

An Overview of Psalms

Various Passages

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 26, 2019

Tonight we are in the Book of Psalms. So you can go ahead and turn there.

I have told you before that the English Old Testament is divided into four sections: Law, History, Poetry, and Prophecy. We are now in the poetic section of the Bible. The Books that talk about suffering and worship and life and romance from a poetic perspective.

And if you have read it, Hebrew poetry is not like English poetry because it doesn't rhyme. Hebrew is not a pretty language anyway. It involves a lot of gutturals, so they don't bother with rhyming. They focused on other things like word order and sentence structure. Some Hebrew poems start out with eight words at the top and go down to six words and down to four words and back up to six words and to eight words and that was poetry to the Jews. Or they begin with four words at the top and go down to six words and then to eight words and to six words and finish with four words. And that was poetry to the Jews. That was called a Chiastic Poem. The beauty was in the word order. It wasn't in the sound but in the order of the words.

Or, every word in a sentence begins with a corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first sentence begins with an "A" and the second sentence begins with a "B" and the third sentence begins with a "C" or the Hebrew equivalent of that. That was called an Acrostic Poem. Psalm 119 does that, so does Proverbs 31, the proverb of the Excellent Wife. Hebrew Poetry was about more than rhyming. It was about other things as well. This made it timeless. We are still reading Hebrew poetry 4,000 years after it was written because it transcends time. It transcends culture.

With that said, Psalms is the Poetry of Worship. Psalms is the Poetry of Worship. To worship something is to give it worth or value. It is to make it important. If you think about it, we value some strange things in our world today.

If an alien came to visit us from another planet and just looked at the way we spent our time, I think he would be surprised at what he found. He would be surprised with how much time we spend on the TV and the internet, right? He would be surprised with how much time we spend on Facebook. John Piper said that, "One of the greatest uses of Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time." Would you agree with that? Facebook recently said that its users spend an average of 17 minutes a day on their website, which comes to about four days per year. Wow. That is an incredible amount of time on Facebook. And we are willing to spend it because value that. That is important to us. The alien would also drive downtown and see Prospera Centre and say that we value sports. That's important to us as well. We give worth to those things. We worship them in a sense.

Well, the Book of Psalms is about the worship of God. It is about giving worth to God. The word "Psalm" in Hebrew is מִזְמָר mizmor, and it means "a song or a melody". It refers to a poem that you can sing to. Psalms worship God through music. Psalms worship God through music.

There are 150 Psalms in all. 116 of them have subscripts that tell us who wrote them and why they wrote them. Someone once asked me if these subscripts are inspired. To answer that, in Luke 20:42, Jesus refers to the subscript of Psalm 110 and says, “For David himself says in the book of Psalms, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand...”’” So Jesus believed that the subscripts were inspired. The subscript of Psalm 110 says “A Psalm of David”. Jesus agreed with that, so they were inspired if Jesus said so. They were breathed out by the Holy Spirit of God.

The shortest chapter in the Bible is a Psalm, Psalm 117. And the longest chapter in the Bible is a Psalm, Psalm 119. Altogether there are seven authors. (We’ll get into that in a moment.) They span 900 years of history. It took nine centuries to write this book. Pretty incredible.

There is no clear reason why the Psalms are divided up the way they are. They aren’t divided up by author, not consistently anyway, and they aren’t divided up by subject or history or anything like that. But they are divided up into five books. And Jewish tradition says that there were five books to go along with the Five Books of Moses. The Bible doesn’t say that, but Jewish tradition does. Each book also ends with a doxology.

So for instance, Psalm 41:13 closes out Book One this way: “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.” Psalm 72:18-20 closes out the Book Two this way: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.” Psalm 89:52 closes out Book Three this way: “Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.” Each Book ends with an “Amen and Amen”. Pretty neat.

Let’s look at these together. The First Book of the Psalms is the Psalms of David. The First Book of the Psalms is the Psalms of David. This covers chapters 1-41. And if you flip through these chapters, you will see that David didn’t write all of the Psalms in here. Some are anonymous. But David would write 73 Psalms in all - many of them are in Book One. Many are in other books.

We talked about David several weeks ago, but he was Israel’s greatest king. His name is mentioned about a thousand times in the Bible; more than the name of Moses and more than the name of Abraham. So in that sense he was the most famous Jew of all time. He started off as a lowly shepherd boy and he rose to be king of the nation. He was also a poet. David was a musician and a warrior. He could beat up people and then sing about it.

