

The Book of Psalms

Introduction – Part I

Opening Prayer

Why study Psalms?

1. Tell us a great deal about God
2. Give us great insight into the life of faith
3. Express a wide range of emotions
4. A collection of songs and music is a vital part of the Christian life

Title

Why is it called “Psalms”?

“Psalms” comes from the Septuagint title of the book. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

The Greek word *psallo* means “pluck” or “twang” and was used for any musical instrument.

The Hebrew word of the Book of Psalms is *tehellim* and it means “songs of praise”.

Psalms and Music in Worship

Music in worship always means movement. It takes us from one thing to something else. In the synagogue worship of the Old Testament the psalms served as the music to move from the reading to something else like the interpretation or sermon.

What are some of the musical pieces of the traditional liturgy that serve this purpose?

Music is also our response in worship to what God had done. Our music is really a restatement of what God has done. The songs of the Bible reflect this idea that our music is a response to what God has done. There are a myriad of examples of this, but consider these three:

A. **Luke 2:25-35** – Simeon’s song

- a. *What is Simeon’s song a response to?*
- b. *Who is the focus of the song?*
- c. *Where do we use Simeon’s song in our worship service and why?*

B. **Revelation 4**

- a. *What has God done to be worthy of praise? (see v.11)*
- b. *What is the connection between this song and **Isaiah 6:1-3**?*

C. **Revelation 5**

- a. *What is the “new song” that is being sung here?*
- b. *What makes the Lamb worthy?(see v.9)*
- c. *When is this song used in our traditional worship service?*

So music in worship serves us in many ways, but it often expresses a movement from one part of the service to another and it is always a response to what God has done. This is very different from much of mainstream American Christianity.

How is music used in much of mainstream American Christianity?

Are emotions generated by music inappropriate in worship?

What are some of the most emotional services of the Church Year?

Structure of the Book of Psalms

Historically the Book of Psalms has been divided into five smaller books. The division of the Psalms into those books is listed below. Each of the five smaller books ends with a “doxology”. A “doxology” is a formula of praise to God. The division of the five books is as follows with the doxology in parentheses after each section:

1. Psalms 1-41 (**41:13**)
2. Psalms 42-72 (**72:18-19**)
3. Psalms 73-89 (**89:52**)
4. Psalms 90-106 (**106:48**)
5. 107-150 (**150**)

The fivefold division may have also been introduced as a means of connecting the Psalms to the synagogue reading of the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch are the first five books of the Bible, the writings of Moses. They were divided into 153 readings and there is some evidence that the 150 Psalms were assigned according to those readings.

Interpreting the Psalms

As we approach the Scriptures our approach will dictate how we understand what we are reading. The most important thing is that we approach the Bible “Christologically”. That means that we understand that the primary purpose of Scripture is to point us to Jesus Christ.

Read John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:14-15

So the first thing we want to ask about any Scripture passage is: *how does it point to Jesus?* After that we can ask some more basic questions to give us an understanding of the passage:

1. What is happening in the Psalm?
2. Who is speaking?
3. Are there particular historical figures mentioned?

Psalms are different than other historical books because their origins and historical setting are much harder to trace. So finding interpretive helps in the historical setting are not as easy.

***** Looking Ahead *****

In the next lesson we will continue with some introductory material and look especially at the literary categories of the different psalms.

Closing prayer