote at least seventy-three (73) of the Psalms

B. Asaph...

1. The music director during the reigns of David and Solomon
2. He wrote twelve (12) of the Psalms

C. The Sons of Korah...

1. These were Levites who served in the Temple
2. They wrote twelve (12) psalms

D. Solomon...

1. At least two (2) psalms are attributed to him (**Ps 72, 127**)
2. But that he wrote many more is stated in **1 Kings 4:29-32**

E. Moses...

1. As stated above, he wrote the earliest psalms
2. One is found in the Book of Psalms (**Ps 90**)

F. Hemen...

1. He was contemporary with David and Asaph, and is known as "the singer"
2. He wrote one (**Ps 88**)

G. Ethan...

1. A companion with Asaph and Hemen in the Temple worship
2. He wrote one (**Ps 89**)

H. Anonymous - Forty-eight (48) of the Psalms name no author

IV. ARRANGING THE PSALMS

A. They Originally Were Collected Into "Five Books"...

1. Book I (Ps 1-41)
2. Book II (Ps 42-72)
3. Book III (Ps 73-89)
4. Book IV (Ps 90-106)
5. Book V (Ps 107-150)
 - This arrangement appears to be according to material found within them

B. The Psalms Can Also Be Arranged Into Chief "Groups"...

1. **Alphabetic or Acrostic**

- a. These psalms have lines which in Hebrew start with words whose first letters follow a certain pattern
- b. For example, **Ps 119**, where the first eight lines start with words beginning with the Hebrew letter ALEPH, the second eight lines with words beginning with BETH, etc.
- 2. **Ethical**
 - a. These are psalms teaching moral principles
 - b. A good example is **Ps 15**
- 3. **Hallelujah**
 - a. These are psalms of praise, beginning and/or ending with "hallelujah" or "praise Jehovah"
 - b. **Ps 103** is one such example
- 4. **Historical**
 - a. Psalms which review the history of God's dealings with His people
 - b. A good illustration would be **Ps 106**
- 5. **Imprecatory**
 - a. These are psalms which invoke God to bring evil upon one's enemies
 - b. Consider **Ps 69** as an example
- 6. **Messianic**
 - a. Those psalms pertaining to the coming Messiah
 - b. For example, **Ps 2**
- 7. **Penitential**
 - a. Psalms expressing sorrow for sins committed
 - b. A classic one is **Ps 51**
- 8. **Songs Of Ascent** (or Songs Of Degrees)
 - 1. Scholars are not sure, but these are possibly psalms sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem to observe the feasts
 - 2. They are grouped together as **Ps 120-134**
- 9. **Suffering**
 - 1. These psalms are cries of those suffering affliction
 - 2. **Ps 102** is typical
- 10. **Thanksgiving**
 - 1. These are psalms of grateful praise to Jehovah for blessings received
 - 2. For example, consider **Ps 100**

C. The Various Styles Of The Psalms Can Be Described As:

- 1. **Didactic:** (educational) psalms of teaching and instruction
- 2. **Liturgical:** responsive readings, for use in special services (e.g., Ps 136)
- 3. **Meditation:** the ancient Hebrews were given to meditation, which spirit finds expression in many of the psalms
- 4. **Praise & Devotion:** psalms of joyful praise
- 5. **Prayer & Petition:** psalms which are sung in an attitude of prayer

Conclusion

Hopefully, this brief background of the book of Psalms will help one gain a better feel for this type of Scripture.