Now we can’t look at all of the Psalms in this section, but let’s look at the first one, Psalm 1. Psalm 1 is anonymous. There is no subscript for it so we don’t know who wrote it. But it says this:

- 1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 Nor stand in the path of sinners,
 Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
- 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 And in His law he meditates day and night.
- 3 He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

- 4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1 worships the Lord for His justice. Psalm 1 worships the Lord for His justice. It does this in several different ways. It does it with a contrast; it contrasts the righteous and the wicked. The righteous man will not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers. But the wicked man will not stand in the judgment or in the assembly of the righteous.

It also worships the justice of the Lord with a physical image. The righteous man, verse 3 says, is “...like a tree firmly planted by streams of waters, which yields its fruit...” But the wicked, verse 4, “...are like chaff which the wind drives away.” The Psalms teach spiritual truths with physical images and we see that here.

And finally, Psalm 1 worships the justice of the Lord with a principle. The principle is that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will perish. At the end of verse 3 ... “And in whatever he does, he prospers.” At the end of verse 6, “...but the way of the wicked will perish.” Those who honour God will prosper eternally, and those who dishonour Him will perish eternally.

Other Psalms in Book One include Psalm 2 which prophesies about Jesus, and Psalm 19 ... “The heavens are telling of the glory of God” and Psalm 23 “The Good Shepherd”. But that is the First Book of the Psalms; The Psalms of David. There are a few anonymous Psalms in there as well.

The second book of Psalms is the Psalms of David and the sons of Korah. The second book of Psalms is the Psalms of David and the sons of Korah. This covers chapters 42-72, and they are not all from David and the sons of Korah. Some are anonymous, some are from Asaph, one is from Solomon. But the sons of Korah wrote ten Psalms in the Bible.

When 1 Chronicles 6 lists the Levites, it mentions them. They were spiritual leaders in Israel. They were Levites. If you remember your Bible history, when the people of Israel were in the wilderness, Korah led a revolt against Moses and the Lord punished him by splitting the earth and swallowing him up. His sons survived. And the phrase “sons of Korah” in the Psalms could have referred to them, or it could have referred to their descendants.

Let's look at one of the Psalms of the Sons of Korah ... Psalm 49:

For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

- 1 Hear this, all peoples;

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
Both low and high,
Rich and poor together.
My mouth will speak wisdom,
And the meditation of my heart *will be* understanding.
I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will express my riddle on the harp.
Why should I fear in days of adversity,
When the iniquity of my foes surrounds me,
Even those who trust in their wealth
And boast in the abundance of their riches?
No man can by any means redeem *his* brother
Or give to God a ransom for him—
For the redemption of his soul is costly,
And he should cease *trying* forever—
That he should live on eternally,
That he should not undergo decay.
For he sees *that even* wise men die;
The stupid and the senseless alike perish
And leave their wealth to others.
Their inner thought is *that* their houses are forever
And their dwelling places to all generations;
They have called their lands after their own names.
But man in *his* pomp will not endure;
He is like the beasts that perish.
This is the way of those who are foolish,
And of those after them who approve their words.
As sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
Death shall be their shepherd;
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning,
And their form shall be for Sheol to consume
So that they have no habitation.
But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol,
For He will receive me.
Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich,
When the glory of his house is increased;
For when he dies he will carry nothing away;
His glory will not descend after him.
Though while he lives he congratulates himself—
And though *men* praise you when you do well for yourself—
He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
They will never see the light.

Selah.

Selah.

20 Man in *his* pomp, yet without understanding,
Is like the beasts that perish.

Psalm 49 worships the Lord for His faithfulness. Psalm 49 worships the Lord for His faithfulness. I don't have to fear in times of adversity when the iniquities of my foes surround me, because verse 15 says, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me." "God will take care of me" the Psalmist says. "He will be faithful". He says this with some of the things that we saw earlier. There is a contrast: low versus high, rich versus poor, wise versus stupid. There are physical images: "inclining my ear to a Proverb" and "my riddle on a harp". Verse 14 says, "As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; and the upright shall rule over them in the morning, and their form shall be for Sheol to consume so that they have no habitation." And there is also a principle for this Psalm: the Lord will be faithful to those who are faithful to Him. No matter what your station in life, if you are rich or poor, low born or high, the Lord will take care of you in you are His.

Other Psalms in Book Two include Psalm 51, "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." And Psalm 53, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" And Psalm 72, which is the only Psalm written by Solomon: "Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Your people with righteousness and Your afflicted with justice." Book Two ends with Solomon's Psalm.

