

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School Class
Placerita Baptist Church
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Introduction to the Psalms (Revised)

1.0 Meditating on the Psalms

- Augustine spent an hour of every day for several decades meditating on the Book of Psalms verse by verse. In this fashion he put into writing his reflections on the psalms. Why not keep your own journal of meditations on Psalms?
- Beholding the beauty of God's creation, our mind might turn to Psalm 8:1, 9 to express the awe and wonder we experience: "O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth" (NAU). With that scripture in mind, we might also begin to sing:
 - O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name
in all the earth!
O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name
in all the earth!
O Lord, we praise Your name!
O Lord, we magnify Your name;
Prince of Peace, Mighty God,
O Lord God Almighty!

2.0 Singing the Psalms

- "To be saved singing is to be saved indeed." – Charles H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 1/1:237.

- **Our God is an awesome God –
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, pow’r and love –
Our God is an awesome God!**
– Based on Psalm 68:35
- Augustine approved of putting the psalms to music, but whenever he found “the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, ... [he] preferred not to hear the singer.” – Stanley L. Jaki, *Praying the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 5.

3.0 Praying the Psalms

- Although there are prayers of various lengths found throughout the Scriptures, only the Book of Psalms is itself a series of prayers.
- The book’s Hebrew name is *Tehillim* = Praises.
- “The psalms illuminate the mind for the purpose of enkindling the soul, indeed to put it on fire.
“It may indeed be said that the purpose of the psalms is to turn the soul into a sort of burning bush, ...”
– Jaki, *Praying the Psalms*, 27
- Psalms like Psalm 100 help us learn how to pray. Consider how we might derive sentence prayers from the psalm’s wording.
 - 1 A Psalm for Thanksgiving.
Shout joyfully to the LORD,
all the earth.
 - Father, accept my prayer of thanksgiving today.
 - I shout for joy while giving thanks to You.
 - On this Lord’s day, may all believers from all lands bring their thanks to you with great joy.
 - 2 Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
 - Lord, help me to serve You with gladness today.
 - Give me a joyful heart and fill my mouth with songs of praise.
 - As I prepare for church this morning, help me to sing Your praises rather than to be impatient and complaining.
- What sentence prayers might you compose from the final verses of Psalm 100?
 - 3 Know that the LORD Himself is God;
It is He who has made us,
and not we ourselves;
We are His people
and the sheep of His pasture.
 - 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving,

*And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.*

- 5 For the LORD *is* good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations.

4.0 Psalms Outside the Old Testament

- The Dead Sea Scrolls (from Qumran) more frequently contain Psalms than the text of any other book of the Old Testament. This fact indicates that the Book of Psalms had a significant impact on at least one group of the Jewish people—and probably on many others.
- Of the New Testament’s approximately 360 quotations from the Old Testament, one-third are from Psalms. Jesus and the apostles

5.0 The Book of Psalms

- The Psalter contains a total of 150 psalms.
- Its division into 5 “books” might intentionally reflect the 5 books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).
- Each “book” of the Psalter concludes with a doxology:

| BOOK | PSALMS | DOXOLOGY |
|------|----------------|----------|
| I | Psalms 1–41 | 41:13 |
| II | Psalms 42–72 | 72:18-20 |
| III | Psalms 73–89 | 89:52 |
| IV | Psalms 90–106 | 106:48 |
| V | Psalms 107–150 | 150:1-6 |

- Individual psalm headings indicate that a number of poets composed psalms:

- David: 75
- Anonymous: 48
- Asaph: 12
- Sons of Korah: 10
- Solomon: 2
- Ethan: 1
- Heman: 1
- Moses: 1



6.0 The Psalm Titles

- 116 psalms have titles/headings. Those headings reveal authors, circumstances, and a variety of musical and/or liturgical directions. Some modern translations (e.g., some editions of the Good News Bible) actually omit those headings.
- However, the psalm titles ought to be preserved as Scripture. The evidence points to the authors writing the psalm titles as part of the original composition.

