**PSALMS: THE CHARACTER OF GOD**

**JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2022**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems, songs, and prayers that cover a 600-year period of Israel's history from David, who ruled 1010-970 B.C., to the period after the dedication of the Second Temple in 515 B.C. For more than 2000 years, Christians have found in them a most helpful resource for conversation with God about the things that matter most in life. They are the most widely read portion of the Old Testament and are often bound together in pocket editions with the New Testament.

I. What Is Their Appeal?

A. **The Psalms are inspired Scripture** and like all Scripture, the Psalms are God-breathed words that are profitable for teaching, conviction, correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person of God might be equipped, fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

B. Their popularity is also rooted in their **uniqueness among other biblical books**. The Psalms are unique in that they represent an ongoing dialogue between God and his people. Not only does God speak *to us* in the Psalms, but he provides us a way to speak *to him*. This is reflected in the differing types of psalms.

* Hymns of praise - See Psalm 8, 17, 29, 33, 104, 113, 146-150.
* Psalms of thanksgiving - These are poetic expressions of thanks to God for his deliverance, protection, blessing, and faithfulness, whether individual (18, 116, 118) or collective (65, 67, 124).
* Laments - Forming more than 1/3 of the Psalms (60+), these psalms express deep and profound response to God during suffering, hardship, and great need. They appear both as individual (3, 22, 31, 42, 88, 142-44) and communal (12, 44, 126, 144).
* Royal Psalms - Psalms dealing with the relationship of God with the king and kingship (1, 2, 18, 20-21, 34, 37, 45, 49, 72-73, 101, 110-12, 144).
* Wisdom Psalms (1, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111-112) and Psalms celebrating the Law (119).
* Songs of Ascent (120-134).

C. Finally, their appeal is rooted in the way these poetic expressions **point to the Christ**, the only begotten of God, who is the object of all Scripture.

II. How Are They Structured?

**Macro-Structure**

* Introduction/Prologue: Psalms 1-2

Psalms 1-2 introduce the entire collection as the songs and prayers that will bless Israel as they seek to live out God's law and await his Messianic kingdom.

* Book One: Psalms 3-41

A collection of Psalms of David, most of which are individual laments. The collection ends with the refrain in 41:13: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting, Amen and Amen."

* Book Two: Psalms 42-72

Book two opens with two psalms, 42-43, that are connected in such a way that they can be treated as one Psalm. Together they form a lament that expresses hope in the Lord's salvation. The book closes with the refrain, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen! (72:18-19).

* Book Three: Psalms 73-89

Book two ended with the words, "This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse," which separates the previous psalms associated with David from those of Asaph. Book three ends with the familiar refrain, "Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen" (89:52).

* Book Four: Psalms 90-106

Book four opens with Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses. Book four concludes with the familiar doxology: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen! (106:48).

* Book Five: Psalms 107-150

Songs of praise predominate in Book five. And the book concludes, not with a single doxology, but with a five-part harmony, five poems of praise, Psalms 146-150. Each psalm begins and ends with the word "hallelujah," Hebrew for "praise Yahweh." "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"

**Microstructure**

* Parallelism
  + Synonymous: a relationship between two poetic lines which expresses the same idea with different but equal words. See Ps 1:1, 5.
  + Antithetic: Two lines that are in contrast. Look for the use of "but" or "yet" in the 2nd line. See Ps 1:6.
  + Synthetic: The second line expands on the first line, adding additional information. See Ps 1:2.
* Acrostics - the use of successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin the next line (alphabet poetry).
  + The first letter of each LINE begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet: Ps 111 & 112.
  + Successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the first line of each VERSE: Ps 25, 34, and 145
  + In Psalm 119, every first word in eight VERSE UNITS begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

III. How Should We Interpret Them?

A. Treat the Psalms wholistically. Avoid ripping one poetic line out of context.

B. Determine the type of psalm, whether praise, lament, thanksgiving, etc., and consider how it might help you frame your own prayers.

C. Determine the type of parallelism. How does one line balance another?

D. Appreciate the imagery and ask, to what does the image point?

E. Beware of constructing theology based *solely* on a poetic line. For example, beware of using Ps 51:5: "in sin did my mother conceive me," to prove “original sin."

F. Always look for the Christ, the coming Messiah and King.

**THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN SELECTED PSALMS**

I. The God Who Suffers for and with His People

Psalms 22-23

The central confession of Judaism and Christianity is found in the words of Deut 6: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one! But who is this God? What distinguishes the nature and character of this God from others who claim to be God? In the center of Book One, we encounter two psalms that declare that God who suffers for us and with us.

**I. God Suffers for Us & With Us (Psalm 22)**

A. Cry of Agony (22:1-8)

B. Cry for Help (22:9-11)

C. Cry of Enemy Siege (22:12-18)

D. Cry for Help (22:19-21)

E. Declaration of Praise for Deliverance (22:22-31)

Do you hear the cry of Jesus from the cross in 22:1? How does a psalm point to Christ is a critical question to ask of any psalm. The answer is self-evident here. Psalm 22 is correctly known as the fifth gospel account of Jesus' crucifixion.

* The words of Ps 22:1 are recorded in both Matt 27:46 & Mark 15:34.
* The enemies hurling insults and shaking their heads (Ps 22:7//Matt 27:39)
* "Let God rescue him" (Ps 22:8//Matt 27:43)
* "I am poured out like water" (Ps 22:14//Jn 19:34)
* Extreme thirst (Ps 22:15//Jn 19:28)
* "They pierced my hands and feet (Ps 22:16//Luke 24:38-40; Jn 20:27)
* Dividing his garments and casting lots for them (Ps 22:18//Matt 27:35)
* "It is done," one word in Hebrew (Ps 22:31) and "it is finished," one word in Greek (Jn 19:30)

It is immediately evident that the entire psalm applies to Jesus' crucifixion, not simply 22:1. That is why some have referred to Psalm 22 as the Fifth Gospel account of Jesus' crucifixion.

As we seek to interpret Jesus' cry (1) we must beware of committing trinitarian heresy. Whatever we say about this moment, we must affirm the unity and oneness of the Godhead. The popular image of the Father turning his back on the Son is nowhere to be found in the text, nor is it a conclusion that should be drawn from Jesus' citation of Ps 22:1. (2) know that the Son of God does not take Scripture out of context. Read all of Psalm 22, particularly Ps 22:24. Jesus certainly did!

**II. The Goodness of God in The Shadow of Darkness (Psalm 23)**

The 23rd Psalm is the most well known and most loved of all the psalms. The Psalmist employs two metaphors to describe Yahweh: He is a caring shepherd and a gracious host. Both images speak of God's character as one who provides for and protects his people. God as shepherd had great meaning in an agrarian culture. They knew the ways of sheep and the responsibility of shepherds to provide provision and protection. The most important trait of a good shepherd was presence with the sheep (Ezek 34:11-24; Jn 10:11).

A. The Lord Is a Shepherd Who Cares for His Sheep (23:1-4)

B. The Lord is a Host Who Prepares a Banquet for His People (23:5-6)