The third Book of the Psalms covers chapters 73-89 and it is the Psalms of Asaph. It is the Psalms of Asaph. Again, Asaph is not the only author in this Book, but he is the main author. Psalm 88 is written by a man named Heman, (I played with his toys when I was a kid... "Heman," get it?) And Psalm 89 is written by a man named Eman... Maybe they were brothers... Eman and Heman ... But Asaph wrote 12 Psalms in the Bible. Sometimes "Asaph" referred to an individual person, and sometimes it referred to a family. 1 Chronicles 6:39 mentions a Levite named Asaph. 2 Chronicles 5:12 says that he was a singer. But Ezra 2:40 mentions "The singers: the sons of Asaph" and that was obviously more than one person.

Let's look at one of those Psalms together ... Psalm 79:

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance;
They have defiled Your holy temple;
They have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

2 They have given the dead bodies of Your servants for food to the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your godly ones to the beasts of the earth.

3 They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem;
And there was no one to bury them.

4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scoffing and derision to those around us.

5 How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You,

And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.
7 For they have devoured Jacob
And laid waste his habitation.
8 Do not remember the iniquities of *our* forefathers against us;
Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,
For we are brought very low.
9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name;
And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.
10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight,
Vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed.
11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die.
12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
The reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.
13 So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture
Will give thanks to You forever;
To all generations we will tell of Your praise.

Psalm 79 worships the Lord for His mercy. Psalm 79 worships the Lord for His mercy. If you notice, Psalm 79 refers to the Temple being defiled and Jerusalem being in ruins in verse 1. That couldn't have been written by the man "Asaph", because he was a contemporary of David. And in David's day, the Temple didn't even exist yet, and Jerusalem was not in ruins. So this must have referred to the family of Asaph. This must have been written by his descendants. There is a contrast here: the nations that do not know You, and the nation that does know You. And there are physical images: pouring out blood like water, jealousy burning like fire, the sheep of Your pastures. And there is a principle as well: the Lord is merciful. God has punished Israel for her sins. He has allowed foreign enemies to invade her and to kill and enslave the Jews. But He is merciful and the Psalmist cries out for that mercy; he begs for it.

Most of the Psalms in Book 3 are lesser known, but you might have read Psalm 74: "O God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?" And Psalm 84: "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."

The fourth Book of the Psalms covers Chapters 90-106 and it is the Anonymous Psalms. It is the Anonymous Psalms. There are 50 anonymous Psalms in the Bible. There are no subscriptions for them, we don't know who the authors are. Again, there are Psalms in Book Four that have authors, but most of them are anonymous. Psalm 90 was written by Moses possibly making it the oldest poem in the world. Moses lived before the time of Homer, the Greek poet, and before the time of Beowulf, so this might be the oldest piece of poetry out there.

But Moses saw a tremendous amount of death in his lifetime. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until an entire generation of them died off. And if you do the math, that comes to about 15,000 deaths per year or 41 deaths per day two deaths per hour ... for 40 years. That is a lot of death. One Commentator said that everywhere Israel stopped in the wilderness, they left

behind a graveyard. And Moses talks about that in Psalm 90: “1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” Moses says that, “Even though we are dying, God, You are eternal.” “Even though our lives are short, You gave birth to the world.” “Even though we are undergoing this judgment, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

Like I said, most of the Psalms in Book Four are anonymous. Like Psalm 96: “Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD all the earth.” And Psalm 97: “The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him and burns up His adversaries round about.” And Psalm 103: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases ...”

That brings us to a fifth Book of the Psalms, which covers chapters 107-150. And that is the Psalms of David and the Anonymous Psalms. That is the Psalms of David and the Anonymous Psalms. I couldn’t find a reference to the sons of Korah or Asaph in here. There are just a few more Psalms from David and the anonymous authors. I want to quickly look at the most famous Psalm in this Fifth Book with you ...Psalm 119.

Turn over there with me. Has anyone read Psalm 119 before? What is Psalm 119 about? Psalm 119 worships the Lord for His Word. Psalm 119 worships the Lord for His Word. Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God. Its author is never given to us. Some think that Ezra wrote it, and that could be the case. Ezra certainly knew enough about the Word of God to write this. But we don’t know that he did.

David Livingstone the famous missionary to Africa actually memorized Psalm 119 when he was 12 years old. His Sunday School teacher told the class that if anyone memorized it, she would buy them a Bible. So the next week David came to class and repeated the whole thing back to her and he received his very first Bible. Which was a big deal in the 19th Century. David Livingstone also went through medical school and seminary at the same time and learned numerous languages in his travels to Africa, so he was quite the genius.