- They are authentic.
📖 Compare 2 Samuel 22:1 with Psalm 18:1.
- They are ancient.
📖 The terms used in psalm titles like those on Psalms 46 and 58 are so ancient that they have not been understood since at least 250-300 years before Christ. At that time the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint) merely transliterated some of the more difficult to understand terms. When Septuagint translators did translate, they chose questionable meanings. For example, “For the choir director” sometimes becomes “Unto the end.”
- They are accurate.
📖 Compare Luke 20:42 with the title on Psalm 110: “David himself” emphatically identifies David as the author—a detail contained only in the psalm heading.

- Thirtle’s Theory* concerning the psalm titles:

Habakkuk 3

Verse 1: **A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.**

Superscription

Verse 19: The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet, And makes me walk on my high places. **For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.**

Subscription

*James William Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms: Their Nature and Meaning Explained* (London: Henry Frowde, 1904). **Read:** John Richard Sampey, “Psalms, Book of,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 5 vols., ed. by James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 4:2487-94. Available online: <http://www.studydrive.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?word=Psalms%2C+Book+of&action=Lookup&search.x=28&search.y=11>

7.0 The Poetry of the Psalms

- Parallelism: Parallel thought expressed in similar grammar, similar sentence length, and similar vocabulary.
 - Psalm 6:9

| | | |
|----------|-----------|------------------|
| a | b | c |
| The LORD | has heard | my supplication; |
| The LORD | receives | my prayer. |

- Repetition: Repeated words or phrases.

- Psalm 29

- v. 3 The **voice** of the LORD is upon the waters; ...
- v. 4 The **voice** of the LORD is powerful, The **voice** of the LORD is majestic.
- v. 5 The **voice** of the LORD breaks the cedars; ...
- v. 7 The **voice** of the LORD hews out flames of fire.
- v. 8 The **voice** of the LORD shakes the wilderness; ...
- v. 9 The **voice** of the LORD makes the deer to calve And strips the forests bare; ...

- Refrain: Chorus-like repetition dividing the psalm into sections.

- Psalm 107

- vv. 8, 15, 21, 31:
Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!



- Inclusio: A bracketing or envelope form of repetition that occurs at the beginning and ending of the psalm or a major section of the psalm.

- Psalm 103

- v. 1: Bless the LORD, O my soul; ...
- ...
- v. 22: Bless the LORD, O my soul!

- Chiasm: A sequence of lines with a mirror relationship in which the first and last are parallel, the second and next to last are parallel, the third and third from last are parallel, etc.—so that the last half is in inverted order.

- Psalm 19:1

- a** The heavens
- b** are telling of
- c** the glory of God;
- c'** the work of His hands.
- b'** is declaring
- a'** And their expanse

- Metaphor: Use of a figure as an illustration for expressing a concept.

- Psalm 23

- 1 The LORD is my **shepherd**,
I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.



- 3 He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
- 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You *are* with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

8.0 Recommended Books for Personal Bible Study of Psalms

- Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms*, 3 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996.
- Bullock, C. Hassell. *Encountering the Book of Psalms*. Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Davidson, Robert. *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- _____. *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975.
- Lawson, Steven J. *Psalms 1-75*. Holman Old Testament Commentary 11. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2003.
- _____. *Psalms 76-150*. Holman Old Testament Commentary 12. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006.
- Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. Reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.
- Travers, Michael E. *Encountering God in the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003.
- Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Psalms 1-72*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- _____. *The Message of Psalms 73-150*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Zemek, George. *Road Maps for the Psalms: Inductive Preaching Outlines Based on the Hebrew Text*. Valencia, CA: The Master's Academy International, 2006.

“One reason we love the Psalms is because they tell us so much about God. The Psalms give us a dialogue with God in which we speak our joys and sorrows to God, and God for his part meets our needs and receives our praise.”

— Michael E. Travers, *Encountering God in the Psalms*
(Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 12