But look at some of the things that Psalm 119 says about the Word of God. Verse 9 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.” The Word of God can keep a young man pure, sexually, spiritually, morally. Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” Kind of building on Verse 9, the Word of God can keep a man from sin, it can keep him from disobeying God. Verse 25 says, “My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Your word.” The Word of God revives us. It breathes life into our soul. If you are like me, sometimes you come into church and you hear the Word of God preached and you say: “Wow, I needed that. That revived me. It gave me hope to go on.” Verse 28 says, “My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word.” The Word of God gives us strength. Verse 38 says, “Establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You.” The Word of God helps us to revere or worship God. Verse 41 says, “May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD, Your salvation according to

Your word;” The Word of God gives us salvation. Verse 49 says, “Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope.” The Word of God gives us hope. Verse 58 says, “I sought Your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Your word.” The Word of God gives us grace. And verse 65 says that it helps us dwell with God. Verse 67 says it keeps us from going astray. Verse 76 says it gives us lovingkindness. Verse 82 says it brings comfort. Verse 101 says that it keeps us from evil. Verse 105 says that it is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. And we could go on and on. That is encouraging, isn’t it? That makes you want to pick up your Bible and read it. It makes you want to come to the FOF Class and learn. Matthew Henry’s father used to say: “All grace grows as our love for the Word of God grows.” And you really see that in Psalm 119. Just about every grace is mentioned here in this chapter, because the more you learn of Scripture, the more you grow in the grace of God.

I get so sad when someone tells me that a man has head knowledge but no heart knowledge. I know what that means, but I don’t think it can happen. I don’t think you can have real head knowledge if you don’t have real heart knowledge. You haven’t learned the Word of God until you have learned how to apply it. They go together.

And maybe that’s a good way to sum up the Psalms. The Psalms were written to teach us doctrine and how to apply it. They teach us Who God is and how He is to be worshipped. They affect our heart and our head, which leads to the next part of our lesson. So there are five books in the Psalms: Book One is the Psalms of David, Book Two is the Psalms of the Sons of Korah, Book Three is the Psalms of Asaph, Book Four is the Anonymous Psalms, Book Five is the Psalms of David and the Anonymous Psalms.

Real quickly, how do we apply this to our lives? What do the Psalms have to do with Grace Fellowship Chilliwack in the year 2019? A couple of things. The first is that they teach us that God can be worshipped at all times. They teach us that God can be worshipped at all times. The Psalms are known as God’s medicine chest because they soothe our souls at all times. If you have read through them, you know that there are Psalms when David is on top of the world and there are Psalms when he is at rock bottom. He talks about his bones being crushed and flooding his pillow with tears. And then in the next chapter, he talks about the Lord lifting him up and showing him favour. But he worships God at all times. All of the Psalmists do. They draw from God’s medicine chest.

That leads to a second thing we learn in the Psalms. There is always someone who has it worse than us. There is always someone who has it worse than us. If you ever want to get down on yourself and throw a pity party, just read the Psalms and you will change your mind. Read Psalm 51: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me... Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice... Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” I have had some bad days, but I have never felt like my bones were crushed with sorrow. Read Psalm 55: “My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me.” Read Psalm 56: “Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me; fighting all day long he oppresses me. My foes have trampled me all day long, for they are many who fight proudly against me.” There are times when David is fighting against his own son. There are times when he is running from the king of Israel. There are times when he is

living at death's door. And the same goes for Moses and the same goes for Asaph and the same goes for the sons of Korah. And they teach us that there is always someone who has it worse than us.

The Psalms also teach us that worship is not based on feeling. Worship is not based on feeling. In other words, worship is objective. Worship is objective. You are to worship God whether you feel like it or not. You are to give Him glory whether your emotions are it or not. There are Psalms in here that sound as if the writer's heart just isn't in it. Things are not going hunky-dory. The world is turning upside down, but He worshipped anyway because worship is not based on feeling. Worship is commanded by God. And it is commanded whether we feel like it or not.

And on the flip-side of that, a fourth thing we learn is that worship is not divorced from feeling. Worship is not divorced from feeling. In other words, worship is subjective. Worship is subjective. You cannot love God without having feelings for Him. You can't love God and not have affections for Him. You worship Him with your "heart, soul, mind, and strength." You worship Him with all that you are. You hold nothing back. You can no more worship God half-heartedly than you can worship Him half-headed, because he wants everything. When you don't feel like worshipping, worship anyway and let the feelings catch up. And if the feelings never catch up, something is wrong. There is probably sin in your life or some misunderstanding on your part. Because God wants it all. He wants your mind and your feelings. He wants your heart and your head. So let's pray for the grace to take that to heart and to worship Him with everything.